UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

Doing Friendship: Storytelling and playfulness in casual conversational discourse

By

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor Philosophiae in the Department of Linguistics, University of the Western Cape

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December 2022

Abstract

This study explores the linguistic construction of interpersonal relationships, specifically friendship. Although we have no control over which families we are born into, we can choose who can be our friend and unlike relationships formed within the workplace, there is no specific institutional context within which friendships can develop. There is also no legally binding agreement between friends as between married people, and there are no conventionalised roles that friends must play as is the case in parent-child relations. Nevertheless, friendship remains one of the most important relationships in people's lives. Researchers have even argued that within a globalising and increasingly mediatised world, friendships have gained more significance as more flexible and diverse ways of constructing one's personal life become available (Spencer & Pahl 2006; Rawlins, 2017; Byron, 2021; Allan & Adams, 2007). This makes the study of the dynamics and processes of friendship within contemporary society fertile ground for harvesting insights into the ways in which the social fabric of the world is being (re)constituted.

In this study, I explore the ways in which friendship is constructed through discourse in everyday casual conversation. I analyse the conversational practices of a group of five friends to get a sense of how their friendship is constituted and maintained in and through their discourse practices. The data for this study consists of two conversations that were audio recorded in 2017 between the five participants: Bella (Cameroonian), Thandi (South African), Zinhle (South African), Quinta (Nigerian) and I the author of this study (Cameroonian). I look specifically at the linguistic strategies through which the participants engage in spontaneous conversational play and storytelling and how play and narrative shape and are shaped by their relationship as friends. I take this further by looking at how these play and narrative devices show up in conversations that are filmed for YouTube, given the constraints of the online platform and the participants' own agenda to empower and entertain their audience places on their discourse practices. This study mainly draws from the community of practice framework (Lave & Wegner, 1991; Wegner, 1998; Eckert & McConnel, 1992), narrative analysis (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008, De Fina, 2008; Sacks, 1992, 1972), interactional sociolinguistics (Tannen, 1984, 1986, 2021) and politeness theory (Brown and Levinson, 1978; Watts, 2003; Locher & Watts, 2005) to make sense of the data. I aim to contribute to studies in interactional sociolinguistics and discourse analysis that focus on informal social ties, conversational storytelling, verbal humour and politeness practices.

Keywords

Discourse practices

Conversation

Friendship

Storytelling

Conversational play

Relational practices

Narrative analysis

Community of practice

Politeness theory

Discourse analysis

Declaration

I declare that this thesis, *"Doing Friendship: Storytelling and playfulness in casual conversational discourse",* is my own work. This study has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Full name: Ajohche Nkemngu Awungjia Signed:  _____

Date: December 2022

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the Centre for Humanities Research (CHR) at the University of the Western Cape for providing a space for rigorous academic engagement throughout the course of this degree. I am a much better thinker today because of it. I am also grateful for the Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship which provided much needed financial assistance throughout the course of my research.

To my dear supervisor, Prof. Zannie Bock, I will always be thankful for your guidance and mentorship throughout my postgraduate studies. I do not have the words to describe just how patient, supportive and attentive you have been. I appreciate how much you care not just about my work, but about me as a person. Thank you for all the ways in which you showed up for me throughout this process.

To my parents and siblings, even though you are so far away from me, I have felt your love and support throughout this journey. Thank you for the long calls, the jokes, the prayers and the encouragements. You are the reason why I strive to be better every day. You are the reason why I find the strength to keep going even on days when I feel like giving up. I pray I keep giving you reasons to be proud.

To my friends, especially my girlfriends, this journey would have been extremely lonely and sad without the love you have poured into me over the years. Thank you for holding me through the highs and lows, through multiple emotional/mental breakdowns and through those moments I doubted my ability to finish. Thank you for putting things into perspective for me when I could not see clearly. It is so fitting that my work is on friendship for I have truly been blessed with the best.

Above all, I thank God. Without God's grace and infinite mercy none of this would be possible. Thank God for always meeting me at my point of need. Thank God for putting the right people on my path. It has taken so many miracles to get here. I will continue to put my faith and trust in You.

I cannot name every single one of you who in one way or another contributed to this degree, but I know you, and I am so thankful for all of you, from the bottom of my heart.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

"it's just… a different kind of love friendship is a different kind of love"

1.1. Introduction

This study aims to contribute to research that explores the relationship between language practices and the construction of social ties (Tannen, 1986, 2005a, 2021; Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004; Georgakopoulou, 2008; De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008, 2008; Allan, 1998: 685), particularly the relationship between discourse practices and friendship. I analyse the conversational practices of a group of five friends: Bella, Thandi, Quinta, Zinhle and myself to uncover the ways in which the multidimensional relationships we share are discursively constituted and sustained over time. I look specifically at our conversational storytelling and play practices of the group in our private conversations at home and the public online conversations posted on our YouTube channel called Girl Chat. I combine the tenets of the community of practice framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Eckert & McConnel, 1992) and various discourse oriented approaches namely: narrative analysis (De Fina, 2008; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Sacks, 1992), interactional sociolinguistics (Tannen, 1986, 2005b, 2021) and politeness theory (Brown and Levinson, 1978; Watts, 2003; Locher & Watts, 2005) to create a multipronged theoretical and analytical framework for the analysis of the data. I aim to uncover the ways in which the interactional achievement of storytelling works in the realisation and sustenance of the friendships between the participants.

Research on social ties and social interactions have primarily focused on institutionalised relationships, or relationships with publicly established roles, such as, between spouses, work colleagues, client and server, teacher and student, parent and child and doctor and patient (Cronin, 2015; Spencer & Pahl, 2006; Allan, 1998; Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999). The main differences between friendship and the types of relationships highlighted above are that while we have no control over which families we are born into, we can choose who can be our friend. Unlike relationships formed within the workplace, there is no specific institutional context within which friendships can develop. There is also no legally binding agreement between friends as between married people, and there are no conventionalised roles that friends must play as is the case with parent and child relations. As a result, the study of friendship has occupied a residual category in research on interpersonal relationships.

Nevertheless, friendship remains one of the most important relationships in people's lives. Researchers have even argued that within a globalising and increasingly mediatised world, as many more people live alone or in non-familial arrangements, friendships have gained more significance as flexible and diverse ways of constructing one's personal life have become available (Spencer & Pahl 2006; Rawlins, 2017; Bubel, 2006, Allan 2008 as cited in Cronin 2015). The contours of social relationships, like most social processes, are organised in and through everyday discourse practices. This makes the study of the everyday discursive processes of friendship, as situated in place and time, fertile ground for harvesting insights into the ways in which the social fabric of the world is being (re)constituted.

1.2. Everyday life

The study of the mundane or the unremarkable which constitute the larger portion of our everyday life, like the study of friendship, has been relegated to a residual position in the study of social reality. Lefebvre (1991), who greatly influenced a scholarly interest in the study of the everyday was aware of the fact that although the everyday often appeared, partly due to its very pervasiveness, to be readily accessible and self-evident, it was indeed one of the most fundamental, yet less researched or understood facets of our social lives. Hence his popular maxim, "the familiar is not always known". In this thesis, I draw insights from work that complicates the familiar as "a problematic, a contested and opaque terrain, where meanings are not to be found readymade" (Highmore, 2002: 9). It views the everyday as encompassing both aspects of reality that are readily available for examination and those that lie hidden and are never fully controllable. This approach centres the largely taken-for-granted meanings that underpin human thought and experiences, which, given their taken-for-grantedness, are not always open to direct observation (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). I take on the view that the so-called 'higher' activities of human beings such as abstract cognition and practical objectifications are built on, and tend to 'make sense' only against the backdrop of everyday life (De Certeau, 1984; Gardiner, 2000; Highmore, 2002).

Gardiner (2000: 2) describes everyday life as "fertile humus, which is a source of life-enhancing power as we walk over it unnoticed". He echoes Lefebvre's (1991) metaphor for everyday life as 'fertile soil'. Lefebvre (1991: 87) continues the metaphor as follows:

> A landscape without flowers or magnificent woods may be depressing for the passer-by […] but flowers and trees should not make us forget the earth beneath, which has a secret life and richness of its own.

It is within the richness of our everyday processes and practices that we develop our multidimensional capacities as individuals and as collectives to become "fully integrated and truly *human* persons" (original emphasis; Gardiner, 2000: 2).

Attempts to capture the richness of everyday life in fields such as cultural studies, feminism, media studies, postmodernism and more tend to converge around the certain dualities in everyday life (Highmore, 2002: 5), namely: the particular - the general; agency - social structures; resistance - power; experiences/feelings - institutions/discourses and micro analysis - macro analysis. In exploring these dualities, questions such as whether everyday life is a product of individual acts (the accumulations of particularities) or if it is an overarching common ground shared by groups of people (the general), and whether the everyday is a space that breeds conformity to power relations or if it is a space where conformity is creatively evaded and resisted, become unavoidable with no guarantee of any easy answers. This study draws from Lefebvre's (1991, 2002) idea echoed by Highmore (2002, 2010) that the particular is saturated by the general in particular ways, and the idea that the micro is related to, but not reducible to or subsumed by the macro and vice versa. It is with this problematised view of the everyday and the mundanities that pervade it, as the foundation for more sophisticated and abstract theorisation, that I explore the discursive construction, sustenance and significance of friendship ties through the analysis of everyday conversational practices.

1.3. Research approach

In this study, I look specifically at the role of discourse practices in the constitution and maintenance of friendship ties. This study is inspired by and will contribute to studies in narrative analysis, politeness theory, conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics as well as other social science disciplines that focus on informal social ties, conversational storytelling, verbal humour and politeness practices. I draw particularly from research that favour interactional approaches to the study of discourse. Discourse is seen as talk-in-interaction where texts depend on other (con)texts for meaning (Cameron, 2001; De Fina, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2008; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Tannen, 1986, 2005a). That is, the meanings assigned to talk by

interacting participants emerges in the turn-by-turn unfolding or sequential organisation of the talk so that what is said is dependent on what has been said and what will be said next for meaning. I focus specifically on storytelling and conversational play in my analysis.

1.3.1. Storytelling and play as social practice

The shift from a positivist way of studying and understanding the world towards an interpretive paradigm has re-energized an interest in the human "impulse to narrate" (White, 1980) and in humans as storytelling beings who experience life as storied, or as taking a narrative pattern. Narratives are viewed not merely as a means of apprehending the world and communicating, but also as constitutive of the world in which they manifest. In the process of narrating, seemingly unrelated experiences are woven together and directed towards a particular goal, a process that was termed *emplotment* by Polkinghorne's (1991). In this way, narratives go beyond description to impose an order onto the unfolding chaos of experiences, thereby shaping/constructing them. Studying narratives provides insight into the ways in which they capture and constitute meaning, experience, subjectivity, the lifeworld, reflexivity and action. Narrative gives us a window into the implicit and explicit rationales that determine how individuals act within society. Research on social interactions has shown a marked presence of narrative activity in a wide variety of social contexts which reinforces the idea that narratives are "a mode of thought, communication and apprehension of reality which is both super-arching and fundamental to [the] human cognitive makeup" (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012: 15; Bruner, 1991, 2010; Ricoeur, 1988; White, 1980). My data supports these findings given the significant presence of narrative activity within both the private conversations and the YouTube conversations. This is why I decided to examine narrative texts in the data closely.

Play is the second discourse practice of interest in this study. Cook (2000: 204) claims that "play constitutes a large portion of personally and socially significant language use" and Tannen (2005a: 187) has demonstrated that "brand of humour is one of the most highly individualistic aspects of a person's [conversational] style". Playfulness in conversation has been shown to manifest differently in different sociocultural contexts and to play several roles within social interactions. Research has shown that language play can "lower affective filters, stretch one's sociolinguistic competence and destabilise interlanguage systems" (Waring, 2012: 192), "transforming the way we perceive reality, stretching the limits of our ordinary experience, or allowing us to feel as

though we are more than we actually are through fantasy, pretence and disguise" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008: 73). Studies have shown that conversational play entails the strategic mobilisation of identity and discourse strategies to be successfully realised. Waring (2012) argues that it is through ascribing, displaying or invoking situational, relational, and personal identities, and I add, in combination with certain discourse strategies in interaction, that the individuals enter an alternative universe unfettered by the rules of social conventions. In this way, the practice of conversational play has a more significant social role than the popular notion that conversational play serves mainly to entertain interlocutors.

1.4. Aims

In this study, I aim to show that the processes and dynamics of friendships can be connected to the details of talk in interaction, giving us access to the workings of the taken-for-granted knowledge used to make sense of everyday experiences and relational dynamics. I aim specifically to look at the interactional realisation of storytelling and play and the ways in which these practices work in sustaining the friendship between the participants. Furthermore, I aim to show how the study of the discursive construction of friendship ties allows for the observation of the ways in which macro processes (such as social organisation and digitisation) and macro discourses (anti-heteropatriarchy, success narratives) are woven into the fabric of everyday lives. In other words, I aim to explore the ways in which the general is put to work in particular local contexts, how a sense of agency is achieved within constraining social structures, the role of discourse in these practices and their interpersonal implications.

The data for this study consists of two audio tapes of (private) spontaneous naturally occurring conversations which were recorded in 2017 between the five participants who were working and or studying in Cape Town at the time: Bella (Cameroonian from Buea), Thandi (South African from the Northern Cape), Quinta (Nigerian from Ibibio), Zinhle (South African from the Eastern Cape) and myself (Cameroonian from Fontem). I also analyse conversations that were shared on Girl Chat, the YouTube channel hosted by four of the participants (except Zinhle) which aimed to empower (African/black) women. Lastly, I use recordings of semi structured interviews conducted in 2021 between each participant and I. In these interviews we talk about friendship and what it means to each participant. I played parts of the tape recordings from 2017 and the participants shared their reflections on what they might have been doing with their use of play and storytelling

strategies. I also asked the participants to reflect on the ways in which their relationships have evolved over the years, especially during the worldwide lockdowns which went into effect in 2020 because of the COVID 19 pandemic. The lockdown measures which were implemented globally to manage the spread of the virus significantly limited the occurrence of in person interactions, such as those captured in the audio recordings between the participants in 2017. The interviews thus gave me the opportunity to look at how the participants' relationships have evolved over time and through a period of global change and uncertainties. Below are the research questions this thesis attempts to answer.

1.4.1. Research questions:

1. What are the storytelling and play patterns observed in the private offline conversations? What insights can the study of the turn-by-turn unfolding of play and story in these conversations provide into the mechanisms by which the friendship between the participants is discursively sustained?
2. How are the patterns of conversational play and storytelling in online public YouTube conversations different from or similar to those in the offline private conversations? What further insights about the maintaining mechanisms of their dynamic and multifaceted relationship can be gleaned from analysing storytelling and play patterns in their public conversations alongside the private ones?
3. What are the macro narratives and processes influencing the way the participants view themselves and their relationship with each other? How are these larger social discourses and patterns exploited to serve interactional and relational goals in everyday meaning making processes?
4. How has the COVID 19 pandemic and other major life changes (such as friends moving to other cities) affected the nature of the relationship between the participants? And what can be learnt about the processes that sustain friendship from looking at the evolution of the participants' friendships over time and periods of change and uncertainty?

1.5. Key arguments

Narrative researchers have shown that the home of the primary form of storytelling is in everyday conversation and that stories both capture and constitute the worlds in which they emerge. I argue that stories, particularly the practice of storytelling, is a key aspect of the mechanisms that ensure the constitution of interpersonal relationships as well. In other words, storytelling is not just something that people who share a relationship do together, it is part of the mechanism through which their relationship exists in the first place. In the data, this process is realised in three main ways. Firstly, storytelling works by keeping the shared stock of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), or the conversational and relational common ground between participants up to date. I argue that shared information which is up to date is one of the main assets of a community of practice and updating the shared pool of knowledge between participants via storytelling allows for multiple layers of information and meaning to be updated simultaneously. The participants share several small stories (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008) of mainly mundane events (as opposed to stories of unusual events) that happen in their lives in the recorded conversations. The events in the story are usually only known to the teller, although some stories may also be known by some members of the audience, leading to the co-telling of the story. In sharing stories, the teller's experience, the teller's evaluation or 'take-away' from the experience, as well as the reaction of the audience to the narrated experience and its narration are grounded into the existing stock of knowledge shared by participants, and may form the basis of future interactions.

Secondly, the ways in which stories are negotiated between the participants play the additional role of reaffirming or challenging established knowledge about fellow interlocutors, such as their beliefs, values, aspirations and ideological positions on a variety of issues, as well as the participants' relational positions towards each other. In other words, I show how the practice of storytelling in everyday conversation becomes an important tool for expanding and adding nuances to what they know about each other, their relationship towards each other, and the world around them. Lastly, I argue that there is always some risk involved in sharing one's experiences (in terms of making oneself vulnerable), even with close friends, and that listening and engaging with another's story usually involves an act of care. The discourse choices made in telling any given story might reveal the interpretive frames, values and ideological positions the teller is using to make sense of the events in a story. These views may be accepted by the audience, but they may also be contested or rejected. Storytelling thus entails vulnerability for the teller. On the other side

of the coin, narratives may also become instances of care if the audience engages sensitively with the teller's vulnerability by showing concern and interest. Thus, although sharing stories may be an act of vulnerability, listening and engaging in another's story may be seen as an act of care. Without the co-creation of safe spaces for sharing information, the shared pool of knowledge will become outdated, thereby stifling the process through which relationships are deepened and sustained over time.

With regards to conversational play, my analysis will show that far from being a trivial activity used mainly for entertainment, conversational play within friendship discourse plays an important role in sustaining friendliness and intimacy between the interlocutors. Instances of play in the data usually include what may be considered impoliteness or face threatening acts (FTAs) (Brown and Levinson, 1987) without any ensuing loss of face or relational trouble. My analysis reveals that the rules of politeness (Lakoff, 1973), or the individual's face needs (Brown and Levinson, 1987) are negotiated *in*, rather than *prior* to the interaction. I argue that individuals orient their interactional practices towards the values that keep them together as a group and not so much towards protecting an individualistic notion of 'face' (Goffman, 1967, 1974). The implication of this argument is the understanding that no act is essentially (im)polite, face threatening or face saving. Instead, FTAs) (Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987) are context specific and actively negotiated in interaction by the individuals in the relationship and interaction. As a result, what may be considered an FTA, even between the same interactants may change as different elements of context change.

In this study sufficient interactional common ground and shared historical knowledge about each other's beliefs, values, temperament and ideological positions on a wide variety of issues are the basis on which the participants negotiate what is face saving or face threatening in playful interaction. The successful use of what may be considered FTAs during conversational play, such as showing disapproval, challenging or teasing each other without the loss of face, reinforces the sense that the members of this community of practice know each other well. It shows that they have an intuitive understanding of the 'ways of speaking' that define their community and relationship with each other. This works to continuously reaffirm their amicable stance towards each other in interaction, effectively reproducing their shared sense of being friends or of being friendly.

1.5.1. Significance of the study

This study makes several contributions to the field of discourse analysis and the study of friendship ties. It is largely acknowledged that storytelling is one of the discourse activities found in conversations between people in close personal relationships. I extend this knowledge in this study by showing how storytelling is constitutive of these relationships. That is, it is partly because of storytelling that relationships are sustained as highlighted above, and without this practice, the potential for growth in the relationships will be limited. Furthermore, studies of conversational play have mainly focused on linguistic forms of play, the entertainment value of conversational play, and individual styles of play. This study brings into focus the interactional achievement of play and the significance of these interactions at the interpersonal level.

In addition, the analysis of conversational storytelling and play among close friends reveals a need to rethink popular understandings of politeness in discourse. Within traditional conceptualisations of politeness, certain speech acts are assumed by analysts to be inherently polite or impolite prior to interaction. I propose a bottom-up approach to the study of politeness practices that looks at how speech acts are negotiated in the sequential unfolding of talk in order to determine which acts are considered (im)polite or simply appropriate by those in the interaction and relationship. Furthermore, I argue that individuals within a community if practice align their discourse practices towards their relational and interactional goals and not to an individualistic notion of face.

Finally, this study highlights the dangers of essentializing categories such as 'African' or 'western' friendships which is common in literature on friendships. Although the participants in this study are African women, their friendship cannot easily be defined as an 'African friendship'. The analysis of the different types of data, collected at different points in the participants lives shows that the acknowledgement of the society in which the participants are situated as well as the idiosyncrasies of their unique positions within this society opens up opportunities for a richer understanding of friendships, the society (place) and the time in which they exist. Such a highly contextual approach should lead to more socioculturally relevant studies of friendship ties

1.6. Chapter overview

This thesis is made up of eight chapters. The first chapter consists of an introduction to the study. In this chapter, I presented a rationale for the study of friendships and the theoretical justifications of the study of the mundane and everyday life. The theoretical frameworks underpinning this study

and the main discourse practices under analysis were introduced alongside the aims and research questions guiding this study. This chapter highlighted my key arguments from my analysis and the contributions of this study to the field. The chapter ends with an overview of what to expect in the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 2 doubles as a theoretical framework and a literature review. The discussion of the frameworks guiding this study show how these frameworks have been developed and applied in previous research and how they have been applied to arguments made in this dissertation. The aim is to position this project within the larger scheme of research in the field of discourse analysis and interpersonal relationships, to demonstrate the relevance of this study and the contributions it makes to the field. I mainly draw from the community of practice framework (Lave & Wegner, 1991; Wegner, 1998; Eckert & McConnel, 1992), narrative analysis (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008, De Fina, 2008; Sacks, 1992, 1972), interactional sociolinguistics (Tannen, 1984, 1986, 2021) and politeness theory (Brown and Levinson, 1978; Lakoff, 1973, 2005; Watts, 2003; Locher & Watts, 2005).

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology and research design. I present background information on the participants in this study. Furthermore, I examine the methods of data collection and the data analysis techniques employed. The data sources include audio recordings of naturally occurring conversations, recordings of conversations filmed to be uploaded on YouTube and playback one-on-one interviews with the participants. I also present the limitations of the methodology and how it may be improved in future studies of this nature as well as the ethical concerns of the study.

Chapter 4 delves deeper into the notion of friendship, how it has been conceptualised and studied in previous research as well as the participants own interpretation and definition of their relationship with each other. This chapter reviews literature on friendship, but it also presents data that was collected in the play back interviews. The discussion shows that the friendships in this study resist classification as 'African friendships' as they exhibit features that have been identified as features of friendships in different sociocultural contexts. This chapter aims to point to the danger of assigning or assuming essential features of friendships, and to highlight the importance of taking the specific situation of the research participants into consideration.

In chapter 5 I present my analysis of the storytelling practices of the participants in their offline/private conversations. I describe the nature of their conversations and then look more

specifically at their stories. I argue that these stories play a key role in the mechanisms through which their relationship is realised daily. Through storytelling in an interactional process that is nonlinear and non-systematic, participants ground new information into their shared knowledge pool. They also expand, add nuance, and critically engage with what they know about themselves, their relationships with each other and the world around them. Lastly, I show how storytelling activities function as instances of vulnerability and care without which the growth of relationships may be stunted.

In chapter 6, I look at the conversational play practices of the group. The analysis of the participants' playful interactions provides evidence for the argument that FTAs are not fixed or given prior to interaction. Instead they are negotiated by the interlocutors in interaction. It is through these continuous negotiations over time that the group develops an intuitive understanding of what constitutes face saving or face threatening actions. I analyse the playful interactions between the participants to illustrate this point. This analysis further reveals that participants orient their (playful) discourse activities towards sustaining an enjoyable and fulfilling relationship, rather than working towards the protection of individual face needs.

Chapter 7 analyses the participants' storytelling and playful practices in conversations that are filmed for their online platform called Girl Chat. I show how understanding the multidimensional aspects of the participants' relationship shape the ways in which discourse practices may be instrumentalised in different contexts. I outline the main differences between their private conversations and their public conversations and analyse the ways in which story and play emerge in the public discourse. These differences include the presence of the unknown audience as well as the goal orientedness of the conversations on Girl Chat. The analyses reveal that stories in Girl Chat conversations work mainly to provide evidence to support the speaker's points or lessons being taught and to build rapport with the audience, while play works to manage face needs in the discussion of taboo or sensitive topics. This analysis supports the arguments in chapters 5 and 6 about the role of discourse practices in sustaining the friendships between the participants as once the friendship is overshadowed by their relationship as hosts, the dynamics of these practices change. In this chapter, I also look at the mediatisation of social relationships which is a recurring theme in the data worth mentioning. This section will discuss insights from the data regarding the symbolic and material role of digital communication technologies in how relationships are viewed and managed today.

Chapter 8 is the last chapter and the conclusion. Here I recap the main issues raised by this thesis, summarise the findings of the project and the theoretical implications of these findings.

CHAPTER 2: ANALYSING CONVERSATIONAL DISCOURSE

"...you have to work for it to work you have to be giving and you have to be receiving"

2.1. Introduction

This study explores the relationship between discourse practices and the sustenance of personal relationships, specifically friendship bonds. To achieve this goal, I analyse the participants' naturally occurring conversations, online conversations as well as data collected from playback interviews. These data allow me to get a sense of how the participants perceive their relationship with each other and the role that their discourse practices play in realising their multidimensional relationship. In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical and analytical underpinnings of the study. I start by discussing the community of practice framework. The participants exist in a type of community of practice given that they have ways of speaking, thinking and relating with each other that have been honed over time through regular interaction. The community of practice approach was a productive lens through which their interpersonal and discourse activities could be made sense of. The data consists mainly of spoken discourse; thus, a variety of discourse analysis approaches were used to analyse the recorded conversations from different perspectives. These approaches include various strands of narrative analysis, conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics and politeness theory. Below I delve deeper into each of these frameworks, exploring how they developed, how they have been used in other research projects, and how they will be adapted and put to work in this current study.

2.2. Community of practice framework

Jean Lave and Etiene Wenger (1991) used the notion of community of practice (CoP) to describe processes involved in situated learning. They were interested in the ways in which certain social relationships established a frame for learning. They argue that human activities are geared towards a variety of goals, such as securing physical survival and seeking lofty pleasures (Wenger 1998; Bubel, 2005). In striving for these goals, people become accustomed to other individuals and to the world around them through interaction. Over time, these interactions lead to the development of practices which reflect these goals of survival and/or pleasure as well as the relationships that emerge as a result. These practices then become the assets of a kind of community, resulting in a community of practice.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) introduced Lave and Wenger's concept of CoP to sociolinguistic research in the field of language and gender. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet defined CoP as

> an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor (1992: 464).

The focus of this framework on the notion of *practice* introduces a dynamic and complex mode of thinking about social organisation beyond the more traditional term *community* and concepts such as, *speech community* and *social network* that were more common in sociolinguistics research. According to Gumperz,

> members of the same speech community need not all speak the same language nor use the same linguistic forms on similar occasions. All that is required is that there be at least one language in common and that rules governing basic communicative strategies be shared so that speakers can decode the social meanings carried by alternative modes of communication (1972:16).

For Labov,

> The speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms; these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behaviour, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage. (1972b:120)

Although Labov and Gumperz use different approaches, a variationist and ethnographic approach respectively with interest in behaviour outside language, both their definitions of speech communities highlight *speech* and linguistic norms as the main aspect of interest. Unlike the CoP model, the speech community models may recognise the social contexts in which language is used, but other practices that form part of these contexts are not given as much attention as the linguistic practices (B. Davies, 2005; Bucholtz, 1999). The focus in research on speech communities tends to be on the relationship between the use of certain linguistic variables (e.g. English accents) and membership to particular groups (e.g. a Nigerian community in Cape Town). The use of the same

accent by a group of speakers will signal their belonging to a speech community even if they do not engage in any other forms of activities as a group. The notion of speech community thus differs from CoP since it is more loosely applied to groups of people. Simply using the same linguistic norms is not enough to define a group of people as a community of practice.

Social networks analysis is similar to the CoP model in that it highlights the relationships between certain characteristics and group identity and accounts for what it means to have membership to certain groups (e.g. Lippi-Green, 1989; Milroy, 1987, 2002). However, the links between members in a social network are usually role based. It looks at whether people work, study or socialise together, with little interest in the practices that emerge as a result of these shared activities. In other words, the approach is more oriented on the structure of networks, rather than their practices (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999; B. Davies, 2005). Like speech communities, the linguistic aspect of the networks is the point of interest, whereas in the CoP model, the linguistic practices are seen as one of many different practices used to perform membership to the community. Therefore, the CoP framework has broader interests in social practices which include but are not limited to linguistic or discourse practices. It grew from practice theory which asserts that the social world consists mainly of sets of practices. Its locus of interest is on *doing,* taking part in activities within a social context and in ways that continuously index membership to and constitute a specific community of practice (Li, et al., 2009; B. Davies, 2005; Hodges, 1998). These social contexts in which the practices are framed work explicitly and implicitly to provide structure and meaning to these activities.

In addition, Lave and Wenger (1991) offer the CoP framework as a critique of traditional models of learning which they perceive to be abstract, due to the tendency to dislodge learners from their interactional contexts, imagining them to digest what they were being taught in a simulated environment, the classroom. They suggest that learning is not an abstract event, but a natural and inevitable part of life which was at its core, a social process (Wenger, 1998; Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999). CoP is thus proposed as a means of studying how individuals naturally learn, which are similar in many ways to the learning process in an apprenticeship. To become a member of a CoP (which typically follows the trajectory of first becoming a *peripheral member* and later, possibly becoming a *core member*), individuals, through their interactions, acquire explicit knowledge of the tools, documents and symbols, well-defined roles and codified procedures used to carry out the community's practices. Members also acquire the tacit conventions, intuitions, subtle cues, rules of

thumb, underlying assumptions, and shared world views at play in the routines of their everyday practices (Wenger, 1998: 47).

As previously mentioned, the CoP framework focuses on the practices of its members. These practices may include several aspects of behaviour which inevitably include aspects of language such as language structure, discourse and interaction (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999; Bubel, 2005). Language itself has been viewed as an example of social practice (Bourdieu 1990; De Certeau, 1984; Bucholtz, 1999). This framework has thus been fruitful to sociolinguists, as the process of becoming a member of a CoP tends to intersect with the process through which members gain mastery of the appropriate discourses which make up any given CoP. In other words, by studying the learning process required to gain membership to a CoP, we could acquire knowledge on how individuals develop sociolinguistic competence in that context (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999). The CoP framework further foregrounds the process through which individuals learn how to adapt their (linguistic) behaviours in ways that simultaneously construct notions of self and other (Eckert, 2000; Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999). As individuals take part in the activities or practices of a CoP, social relations develop, and as social relations develop even more activities emerge around these relations. This leads to the co-construction of individual and community identities which revolve around their shared activities and relations (Eckert, 2000; Bubel, 2005).

Communities of practice may be defined along three main criteria: *mutual engagement*, joint *enterprise* and *shared repertoire* of negotiable resources accumulated over time (Wenger, 1998: 76). Below I look at each of these dimensions in more detail.

2.2.1. Mutual engagement

Mutual engagement makes the emergence of CoPs possible, as this forms the foundation of the relationships that make up the CoP. Through mutual engagement, individuals in a CoP are able to jointly negotiate the meaning of actions and its functions as the main source of coherence in the community. Practice here "does not reside in a structure that precedes it, though it does not start in a historical vacuum" (Wenger, 1998: 73). That is, although there is a historical context to a CoP, the actions of members simultaneously draw from the historical schema while evolving and transforming it in the present.

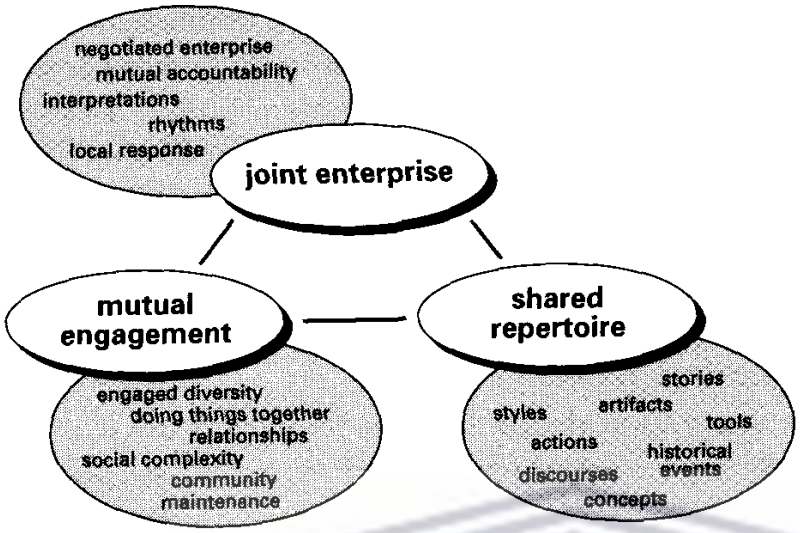

Figure 2.1. Dimensions of practice as the property of a community (Wenger, 1998: 73)

The activities of members may point to pre-established practices even as they reshape them and establish new practices that will be taken into the future. In addition, belonging to a social category, belonging to an organisation or having personal relations with some people is not enough to qualify a CoP. Membership is not assigned by having relations with (having talks with or knowing) people, nor is it by geographical proximity, although this can facilitate the practice of mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998). Thus, people might work in the same office or attend the same class/school without belonging to a community of practice. It is the density of their mutual engagements which are organised around their activities that make them a CoP.

Using Wenger's (1998) case study on a group of claims processors who work in the same office, understanding a work memo might be as important for membership as knowing the latest gossip. The person who creates an enjoyable work environment by providing snacks may be as important as the person who shares valuable information, while conversations about work may play as vital a role as including some personal details into these conversations. Thus, mutual engagement can be subtle and difficult to identify. Nonetheless, "the kind of coherence that transforms mutual engagement into a community of practice requires work" (Wenger, 1998: 74). The work required to maintain a sense of community is an integral part of the development of CoPs.

2.2.2. Joint enterprise

The notion of joint enterprise is not simply a stated shared goal, it is the result of:

> collective processes of negotiation that reflect the full complexity of mutual engagement… [It is] defined by the participants in the very process of pursuing it…and creates among participants relations of mutual accountability (Wenger, 1998: 77).

Drawing again from the example of claim processors working together, the joint enterprise is not only the goal of processing claims. Although processing claims forms part of what they do together, part of their enterprise is also finding ways within the constraints of their workplace, to get the job done and also to make doing the job a bearable or enjoyable experience for each other. This does not mean that they agree on everything or have the same understanding of how they conduct their work. It simply means that despite their differences, they engage in negotiations to ensure that their work is done as effectively as possible and that it is as enjoyable as possible. Nonetheless, CoPs do not exist in a vacuum. There are usually implicit and explicit institutional and larger societal factors which are out of the control of members which influence how they can go about their joint enterprise. However, ways of dealing with these constraints are creatively negotiated in the micro activities that make up their engagement so that they develop their own strategies for dealing with these external conditions.

In the process of negotiating joint enterprise, relations of mutual accountability are simultaneously cultivated. The notion of mutual accountability here refers to stated and tacit understandings of the aspect of their practices that matter and those that do not, what they pay attention to and what gets ignored, what is stated and what should be left unsaid, what needs justification and what does not, what is good enough and what might need to be improved on and so forth. These understandings guide the processes of negotiating relations of accountability that are fluid. According to Wenger (1998:82), this process is:

> as generative as it is constraining. It pushes practice forward as much as it keeps it in check […] it invites new ideas as much as it sorts them out. An enterprise is a resource for coordination, of sense-making of mutual engagement" (Wenger, 1998: 82).

Wenger (1998: 82) likens these processes of creating mutual enterprise and accountability to the process of creating musical rhythm where musicians rely on each other to create "music [that is] interpretable, participative, and shareable", resulting in a rhythmic relation of accountability around their shared enterprise.

2.2.3. Shared repertoire

Through mutual engagement revolving around the communities shared enterprise, a shared repertoire is realised which is made up of resources which are used for the negotiation of meaning (Wenger, 1998:85). These resources may include linguistic routines, pictures, tools, ways of doing things, symbols, actions, gestures and other practices that have over time become part of the community's shared practice. In Holmes and Meyerhoff's (1999) research on the New Zealand policy unit, such shared repertoires included preferred ways of arriving at decisions in meetings, greeting rituals and how much talk was deemed acceptable in different contexts. The different elements that make up a repertoire are usually heterogeneous and they create a sense of coherence not by virtue of the specific activities, symbols, tools or linguistic routines per se, but by the fact that they form part of a community's assets.

In addition to the three core dimensions discussed above, Wenger (1998: 130-31) proposes that the characteristics of a CoP are further substantiated through a couple of more specific features which may not always be applicable to all CoPs, but which work with the dimensions discussed above to differentiate CoPs. These features are summarised by Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999: 176) as follows:

- Sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual.
- Shared ways of engaging in doing things together.
- The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation.
- Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process.
- Very quick setup of a problem to be discussed.
- Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs.
- Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise.
- Mutually defining identities.
- The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products.

- Specific tools, representations, and other artifacts.
- Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter.
- Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones.
- Certain styles recognized as displaying membership.
- A shared discourse that reflects a certain perspective on the world.

The community of practice framework is therefore a suitable framework for the study of the ways in which friendships in this study are constructed and maintained. Groups of friends may be considered a community of practice if their relationship captures the dimensions of CoPs highlighted above, that is, if they regularly engage with each other (mutual engagement) towards the joint enterprise of securing social and economic support among other possibilities. As these engagements persist, these groups of friends might develop shared relations of accountability which keeps the relationship enjoyable for all. They may also develop a shared repertoire consisting of linguistic routines, ways of dressing and thinking as well as instinctive understandings of what can be stated and what is only to be implied, which ideologies and perspectives are acceptable and which are not.

Meyerhoff (2001) uses the CoP framework to analyse conversations collected from a group of friends who get together weekly to share drinks, over which they talk about their various work experiences. Eckert (2000) applies the framework to her study of friendship clusters in a highschool in Detroit which have developed communities of practice around activities which range from school to party-oriented activities and within which social meanings and identity are actively negotiated and co-constructed. These studies, among others (see also Bucholtz, 1999; Bubel, 2005), show that the CoP framework, specifically the notion of core and peripheral members, allows for the analysis of friendship beyond the dyad. CoP makes room for the analysis of an interlocking network of friends, where members function at different capacities to serve each other's friendship needs. This allows for the development of shared knowledge, but even more so, the negotiation of varying levels of intimacy between members of a friendship group or community of practice.

The community of practice framework is therefore suitable for the analysis of the five participants in this study. The data collected shows how through mutual engagement in the multiple activities that make up their friendship (school, work, Girl Chat etc), the group has accumulated a repertoire of practices to facilitate their interactions with each other. The practice approach allows for an

appreciation of the unique aspects of this friendship that differentiate it from others as well as differences between the relationships the participants have with each other.

The CoP framework, as highlighted above, is compatible with the tools of discourse analysis which are employed in this study. Discourse mainly refers to language in use (Cameron, 2001; Johnstone, 2018). The activities of any given community of practice are usually organised and coordinated through the use of some form of discourse, whether this is spoken, written or signed. In the case of the group of friends in this study, spoken conversation is one of the main discourse practices they use to make sense of their lives and their relationship with each other. Below I discuss the four types of discourse-oriented frameworks I have used to analyse the conversational data collected from the group: narrative analysis, conversation analysis, politeness theory and interactional sociolinguistics. But before I get into that discussion, I first want to look at conversations more generally, mainly to highlight the constitutive role they play in structuring everyday life.

2.3. Conversation as constitutive practice

One thing we cannot escape as human beings living within a social world is conversation. Cultural habits, for individuals and communities, identities, ideas, attitudes, values and beliefs are established, maintained, transmitted and/or evolve mainly in and through (public and private) conversation (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Keating & Egbert, 2005; Kashima, 2014). Harvey Sacks, one of the pioneers in the study of conversation, initially sought to understand the world better by analysing people's everyday conversations. He soon discovered that conversations were not merely ways of apprehending or describing the world, but they were in themselves actions that had the power to shape the worlds they described. Sacks (1972) showed that conversations were made up of a range of actions such as: greeting, giving advice, complaining, giving compliments and arguing and so forth. Through these conversational acts, individuals were able to realise and sustain relationships with people, objects and ideas.

Researchers interested in the study of micro, everyday interactions propose that conversation is the prototype of language use as it is that which children are first exposed to from their caregivers and significant others (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Keating & Egbert, 2005). The basic turn by turn or sequential structure of everyday conversation can be found even in the most formal political engagements. 'Talks' between nations usually take the form of conversations between government

officials (individuals). These conversations form the foundation for decisions which usually have great consequences on the fate of the world. Although the conversations of lay people do not necessarily have the kind of large-scale impact that such official conversations tend to have, they shape the lives of the individuals involved significantly. Research on everyday conversation has shed light on issues, such as the way people perceive power relations, issues of gender or racial inequality among others which has led to a more nuanced understanding of these phenomena (De Fina, 2008; Wetherell, 1998; Homes and Meyerhoff, 1999).

The notion of conversation as used in this study is not limited to talk. Although talk is usually a salient part of conversation, non-verbal aspects, such as body language, gaze, tone and volume all work together to create the meanings that emerge within conversations. In addition, the work that conversations do in establishing and maintaining a sense of our social reality and relationships is done implicitly.

> Most conversations do not in so many words define the nature of the world [or the relationship of the individuals involved]. Rather, they take place against the background of a world that is silently taken for granted [...] conversation that can *afford to be casual* precisely because it refers to the routines of a taken-for-granted world" (author's original emphasis, Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 172).

Consider the example from Kashima (2014):

> Two men in their 30s, Adam and Ben, almost simultaneously walk out of their offices, recognize each other, and begin to walk down a corridor towards a water cooler. From their clothing and the surroundings, they look like businessmen working in a large company.
>
> Adam: Gary bought a ring.
>
> Ben: For Mary, isn't it? (Adam nods)

This interaction goes beyond the actual words that are spoken to point to an entire (objective, taken-for-granted) world in which the interaction 'makes sense' or is considered 'normal'. It is implied that Ben knows who Gary is and Ben confirms this by stating who the ring is for. It is also implied that it is conventional for Gary to buy a ring for Mary, given that it is common behaviour between people who want to get married in some cultures. All these meanings are however achieved implicitly.

Although such conversations may appear trivial and insignificant in the larger scheme of things, they play a crucial role in ratifying one's existence and place in the world. Our daily lives are filled with such seemingly insignificant interactions in private and in public (at the bank, market, hospital etc) to the extent that whether we perceive the world to be hostile or enjoyable, pleasant and friendly may depend primarily on the quality of and ease (or lack thereof) in the conversations that make up our lives (Tannen, 1986, 2021). If we continually feel misunderstood because the things we say are seldom interpreted as intended by those around us, one might begin to feel socially incompetent and it might take a toll on one's psychological wellbeing. Conversely, if we feel we are on the same wavelength with those around us, and we usually manage to find an enjoyable conversational rhythm in the different interactions in our lives, this can subconsciously boost our self-esteem and contribute to the sense that we, and the world around us makes sense.

Early studies of conversations argued that face-to-face conversations were more significant than any other form of social correspondence in terms of their potency, given that one's sense of the other is most heightened in face-to-face engagements (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Walther, 1996). These researchers argued that even though it was possible to maintain relationships with significant others without face-to-face conversation, through email correspondence for example, it is within face-to-face conversations that language actualises its double role of describing and modifying the world. Technology has evolved drastically since these claims were made. There is now a growing body of work dedicated to looking into precisely these other modes of communication, specifically those brought about with the rise of the internet and its accompanying technologies (see Georgakopoulou, 2011, 2022; Georgakopoulou & Spilioti, 2016; Androutsopoulos & Tereick, 2016; De Fina & Perino, 2017). The use of modern technology to facilitate the continuation of the conversations, and the use of internet based platforms to engage in conversations with people we have not and may never meet further highlights the role of conversations for the maintenance of our sense of self and our relationship to people, ideas and objects that make up our world.

As highlighted above, conversations may be seen as a meta activity within which several other activities may be carried out, such as sharing information, persuading, solving problems, giving directions and arguing among others. Although this study is interested in the conversations of the participants as a whole, I focus mainly on the analysis of the activities of storytelling and playfulness. I shall now look at the discourse analysis frameworks that have been employed in the analysis of these conversational practices, beginning with narrative analysis.

2.4. Narrative analysis

Stories, or narratives as a speech genre, have been the interest of much research attention. This is due to the prevalence of stories or texts that take on a narrative format in various social contexts. Movies, TV shows, novels and music all make use of storytelling techniques to keep their audiences captivated. Narratives can also be found in both public and private conversations in almost every socio-cultural context. The pervasiveness of stories and storytelling has led some researchers to regard it as "a mode of thought, communication and apprehension of reality which is both super-arching and fundamental to the human cognitive makeup" (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008: 15, 2012, 2015; Bruner, 1990, 1991; Ricoeur, 1988). Researchers have aimed to uncover the role of narrative in the formation of social and psychological structures (Bruner, 2010; Herman, 2007). Contrary to the logic driven scientific mode of knowing which aims to uncover "truth" through testing hypotheses against empirical data, Bruner (1991, 2010) argues that the narrative mode is based on *verisimilitude*, where its value lies in its ability to give meaning to human experiences. The narrative mode centres issues around the ambiguousness of truth, the symbolic qualities of language in constituting objective reality, the temporal and liminal aspects of human interpretations of their experiences, and the sociocultural and historical contexts which constrain individual actions and meanings.

This shift in research focus has been called the *narrative turn*, as it shifts the focus of studies within many social science disciplines from positivist ways of studying social reality, which focused on rationality, reason, objectivity and the generalisability of results, to an interpretive one which favours particularities, subjectivity, intention and emotions. Within the narrative turn, researchers are not particularly interested in logic, as events that are narrated often involve instances in which typical patterns are disrupted. Thus, research often leads to conclusions that are ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations, as opposed to being factual or 'true'.

Narratives are viewed not merely as a means of apprehending the world and communicating, but also as constitutive of the world in which they manifest (Norrick, 2007; Eggins & Slade, 1997; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, 2015; Georgakopoulou & Goutsos; 2000). In the process of narrating, seemingly unrelated experiences are weaved together and directed towards a particular conclusion or goal. In this way narratives go beyond description to impose an order onto the unfolding chaos of experiences, thereby shaping and constructing them. Studying narratives as a

mode provides insight into the ways in which they capture and constitute meaning, experience, subjectivity, the lifeworld, reflexivity and action. Narrative gives us a window into the implicit and explicit rationales that determine how individuals act within society (Brunner, 1991, 1994, 2010; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, 2015).

Furthermore, the study of storytelling within conversational contexts has shown that narrative is a speech genre through which several kinds of social activities are jointly achieved (M. Goodwin, 1992, 1997; Sacks; 1992; Tannen; 1986, 2017). By studying the use of contextual cues, evaluations and interpretive frames used in jointly constructing narratives in conversations, we are able to gain insight into the ways in which individuals make sense of their lives and produce a sense of *their* world (Tannen, 1989, 2005, 2017; Killick & Boffey, 2012). Stories may be used as evidence in an argument, they may be used to praise, show support and care. When people are willing to share and listen to each other stories about life, they are actively involved in and bearing witness to the lives of those around them which helps to build rapport. Furthermore, looking at which kinds of stories are told within which contexts and between which types of individuals points us towards the role of narratives in the development and maintenance of different types of relationships such as friendship and family (M. Goodwin, 1997; Eggins & Slade, 1997, 2004). Most of the social and interpersonal work that narratives do is usually implicit and mostly forms part of the metamessaging of conversation.

Narratives as a mode for apprehending and constituting the world is accompanied by the view of narrative as a method of inquiry into human experience. Narrative methods and analysis have been used across the social sciences since the 1970s (Labov, 1972, Sacks, 1972a, 1992; M. Goodwin, 1980; C. Goodwin, 1984; Murray, 2000; Tannen, 2008; De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008, 2012; 2015; R. Dwyer, I. Davis & Emerald, 2017; Georgakopoulou, 2022). In keeping with the interest in the particularities of everyday life and subjectivity, scholars have used the narrative method to study ways in which individuals view various social issues, such as education, women's rights, race relations, a variety of interpersonal and institutional relationships and illness in a wide range of social contexts (Tannen, 1986, 1994; Atkinson, 2012). Through the stories of participants, researchers can comment on wider social phenomena. Although what narrative researchers share is the common interest in the experiences of people and the discourses in and through which these experiences are (re)produced, there are differences between the ways in which scholars in different fields have incorporated narrative into their methodological and analytical frameworks. Below I look at those

that are particularly relevant to the present study: the *narrative as practice* approach, the *conversational/interactional* approach and the *structural* approach to narrative analysis.

2.4.1. Narrative as practice approach

The narratives as practice approach is one of the more recent frameworks for the analysis of narrative discourse. It takes into account the immediate interactional context of narratives (see discussion on the interactional approach in section 2.4.2), but they take it further by looking into ways in which these micro activities interrelate with macro contexts in the constitution of narratives in everyday conversations. Within this paradigm, narratives are viewed both as talk-in-interaction and as social practice (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008; De Fina, 2008, 2019). In terms of narratives as talk-in-interaction, scholars mainly adopt ideas from conversation analysis discussed below. They maintain that narratives are embedded in conversation and thus cannot be detached from the contexts within which they emerge (Sacks, 1992; Jefferson, 1978). They also follow that narratives unfold in the turn by turn organisation of conversation and are shaped by the discourses that surround them. Proponents of this approach are attuned to the shortcomings of a purely conversation analysis approach to talk-in-interaction given that these interactions take place within a social world where ideologies and unequal power relations are often at work, even at the local level of interaction (De Fina, 2003, 2006; Wetherell, 1998). Hence they propose that narrative, in addition to being seen as talk-in-interaction also be seen as social practice.

Looking at narratives as social practice entails going beyond the here-and-now of conversation to find "articulations between the micro and the macro levels of social action and relationships" (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008: 382). They draw on notions of social practice, genre and communities of practice to illustrate the situatedness of narratives in various macro processes, such as how knowledge is accumulated and shared, how social groups are included and excluded in discourse. The goal of analysts is to uncover the intimate relationship between the emergent form of narratives and the ways in which local occasioning intersects with larger macro processes and practices (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Wetherell, 1998; Tannen, 2008, 2021).

To contextualise the narratives within their work, scholars link them to the social practice that they are part of. This entails looking at recurring situations and looking at the habitual discourse practices associated with those situations. Drawing from genre theory, they look at the relatively stable and

typical aspects as well as those that are emergent and fluid. Scholars like Labov (1972a) and Eggins and Slade (1997) use genre theory to uncover generic structures for narratives, but within narrative as practice research, genre is used as a means to explore modes of action which entail "the routine and repeated ways of acting and expressing orders of knowledge and experience" (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008: 383). Attention is paid to ways of telling stories that are shaped by daily social routines and larger sociocultural elements. In other words, narrative structure is seen as a fluid and evolving response to recurring situations that tellers actively exploit, negotiate and reconstruct at micro levels of interaction.

Another major contribution of this approach is the fact that it makes room for other types of stories such as incomplete tellings, refusals to tell, stories about 'nothing' and one-line references to shared stories and more. These unconventional stories are collectively referred to as "small stories" (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2006, 2008). *Small stories* is used as:

> an umbrella-term that covers a gamut of under-represented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell (Georgakopoulou, 2006:122).

These stories are usually quite literally 'smaller' or shorter than "big stories" (see structural approaches below) and they may not always be about past events or may not necessarily have a beginning, middle and end (Georgakopoulou, 2006, 2008; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). The rationale for the study of small stories is that the different levels of context may be determining how these smaller narratives emerge. This may point to their usefulness for interlocutors within specific interaction and their role in the constitution and (re)production of everyday reality.

The connection between narrative practices and larger social variables is not new. Within the sociolinguistic paradigm, links are made between narratives and social variables such as gender, class or race. However, the narrative as practice conceptualization of the link between the micro and macro shows that people's identity categories intersect differently within different situations, which in turn influences their experiences and thus the ways in which stories emerge in context (De Fina, 2008; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008). This raises questions around the idea of a homogenous speech community with generalised ways of speaking. The recent trend has seen researchers study smaller communities of practice, such as family units and friendship groups, where people share certain language and social norms due to regular interactions with one another. This has led to

plurality and fragmentation, where within larger group categories such as race and gender, there are numerous smaller and more manageable configurations with different narrative norms (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012). Within communities of practice, narratives form part of the shared culture and are instrumental in (re)defining cultural practices and group identities (M. Goodwin, 1990). However, they are also prone to contestation, they can be recontextualized and used in different settings for different purposes. The narrative as practice framework is most relevant to the analysis of stories in this study as it makes room for the analysis of the links between macro and micro contexts and different types of narrative discourses. It also focuses on narratives as being a part of the shared symbolic assets of a community of practice which are all key interests of the present study.

2.4.2. Conversational/interactional approach to narrative analysis

Conversation analysis (CA) is a broad framework used to analyse different types of discourse, and not just narrative texts. In addition, this project looks at conversational storytelling, conversational play and it also analyses the conversations that surround these specific discourse practices. As a result, I will discuss the broad conversation analysis paradigm since the approach influences the way in which the non-narrative data are analysed in this study. I will then look more specifically at the CA approach to narratives.

Conversation analysis is a popular approach among linguists, but interestingly it was developed outside of the field of linguistics by renowned American sociologist Harvey Sacks and his colleagues, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson in the 1960s and 1970s. They were highly influenced by Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology which sought to explain the ways in which individuals themselves made sense of their everyday lives. Garfinkel's (1967) work favoured a bottom-up approach to the study of commonsensical reasoning that individuals applied as they went about their everyday activities in an attempt to make the ordinary more visible. Following these objectives, Sacks and his colleagues collected naturally occurring conversation which they made sense of by using a strictly micro-level analytical approach (Eggins & Slade, 1997; Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Bubel, 2005).

Conversation analysts view communication as sequentially unfolding joint activity in which interlocutors follow certain implicit rules for successful interaction to be realised. Thus, some CA

practitioners prefer the term talk-in-interaction rather than conversation to describe their object of study. The approach has been used to analyse a wide range of interactions including telephone conversations, aerobics instructions and talk in the workplace. Their analyses, which have focused on highly interactional communicative events, have revealed how interlocutors work together to achieve a sequentially meaningful set of actions. Two main 'facts' were brought to light from this work: that one person speaks at a time, and that speaker changes recurs (Eggins & Slade, 1997). Thus, talk in interaction is fundamentally a turn taking activity in which interlocutors *know* to wait till one person has finished their turn before others may speak. These conversational turns are locally occasioned, meaning that every turn is influenced by and relevant to the turns that preceded it, as well as other aspects of the immediate context of talk. In other words, they are "conditionally relevant" (Schegloff, 1968). The interpretation of the current speaker's turn is displayed in turn of the following speaker. The interpretation of one's turn as a greeting, will lead to the provision of the appropriate reply to this greeting by the next speaker.

Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008:15) use an analytical procedure called *next-turn proof procedure* to find evidence for meaning in the next speaker's turn. This is a useful notion in my study, especially in the analysis of playful interactions as the next speaker's turn is usually where I am able to determine whether the previous speaker's turn has been interpreted within the same play frame. Another CA term that is relevant to this study is the notion of *repair*. Repair is a term used to capture a variety of activities which can range from "corrections to mending problems in the way participants take turns" (Bubel, 2005: 71). Repair strategies may be used when there is a slip of the tongue, the use of incorrect word choice, mishearing and misinterpretations.

In terms of the use of CA methods for analysing stories, conversation analysts propose an approach to understanding the structure of personal narratives in daily mundane conversation that has laid the foundation for research on narratives that occur in interactional settings. Conversation analysts argue that stories themselves belong in the sequentially ordered practice of conversation, as stories are preceded and followed by discourse which shape the way stories emerge (Sacks, 1972a/b; Jefferson, 1978). This embedding of narratives within conversational and interactional contexts is one of the main contributions of the conversational approach to the study of narratives. The focus on stories as embedded in conversational contexts results in researchers paying close attention to the endpoints of stories, that is how stories are launched and how they are exited (Jefferson, 1978; Norrick, 2007).

Their research efforts have shed light on how storytellers secure permission to hold the conversational floor. Sacks (1992) shows that stories are told in more than one turn. The story itself only comes around the third turn in the interaction in Sacks' three-part structure:

Teller: story preface (request to tell)

Recipient: request to hear the story (permission to tell)

Teller: story

Sacks (1992) argues that the preface gives the teller the opportunity to see if the story is already known or to gauge how the story will be responded to. It also puts the audience within a certain orientation from which to interpret the story if they request to hear it. This moves the analysis of stories from a teller-led perspective to one that focuses on the dynamics of interaction. Sacks demonstrates this with his analysis of jokes. Jokes are believed to be followed by laughter; hence announcing a story as funny prepares the audience for a story that will make them laugh. Now, whether they laugh or not is another matter altogether. Nonetheless, the *success* of the story that follows will be determined by the presence or absence of laughter. The recipient's reaction to the story is often along the lines of how it was prefaced or launched. The same story prefaced differently may lead to different story structure within the conversation and different recipient reactions.

Conversation analysts have shown that story endings can take a variety of forms and also require complex interactional negotiation among participants (Jefferson, 1978). Tellers use several exit devices which are similar to Labov's coda to demonstrate that their story is over as well as to elicit a reaction from the recipients. Endings can take the form of a proverb, or the moral of the story, but it brings the audience out of the story world and back to the present moment. Participants at the end of a story also use various devices to show that they understand the story that has been told and add their own contributions to it as conversation continues to unfold. Jefferson (1978) uses the concept of *sequential implicativeness* to bring to light the ways in which narratives influence the talk that follows it. She also shows that in some cases the audience interrupts the story before it is concluded by the teller and at this point the teller becomes faced with the conversational challenge to either stop or continue. Tellers sometimes do not regain control of the floor till several turns after the interruption. In other cases, the audience do not find the story sequentially implicative and hence stay silent or carry on conversation on topics unrelated to the narrative.

Despite the interest in how stories are launched and exited in interactional contexts, research has shown that many stories in conversational contexts do not always have a starting, a middle and an end (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012; Eggins & Slade, 1997, 2004). Conversational stories are so deeply embedded in conversation that it may not always be clear when a story begins and where it ends. In addition, once a story is introduced, there is often no guarantee that it will be told till the end. In interactional approaches to narratives, unfinished stories are interesting as they may be strategically used as an indication of what is tellable in what context. Georgakopoulou (2008) illustrates this point in her study of stories that are started online but the actual telling is deferred to a later time when the participants meet face-to-face. Such incomplete tellings are studied for what they may reveal about the individuals involved and the contexts in which they emerge, unlike in traditional narrative research where they would be considered failed performances.

Furthermore, the focus on the interactional aspects of storytelling in conversation highlights the role of the audience. Conversation analysts move away from the one teller one listener understanding of stories to one in which all participants take part in how the story develops in the interaction. The role of the audience, which was mostly ignored in traditional narrative studies, is brought into sharp focus as the act of storytelling requires certain actions from those participating in the storytelling event. CA researchers argue that the structure of a narrative cannot be determined prior to the interaction that produced it, as the actions of the audience - which cannot always be predicted - play a role in shaping the way the narrative structure emerges.

Studies that apply interactional analytical methods to non-conversational settings like interviews, also demonstrate how even in such settings, storytelling requires joint effort from both interviewer and interviewee. In such instances, the narrative is often prompted by the interviewer's question and during the course of narration, the interviewer may interrupt the telling to ask for elaboration on certain aspects of the story. In therapeutic sessions, the analyst often has the objective to bring change to their patients psychological state and these objectives influence the way in which the interaction takes place, which in turn influences the narrative that is collaboratively produced by the patient and therapist (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, 2015; Murray & Sargeant, 2012; Murray, 2007). This further highlights the value of taking the interactional contexts of storytelling, specifically the role of the audience, into account in the study of social phenomena through narrative.

Moreover, C. Goodwin (1984) looks at how stories are told depending on if the story is known to the recipients as opposed to when it is unknown. The launching of shared stories differs from that of stories known only by the teller. Shared stories are launched with an abstract that highlights the fact that the story is shared by the teller and recipients, and often is an invitation for co-construction of the story to come (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012; C. Goodwin, 1984; Goodwin & Goodwin; 2004). Establishing mutual reference to a story is often spread across two adjacency pairs: announcement of a shared story, followed by a request for clarity if the recipient is not sure of the details of the story being referred to. The provision of additional details by the teller usually includes a character in the story and a temporal element like "last night" which jogs the recipient's memory. From there, the narrative follows, and it is typically brief or just a skeleton of the actual narrative (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012). Stories that are known or being retold are often shorter than their first telling (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012). Norrick (1993) proposes the term *familiar stories* to describe such known stories and the functions that they play in the conversations within which they are embedded. He shows that these familiar stories are used as strategies to demonstrate closeness in intimate groups such as family and friends. These research efforts have been instrumental in changing how story prefaces are analysed as they are not just a tool used to grab the listeners attention or to demonstrate why a story should be told. They may play other constitutive functions like establishing mutual reference, among others. Story openings may therefore take on many different formats depending on the immediate interactional tasks the teller is aiming to perform.

C. Goodwin (1984, 1986) distinguishes between different types of story recipients: the addressed recipient, recipients who already know the story versus those who do not, recipients who are also characters in the story and may become co-tellers during the course of the telling, and those who may agree with the teller or those who may undercut the telling of the story. C. Goodwin (1984) takes the analysis further by shedding light on the different treatments recipients may receive from the teller and the effect of language and topic choices on the kind of audience participation. He also shows how participation roles may evolve over the telling. Participants may go from being active to inactive and vice versa in the course of the telling. De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) further outline some roles that participants may play to shape the evolution of the narrative within the conversation. They may:

1. Initiate a story by inviting someone to tell it;
2. Show appreciation for the narrative through laughter or through manifestation of empathy or other emotional outbursts, response cries and generally positive back-channelling;
3. Negotiate the meaning of a story by providing alternative evaluations;
4. Respond minimally by just listening to the story and making occasional comments;
5. Assume the much more active role of a co-teller by offering details or repairing some aspect of the telling.

When the telling finally comes to an end, the audience has the responsibility to demonstrate that they have understood the point of the narrative. They may use several strategies to do so: audience members might further evaluate the events of the story either to show that they align with the tellers point or to provide alternative evaluations, or they may contribute by telling a *second story*, a *response* or *interlaced story* (Sacks, 1992; Norrick, 2005, 2007). It is important to note that tellers of first stories have no way to know beforehand that other audience members may volunteer stories of their own. Hence the tellers of response stories are responsible for showing how their story is relevant in relation to the first one. Second stories have been found to be common in talk among close knit groups like families or groups of friends. They have been found to be important in the display of friendship and connectedness due to the expectation of reciprocity and solidarity that often drives them.

Another area of contestation between traditional narrative research and interactional approaches lies in the fact that stories in traditional research are seen as objective reflections of the events they recount. Schiffrin (1984), who explores the intertextual properties of known or retold stories, showed that retold stories are not just narrations of experience, they are also narrations of prior tellings. She argues that each retelling is inserted within different irreducible contexts hence the meaning of the text of the story will change from context to context and from audience to audience. Georgakopoulou (2005) also examines the different forms that retold or shared stories can take. She demonstrates that shared stories could range from fully fledged narratives to one-line references which are always contingent on the local context. This work reveals that stories do not have one fixed meaning as each new context will reveal different interpretations of the same events. It also emphasises the idea that language is not a transparent vehicle of information (as seen in traditional approaches to narratives). It is rather contingent and locally occasioned such that the discourse choices made in the

narration of events reflect the interactional environment and goals of that specific telling and not an objective account of the events.

Conversation analysis and interactional approaches to narratives have contributed immensely to our understanding of narratives. They have shown the complex nature of the division of labour and roles between participants and the embeddedness of stories within social and discourse practices. The most common issue that researchers have found in applying conversational/interactional analysis methods to their work has come from its sometimes exaggerated focus on the local context of conversation. Little or no attention is paid to the ways in which conversational discourse shapes and is shaped by multiple layers of context that usually extend beyond the text or local situation of interaction. In this study, this approach gives me the tools needed to analyse the immediate interactional contexts of the storytelling and discourse in general. I found that the interactional/conversational approach proved most productive when combined with the practice approach discussed above and the interactional sociolinguistic approach which I discuss later on in this chapter. The combination of frameworks allows me to stay close to the interaction, while also exploring how the interaction may be pointing to more macro issues such as their overall friendship or their position as black African women in a neocolonial world. To end the discussion on the narrative frameworks that inform this study I will look at the structural approach, specifically the work of William Labov (1972a) who laid the foundation for much of contemporary narrative studies.

2.4.3. Structural approach to narrative analysis

The structural approach to narratives is interested in uncovering the basic internal structure of narrative texts. Researchers within this framework are interested in the ways in which tellers strategically use a variety of narrative devices to increase the *tellability* of a story that goes beyond the actual content of the story. The goal within this approach is to understand the function that different clauses play in making a story worth telling or listening to. The most influential approach to the study of the structure of narratives is proposed by William Labov and his colleagues (1967, 1972a). They sought to define the basic internal structure found within all narratives. The conversations/interactional analysis approach developed mainly as a critique to Labov's theory. However, Labov's theory remains influential to date. Although it may not be obvious in my analysis chapters (5-7), Labov's work was one of the main frameworks which influenced my method of

identifying the narrative patterns in the data, even though the type of stories I analysed are different from those that Labov and his colleagues were interested in.

The Labovian approach

Labov defined the narrative as a "method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events (it is inferred actually occurred)" (Labov, 1972a: 360). What he calls a minimal narrative is two narrative clauses bound together by temporal juncture. These are clauses that stand in the place of something that actually happened in a particular sequence hence, changing the order of the clauses would not be a 'true' account of the actual event. An example of one of Labov's (1972a: 361) minimal narrative clauses is as follows:

A. I know a boy named Harry
B. Another boy threw a bottle at him right in the head
C. And he had to get seven stitches

The narrative clauses in the above example are B and C because placing C before B would make the story 'untrue' as this may not be how the action actually unfolded. Although Labov emphasises narrative clauses, he also adds that a narrative can have several narrative clauses as well as free clauses which play different functions in creating the scene. For example, A in the extract above is an example of a free clause and moving it around does not necessarily change the sequence of events as it just adds information about the boy at whom a bottle was thrown.

Labov proposed a structure consisting of six parts which he claimed made up the basic structure of a narrative namely: *abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, coda*.

- *The abstract* is an optional stage which summarises the story and also tells the audience why the story is worth telling.
- *The orientation* tells the who, the what, the where and when, of a story. It usually comes at the beginning of the story but can also be placed strategically at different points in the telling of the story (Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Labov, 1972a).
- *The complicating action* is a set of narrative clauses which answer the question "and then what happened?".
- *The evaluation* can be said to be the most important contribution of Labov's framework to the field. This is the part that answers the question 'so what?' and constitutes the soul of the narrative. Evaluation can be found at all parts of the story in the form of intensifying

adjectives and repetition reported speech, expressive phonology among others (Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Labov, 1972a). However, the main evaluation section is that which suspends the action by use of a series of free evaluative clauses to tell the point of the story or what makes it unusual thereby making the resolution more effective.

- *The resolution* refers to what finally happens, how the crisis is finally resolved or the end of the plot and
- *The coda* (an optional element too) ends the story and brings the readers out of the world of the story and back to the present moment.

Reported speech

Most of the stories in this study centre around reported dialogue between the participants and the characters in their stories. Reported speech has been shown to be an important strategy in narrative both in Labov's framework and in interactional approaches. Tellers often negotiate authorship and responsibility by incorporating other voices into the telling. This draws on Goffman's (1967) work where he differentiates between the *author* (or the person who selects the belief, opinion or the attitude being expressed in the utterance), the *animator* (the person who reports or reproduces the utterance) and the *principal* (the person responsible for the utterance). Tellers may assign authorship to different characters in their stories to assign blame, praise or responsibility, mainly through quoted speech. By animating the author's utterances, the narrator (and consequently the listeners) goes back and forth between the story world and the present interaction. This further heightens the double chronology concept where the teller is able to make multiple associations between themselves in the interaction world and in the story world (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012; 2015; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008).

Furthermore, reported speech is not a verbatim reproduction of the actual speech event, but a fictional construction by the teller to propel the point of their story. Hence, direct reported speech is often referred to as *constructed dialogue* (Tannen, 2008, Norrick, 2007). From here on, I shall be using the terms *reported speech* and *constructed dialogue* interchangeably. This is in line with Labov's (1972a) work in which dialogue is one type of an embedded evaluative device which helps to create drama. The fictional quality of reported speech is even more visible in instances where the speech that is quoted, in reality, could not have been uttered, for instance, "and all the students said 'we are going to burn down the university'". The students could not have all said the same thing at

the same time. Listeners may also construct parts of the dialogue even though they have no way of knowing exactly what was said. Moreover, individuals report their own internal thought processes in the form of constructed dialogue: "I said to myself 'this is it'".

Constructed dialogue has also been associated with morality and agency. Ochs and Capps (2001) show how tellers often construct themselves as individuals who act ethically and portray themselves as having higher moral standards than the other characters within their stories. They have shown how tellers express their beliefs and values through dialogue within the story world, rather than explicitly discuss those beliefs. In relation to agency, tellers will downplay or heighten their own responsibility in the events being narrated in a way that best helps them save face or emerge as the ones with higher morals. Narratives in general, but especially the use of constructed dialogue, allows tellers to take on the role of the animator, while assigning the role of author and principal to characters in the story in ways that reduce their own responsibility. This is evident in De Fina's (2003) work where she shows how undocumented immigrants typically downplay any role, they may have played in their predicament by assigning greater speaking turns to characters while silencing themselves in their stories.

In addition to what is being reported, *who* is being reported also has implications on self-representation. The voices animated by tellers may be indexical of power relations at play in the story. Georgakopoulou's (1997) study shows how people are quoted in stories based on whether the teller perceives the author to be a voice that legitimises the teller's point. The evaluative properties of constructed dialogue and the movement between tale world and present interaction provide a powerful tool that interlocutors exploit for self-representation and to distance or align themselves with certain identity options in storytelling events. In so doing, they simultaneously produce a world in which their stories *can* be told, a world in which their stories, their sense of self, their values, beliefs and experiences 'make sense'. This further points to the constitutive, world-making potential of narratives.

Although Labov's (1967, 1972a) work has been very influential and continues to be used to date in numerous studies (including this one), it was also met with criticisms several of which have been discussed in section 2.4.2. The main concern of scholars attempting to apply Labov's work in their own research was the fact that the stories in Labov's approach were extensive and monological in nature. Researchers working with conversational data quickly found that stories emerged within

highly interactive settings and could not always fit neatly into Labov's six stage model (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012; 2015; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). In addition, structural approaches pay little attention to the multiple layers of context often influencing the linguistic choices that individuals make in telling their stories. Stories were often detached from the interview settings and analysed as objective texts. Whereas the researchers' aims, the interview setting, institutional and larger societal norms are usually at play and determining how participants frame their stories. Critics argue that by decontextualising the story and analysing them without analysing the researcher's role in the production of that story, Labovian-type structural approaches tend to miss the mainly implicit ways through which stories are constituted by and constitutive of the social interactions in which they emerge. Despite the shortcomings of the framework, Labov's work remains foundational in the study of narratives.

The approaches discussed here are not an exhaustive list of narrative frameworks that have been used in research. These are mainly those that have been beneficial to the analysis of data in this current study. As highlighted above, one of the major criticisms of Labovian approaches is the tendency to detach the narrative from the interview context in which it occurred, while interactional/conversational approaches and conversational analysis in general have been criticised for the focus on only the immediate context of talk-in-interaction. Both approaches thus limit, in their own ways, the understanding of how larger sociocultural or macro forces determine what is possible in micro contexts. Interactional sociolinguistics, like the narrative as practice approach, provides a framework that considers the ways in which the micro and macro are mutually constitutive categories. Below I look at interactional sociolinguistics in more detail.

2.5. Interactional sociolinguistics

Interactional sociolinguistics (IS) is a term that is used to describe an approach to the study of discourse that was highly influenced by the work of John Gumperz (1972, 1982). Gumperz's work is interested in the role played by context in the production and interpretation of discourse. His notion of context went beyond the immediate interactional/conversational context to look at the relationship between discourse and culture by exploring the ways in which discourse was used and interpreted by people of different cultural backgrounds. For example, Gumperz showed how British and Indian speakers of English who belonged to different sociocultural backgrounds interpreted various types of *contextualisation cues.* He realised that different people from different backgrounds would

interpret the same cues, such as intonation and pace, differently. He stated that "what we perceive and retain in our minds is a function of our cultural predisposition to perceive and assimilate" (Gumperz, 1982: 4). Thus, when individuals who have been socialised into different modes of using and interpreting discourse interact, misunderstandings are bound to happen. Although Gumperz work did not focus on conversational discourse, other scholars such as Tannen (1989, 1990, 2004, 2005) and Shiffrin (1984, 1987, 1990) among others have shown how productive this approach is to making sense of conversational discourse. Gumperz (1982) work is similar to the work of Hymes (1974) who studied the components of situated interactions and grouped them into a mnemonic, SPEAKING[1], highlighting the significance of extralinguistic context in determining the way interactions unfold.

IS focuses on the effect of the sociocultural (macro) and situational (micro) contexts on talk. It is oriented towards the analysis of communicative practices and the "interactional order" (Goffman, 1983) which "constitute an intermediate[2] and in many ways an analytically distinct level of organisation" (Gumperz 2001: 216). Conversation analysis (CA) (see section 2.4.2) is also influenced by Goffman's (1983) notion of the interactional order, but unlike CA, IS uses the interactional order to bring both the social and the linguistic aspects of interaction into focus. For example, the act of updating each other on events that have taken place in each other's life is a linguistic phenomenon, but it goes beyond the linguistic to create or reinforce the interpersonal relationship between interlocutors. It may also point to ways in which individuals engage with macro issues, such as racial or gender ideologies which emerge during these updates.

IS can also be contrasted from macro perspectives such as that of Pierre Bourdieu (1978, 1990). Bourdieu, whose work can be located in practice theory, views (communicative) practices as conditioned by the macro level or *habitus*. Habitus refers to "principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them: structuring structures" (1990, 53). From the IS point of view, our social realities are actively

[1] Situation, Participants, Ends (outcomes and goals of the interaction), Act sequence (message form and content), Key (tone and manner), Instrumentalities (form and channel), Norms (of interpretation and of interaction) and Genre (e.g. Hymes 1974)

[2] Intermediate as it is neither strictly micro nor strictly macro in its focus. The narrative as practice approach discussed in section 2.4.1 can also be seen as belonging to an intermediate level of analysis.

constructed in local communicative practices, rendering a study of these localised interactive processes highly consequential to our understanding of how social realities emerge. The intermediacy of IS which provides a means to study communicative practices as "the everyday-world site where societal and interactive forces merge" (Gumperz 2001:218) is what makes it productive for my work on the ways in which talk is implicated in the construction and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. This is also in line with the community of practice framework discussed in section 2.2. It brings to light the ways in which social organisation (macro) is achieved cooperatively at the micro-level of interaction and how these local interactions relate to pre-existing, historical macro-level structures, such as the sociocultural background of people and their shared interactional history.

In IS, the sequential unfolding of talk in interaction is analysed, but it goes beyond this point to reveal how communicative practices and strategies are exploited to arrive at contingent, context-specific meaning and by extension, how social structures, identities and relationships shape and are shaped by these communicative practices. A key element in IS analysis is what they refer to as *contextualisation*. Contextualisation is defined as the ways in which speakers and listeners use verbal and nonverbal signs to make connections between the literal words that are spoken in time and place and to the historical background knowledge they are drawing from. This is done through the use of *contextualisation cues* which include a variety of elements, such as prosody, paralinguistic signs, lexis, syntax, code, sequential organisation and non-verbal behaviours (Gumperz 1982; Schiffrin 1996). These cues point listeners to the type of speech activity they are involved in (e.g. a joke, a story, discussing politics) and the interpretive frames they may use to make sense of speakers' utterances. These cues are also used by listeners to formulate appropriate and relevant responses to what is being said and to gauge what turn taking rules may be applicable to the specific context.

The links between the macro aspects of research, specifically social relationships and certain discourse practices and strategies used in everyday interactions (micro) have been the focus of face and politeness research. I shall now turn my attention to developments in research on face and politeness strategies.

2.6. Politeness and face

Politeness, indirectness and face are popular concepts in the study of conversational discourse practices especially as they pertain to interpersonal relationships. These notions have been instrumental in untangling what has been described as the "double bind" (Tannen, 1986: 16) of human communication: the need for *involvement* and the need for *independence* (Tannen, 1986; Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Lakoff, 1973, Brown & Levinson, 1987). These two opposing forces are simultaneously at play in all human interactions, and they must be carefully negotiated to achieve interactions in which the *face* (Goffman, 1967) of all interlocutors are protected. *Involvement* refers to the human need to belong, to have a sense of community and the sense of not being alone in the world, while *independence* refers to the need to be unique with boundaries that separate the individual from others and the need to not be imposed on by others (Tannen, 1986, 2005a, 2021). Therefore, while individuals have a need to be part of the group, they have an equally important need to stand out as individuals and both these needs are continuously being negotiated in every interaction.

The notion of face which is related to the notions of involvement and independence is important for understanding how politeness in interaction has been theorised. Face is a concept that was coined by Ervin Goffman (1967) and later taken up in the work of Brown and Levinson (1978: 61). Face is a term used in lay language in expressions such as 'losing face' or 'saving face'. It was Goffman who presented a technical use of these expressions in the analysis of interpersonal meanings and interaction. He defined face as "the public self image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Goffman, 1967). He argued that when an individual interacts with others, he/she:

> act out what is sometimes called a *line* – that is, a pattern of verbal and non-verbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of participants, especially himself. The other participants will assume that he has more or less wilfully taken a stand, so that if he is to deal with their response to him he must take into consideration the impression they have possibly formed of him (Goffman 1967: 5).

Therefore, in acting in a way that is consistent with the line that others assume one has taken, one can claim positive social value for oneself. This social value is what is referred to as face (Goffman, 1967).

This notion of face is inextricably linked to others in interaction. The patterns of our actions lead to the emergence of a particular version of ourselves that others perceive and will expect us to continue to live up to (regardless of whether the perceived image is what we intended or not). As long as our actions remain consistent to this projected and/or perceived image, we can be said to *have face*, *be in face* or *maintain face*. While acting in ways that are inconsistent with the perceived line leads to a situation in which we *lose face* or find ourselves to be *in wrong face*, *out of face* or *shamefaced* (Goffman, 1967). The interpersonal and interactional work we do to repair this situation or to find ourselves once again to be in face is what Goffman (1967) refers to as the process of *saving face*. Goffman (1967) proposes two levels of face work (the process by which interlocutors stay in or maintain face): one which entails being *defensive* of one's face (*a defensive orientation*) and the other which entails being *protective* of the face of our fellow interlocutors (*a protective orientation*). Although any given act might be more defensive than protective or vice versa, both levels are typically always at play so much so that in performing an act aimed at protecting an interlocutor's face, we may only do so up to the point where we do not end up losing ours, and vice versa.

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) extend Goffman's notion of face through their concepts of positive and negative face.

> **Negative face**: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition
>
> **Positive face**: the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants (Brown and Levinson, 1987:61).

These two aspects of face are served by certain *wants* or *face wants*:

> **Negative face wants**: the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others
>
> **Positive face wants**: the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 62).

Positive face is similar to the need for involvement, and the negative face is related to the need for independence. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), cooperation in face work in interaction is mutually beneficial as all interlocutors share and ultimately try to minimise the risk of losing face.

Hence, the expectation is that all interlocutors cooperate with each other to negotiate a shared line that protects one's face without risking the others.

Lakoff (1973), in an earlier attempt to capture this inherent dialectic of human relations, proposed what she calls the "rules of politeness":

1. Distance - Do not impose.
2. Deference - Give options.
3. Camaraderie - Be friendly

The first and third rules are in line with the independence and involvement respectively, while the rule of difference refers to instances in which speakers find a middle ground between imposition and camaraderie by giving their interlocutor options. Individuals in interaction will use strategies that signal involvement, independence or deference in ways that help one to be in good face, save face or to maintain face while also protecting the face of their fellow interlocutors (Lakoff, 1973; Tannen, 1986, 2005a)..

Apart from the assumptions that interlocutors are willing to cooperate[3] with each other to ensure that conversations unfold smoothly without the loss of face, Brown and Levinson (1987: 58) further assume that interlocutors possess "certain rational capacities in particular consistent modes of reasoning from ends to means that will achieve those ends". In other words, that individuals are at least partially conscious of the strategies they are exploiting in different contexts for the maintenance of face, both theirs, and that of others, partially because we do not consciously think that we are following 'rules of politeness' when we speak. In fact, when people think of politeness in everyday life, they mainly think of formal and conventional signifiers of politeness such as saying "please", "thank you" or "excuse me" when trying not to impose on others (respecting the negative face of others, or applying the rule of distance). What is closer to the truth is that we generally have a sense of ways of speaking that seem self-evidently appropriate at the time we utter the words. But if one is asked why they expressed themselves in a particular way, they are usually able to give an explanation such as "I did not want to hurt their feelings", or "I thought it was a nice thing to say". This sense that humans have of appropriate ways of speaking in particular contexts is what linguists refer to as *politeness*: "ways of taking into account the effect on others of what we say" (Tannen, 1987: 19). In Lakoff and Ide's (2005: 4) terms politeness "implies consideration for others and the

[3] Grice's maxims of cooperation: 1) quality - providing truthful information 2) quantity - providing enough information 3) relevance - providing relevant information and 4) Manner - avoiding ambiguity

adherence to conventional standards expected of a well-bred person".

Various strategies may be used by speakers to signal involvement or independence in conversation. Signals may be found in how fast we speak (e.g. saying what we want to say quickly so as not to take up too much of a person's time), the volume of our voice (e.g. speaking loudly to show one's enthusiasm about what is being said), intonation (e.g. using a sing song voice to indicate playfulness) as well as the actual words that are spoken, to name a few. All these strategies communicate certain metamessages that go beyond what is actually said to demonstrate particular attitudes towards the conversation, person or object. How a person utilises these strategies may cause them to come across as rude or polite, interested or aloof and so on and so forth.

One of the strategies used to manage the need for involvement and independence is *indirectness*. As highlighted above (section 2.3), conversation accomplishes most of its work implicitly as people do not always come right out and say what they mean. Instead, they rely on their fellow interlocutors to key into the taken-for-granted background knowledge and interpretive frames (or contextualisation cues) available to make sense of the words that are actually spoken. In addition, the meanings of the words may not accurately capture the message that is being communicated. For example, one might say they are happy, but their tone of voice and body language suggests otherwise. Tannen (1986) makes a distinction between the information conveyed, what is *on record* (the meaning of the actual words that are spoken e.g. "I'm fine") and the metamessage or "what is communicated about the relationships—attitudes towards each other, the occasion, and what we are saying" (e.g. the tone of voice and body language which may suggest that the speaker is in fact angry about something), what is *off record*. Although the information conveyed is important, research on social interactions shows that individuals tend to react more strongly to the metamessage that comes with the words (Tannen, 1986, 2013).

In trying to serve the conflicting needs of independence and involvement indirectly, miscommunication can occur. For example, if a friend has suffered a tragic loss, I might choose to say nothing so as not to make them relive said tragic incident thus attempting to serve my friends need to not be imposed on. However, my decision to say nothing might be perceived by my friend as a sign that I do not care about her. From her perspective, I have violated her need for involvement or camaraderie by choosing not to get involved. Thus, doing face work through politeness strategies tends to be successful if the interlocutors are projecting the same interpretive frame onto the particular speech acts which make up the conversation.

Framing (similar to Gumperz's notion of contextual cues) is thus another important concept at play as people engage in the process of balancing their need for independence and involvement in conversation. Bock (2017: 5) citing Goffman (1974: 21) defines framing as the "one or more frameworks or schemata of interpretations which individuals use to decide what is going on in any interaction". Similarly, Tannen (1986: 63), following Bateson (1972) defines framing as "a way of showing how we mean what we say or do and figuring out how others mean what they say or do". Individuals in conversation rely on linguistic and nonverbal cues to frame what they say and rely on their audience to key into these frames in order to correctly interpret their utterances and respond accordingly. We do not always announce that what we are about to say should be interpreted as a joke, instead, we may use a combination of devices, such as intonation, facial expression and/or body language to signal that what we are saying is a joke and should be interpreted within the frame of a joke (see also Tannen & Wallat 1993).

If there is a chance that one's speech acts may be interpreted using the wrong frame, why then do we insist on using strategies of politeness or indirectness? Why do we not come right out and say exactly what we mean? There are two main reasons for this in the literature. The first is that indirectness allows for the management of relational ties (Tannen, 1986, 2021; Chen & Warren, 2003; Watts, 2003; Locher & Watts, 2005). When those around us understand what we mean, where we are coming from and the point we are getting at without the need for us to spell it out, it signals that we are on the same wavelength and this strengthens the bonds we share. Think of the friend who just 'gets you', the friend who can tell what you are about to say before you even say it based on non-verbal cues you might be sending through body language or gaze. Indirectness thus has the effect of potentially intensifying rapport and the pleasures that come with feeling of being close to someone and the feeling of being understood. The second reason is that indirectness carries within it the potential for decommitment (Tannen 1986). By not explicitly saying what we mean, we create room for us to 'take back' what we have said, if what we have said does not trigger the desired response. If we never went on record to state what we meant, then we can always say something such as, "it was just a joke" when our speech act is not well received.

Another aspect of the politeness framework proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) is the idea that certain (discourse) actions inherently threaten face by running "contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or speaker" (Brown & Levinson, 1978: 65). These acts are referred to as *face threatening acts* (FTAs). Acts that threaten one's negative face may include an invitation (puts

pressure on the addressee to act in a particular way e.g to say yes, with the risk of losing face if they say no), orders or requests, threats, warnings and other acts that may be considered an imposition. While acts that threaten positive face could include ridicule, disapproval, criticism or challenge, complaints or any act that may suggest a dislike for one's face. Some acts simultaneously threaten both speaker and addressee. An invitation, for example, imposes on the addressee (negative face threat) while putting the speaker in the vulnerable position of potentially being rejected (positive face threat). Given that these FTAs are mostly unavoidable in the development and maintenance of social ties, individuals draw from a wide range of strategies (verbal and nonverbal) to mitigate the threat of their actions on the face of the speaker and addressee. These strategies are referred to as *politeness strategies* (Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987; Tannen, 1986, 2021). Positive politeness strategies are aimed towards protecting the interlocutor's positive face, such as giving them a compliment or avoiding disagreement. Negative politeness strategies are used to protect negative face, such as, hedging one's request: "do you mind if I…", "I don't mean to be a bother, but…" or asking questions: "would you like some tea" instead of direct orders or the use of imperatives.

According to Brown and Levinson (1978), the type of politeness strategies available to interlocutors is contingent on the power relations between interlocutors and levels of familiarity. Certain strategies might be available to people who wield more power, and not to those who wield less power within specific contexts. Subordinates in the workplace, for instance, tend to display more strategies of negative politeness towards their superiors, such as addressing them formally (Mr. or Miss/Mrs. X). Similar strategies may also be applied when dealing with strangers. While positive politeness may be displayed towards those who are familiar or perceived to hold less power in the interaction or relationship. For instance, the boss, in some workplaces, is more likely to refer to their employees using their first names to display friendliness (positive politeness). Negative politeness according to the authors is "at the heart of respect behaviour, just as positive politeness is the kernel of 'familiar' and 'joking' behaviour" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 129). In other words, negative politeness is usually at play when conventional politeness is used, while positive politeness is usually at play when one is being pleasant or friendly. Therefore, in analysing the type of politeness strategies at work within conversation, we can get a sense of the type of relationship that exists between the participants.

Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) framework has been useful in helping me understand some of the dynamics between the participants in my data (as I shall show in chapters 5-7). However, Brown and Levinson (1987) tend to view issues around power and distance, solidarity and intimacy between interlocutors as fixed and given. The guiding assumptions in Brown and Levinson's (1987) work, in their effort to put forth a universal account of politeness, are based on what they call the *Model Person* (MP) who is perceived to always be rational in their ability to identify the means that would lead to certain interpersonal goals. This makes it so that the theory does not and perhaps cannot account for the role of emotion and the idiosyncrasies of different interactional contexts (Locher and Watts, 2005; Lakoff & Ide, 2005; Tannen, 2021). In the current study, for instance, the participants' style of speaking to each other did not always fit the predictions and generalisations made by Brown and Levinson (1987) (even though their framework provides a useful and well known vocabulary). Their use of power differentials and distance/solidarity to explain the reasons behind the use of different kinds of politeness strategies thus needs to be further complicated if the theory is to be productively put to work in different contexts.

I follow scholars who have used face and politeness theory from a social constructionist, rather than an essentialist point of view (Watts: 2003; Watts & Locher, 2005; Holmes, 2003). These scholars have shown that politeness strategies and what may be considered FTAs are actively negotiated and defined *in*, rather than prior to interaction. Being or staying in face is co-constructed in interaction and the strategies used to maintain face or save face only become intuitive to interactants as they engage in different discourse practices over time. Watts (2003) contends that certain situations and/relationships neutralise what may be perceived as face-threatening behaviour, especially in interactions between people with close relationships, such as family members, close friends and spouses (see also Locher & Watts, 2005). Instead of the idea that people in interaction orient their actions towards a perceived public image, a discursive perspective shows how people tend to orient themselves towards other aspects of their relationship they value more than face, such as affection and sustained contact.

Watts' (2003) idea that within close relationships, the focus of interactions shifts from face work towards preserving what the interlocutors believe to be the fabric of their relationship, or the glue that makes them stick together, has been a productive way to complicate Brown and Levinson's (1978) claims. Watts (2003) refers to this tendency to shift from individualistic notions of face to

the shared interpersonal space as the *politic behaviour*. Watts (2003: 135) defines politic behaviour as "socio-culturally determined behaviour directed towards the goal of establishing and/or maintaining in a state of equilibrium the personal relationships between the individuals of a social group, whether open or closed, during the ongoing process of interaction". The notion of *equilibrium* in Watts' (2003) theorising is not fixed or given and can only be defined in terms of the specific relationship/interaction under analysis. For my specific study, using Watts' (2003) conceptualisation together with Goffman (1967, 1974) and Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) theory works well in creating a complex vocabulary through which the dynamics of the interactions, which shape the interpersonal relationships between the participants may be analysed. In other words, these approaches combined allow me to analyse the relational and discourse strategies through which members of this specific community of practice are able to find the points of equilibrium at which their relationship works.

This study looks specifically at the conversational storytelling and playfulness practices found in the conversational data. In the sections above, I have discussed approaches to the study of discourse and conversation in general, while sections 2.4.1. and 2.4.2. looked specifically at conversational storytelling. However, I have not looked at work that looks specifically at conversational play. Although conversational play forms part of conversation and will be analysed using a combination of the approaches highlighted above (mainly politeness theory, interactional sociolinguistics and conversation analysis), it is necessary to look into research that has focused specifically on different aspects of conversational play and humour. I will devote the last part of this chapter to this discussion.

2.7. Conversational play/humour

Humour has been the focus of research in various disciplines and contexts. Conversation analysts, psychologists and sociolinguists have sought to understand the nature of humour in the home (Norrick, 1993, 2003, 2004; Gibbs, 2000; Hay, 2000; Everts, 2003), in classrooms (Kehily and Nayak, 1997; C. Davies, 2003), and in the workplace (Holmes, 2000; Holmes et al., 2001; Holmes and Marra, 2002; Mullaney, 2003). There is no one agreed upon definition of what constitutes humour, especially within conversational contexts. The more popular definitions of humour focus mainly on the act of telling formulaic or *canned jokes*, sarcasm, and irony (see, for example, Chiaro, 1996; Attardo, 2017; Norrick, 1993; Gibbs, 2000). A *joke* may be defined as "a very specific speech

act, that is, a short formulaic utterance, ending with a punch line, which produces (or is meant to produce) laughter" (Coates, 2007: 30). The telling of these kinds of jokes is rarely found in casual conversation. This is because they tend to disrupt the flow of conversation, since they are hardly related to ongoing conversation. Joke telling rounds (similar to the notion of story rounds) or *joke-capping sessions* are even more uncommon. These claims are supported by my data as in the hours of conversations recorded, there was no telling of formulaic jokes as the ones defined here.

Definitions of what is referred to as *language play/humour* (as opposed to *jokes*) have highlighted its *ludic functions*. That is language that is mainly used for entertainment rather than for transferring information and other transactional uses of language (Tarone, 2000). Peck (1977) defines language play as an activity that is socially constructed, non-literal, inherently entertaining and rule oriented. Tannen (2005: 187) contends that "brand of humour is one of the most highly individualistic aspects of a person's [conversational] style". Tannen (2005) echoes Cook's (2000) argument that play is one of the significant modes of language use in adults. Cook (2000) claims that play allows adults to use language in authentic ways that are neither practical nor purposeful.

> Many conversations between friends and intimates contain little information and may be regarded as instances of play and banter. These discourses are not used to solve a practical problem. They are not 'task based'. They are language for enjoyment, for the self, for its own sake. And they are often fantasies -- not about the real world, but about a fictional one in which there are no practical outcomes (Cook, 1997: 230).

Cook (1997) further identifies two types of language play: playing at the *formal* and *semantic* level. Playing with language form involves the use of strategies such as playing with the sounds of the language "to create patterns of rhyme, rhythm, assonance, consonance, alliteration, etc., and play with grammatical structures to create parallelisms and patterns" (228). At the semantic level, units of meaning are the object of play which are combined in ways that create fictional worlds (e.g. irony, "double voicing' (Bakhtin, 1981) and parody). Children tend to play at the formal level, but as they mature into adults and gain mastery of language, language play takes on the more sophisticated forms of semantic play.

Furthermore, there are two influential frameworks that attempt to explicate the presence of language play in the speech of children and adults. The first and more recent framework comes from the work of Larsen-Freeman (1997) who proposes that language is a fluid and nonlinear system which retains

some levels of stability even though it contains a wide range of elements that are interrelated and unpredictable. Tarone (2000) suggests that during language use individuals explore this unpredictability inherent to language systems for spontaneous and creative language play. The second framework was formulated earlier in Bakhtin's (1981) work. Bakhtin (1981) highlighted the tension between conventional or normalised language use and individual creativity (centripetal and centrifugal forces). He argued that this tension was the force behind innovation and diversity at all levels of language, although his focus was more on creativity at the semantic and discourse level of adult language use (Tarone, 2000). Both Bakhtin (1981) and Larsen-Freeman (1997) argue that this unpredictability and creativity that usually result in counter-normative language use did not receive much research attention in linguistic research because of the tendency to idealise language as a homogenous and abstract phenomenon. For Bakhtin (1981), the availability of multiple genres, registers and language varieties are crucial for the realisation of semantic language play. He states that

> It is after all, precisely in the light of another potential language or style that a given straightforward style is parodied, travestied, ridiculed. The creating consciousness stands, as it were, on the boundary line between languages and styles [...] Only polyglossia fully frees consciousness from the tyranny of its own language and its own myth of language. Parodic-travestying forms flourish under these conditions. (Bakhtin 1981:60 - 61)

The study of language in use has developed significantly since the time of Bakhtin's writing. While there are still perspectives of linguistic theory that continue to foreground idealised notions of homogenous language competence (Chomsky), or langue (Saussure), the development of sociolinguistics and discourse theories allow for the appreciation of diversity and creativity in language performance (Chomsky) or parole (Saussure). Such exploration of language play should enable us to understand more about the role of play in the fluid and complex systems of language in use (Tarone 2000).

The concept of *framing* highlighted in the previous sections is important for the realisation of conversational play. Coates (2007) argues that conversational discourse tends to be framed as 'serious' or as 'play' through the use of various contextual cues. This means that depending on how talk is framed, any utterance has the potential to be humorous. This highlights what Bakhtin (1981) anticipated in relation to the multiple forms that language play may take outside of those he studied such as irony, double-voicing and parody. Studies have shown that speakers rely on a host of

linguistic and paralinguistic features to signal that their utterances are coming from or pointing to a play frame (Tarone, 2000; Cook, 2000). Tone of voice, changes in pitch, pace or rhythm and the use of what is referred to as the "smiley voice" are all examples of strategies that may be used to signal playfulness (Holmes & Hay, 1997). The co-participants then choose whether or not to maintain this frame that has been signalled for the realisation of playful interaction.

Studies on conversational play have thus been interested in the audience response to their coparticipant's utterances as the intention of the speaker is not always observable in the data. Some of the audience responses that have been studied are agreement, mirroring and parity, although the main response has been laughter (Jefferson, 2004, 1987; Holmes & Hay, 1997). Research on laughter has however shown that laughter is not always an indicator of humour or joking as laughter plays a variety of roles in conversational discourse. For example, laughter may be used to diffuse a tense or awkward moment in conversation, or it may be used to indicate nervousness in serious conversation (Coates, 2007). When a play frame is signalled, the co-participants' responses tend to fall on a spectrum between fully engaging with and thus maintaining the play frame or reverting back to serious conversation (Drew, 1987). In between these two extremes, the participants may provide a part playful and part serious response to the playframe being signalled, especially when the playful activity in question is teasing, as we shall see in Chapter 6 of this study. Kotthoff (2003), who compared ironic humour in TV and real life conversations between friends, showed that in TV conversations the participants returned to serious conversation, while in conversation among real life friends, the play frame tends to be maintained.

In addition, playfulness in conversation has been shown to manifest differently in different sociocultural contexts and to play several roles within social interactions. Waring (2012: 192), who looks at the relationship between play and language learning, found that language play in the classroom context can "lower affective filters, stretch one's sociolinguistic competence and destabilise language systems" (see also Tarone, 2000; Cook, 2000). The Hungarian-American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2008), who introduced the concept of 'flow' in psychology, views play as an activity that allows us to "feel as though we are more than we actually are through fantasy, pretence, and disguise… stretch[ing] the limits of [our] ordinary experience, so that [we] become, temporarily, someone different" (2008: 73-74). Furthermore, Waring (2012) explores the strategic mobilisation of identity and discourse strategies for the successful realisation of conversational play in the second language classrooms he studied. He argues that through ascribing, displaying or invoking situational, relational, and personal identities (e.g. student playing teacher)

individuals may enter an alternative universe unfettered by the rules of social conventions or at least, a universe in which the rules are loosely applied and exploited in unexpected ways.

Research of conversational practices in the workplace has shown that play occurs at work, and in other formal contexts. What this reveals is that play can happen anywhere between competent users of language, who are knowledgeable of what is appropriate within a given space and how to switch from serious to playful discourse in order to fulfil various conversational goals. In formal contexts, play may be used as a means to diffuse tension, nervousness or awkward situations. It can provide relief from tedious and/or boring work related conversations or tasks (see Holmes, 2000; Holmes et al., 2001; Mullaney, 2003). However, the literature reveals that playful interactions tend to happen less frequently in formal contexts when compared to informal conversations between friends. Friends who know each other well may repeatedly switch between their serious and non-serious frames and interlocutors collaborate with each other to realise these switches.

In some contexts, speakers may use conversational humour as a strategy for indirectness (C. Davies, 2003; Tsakona and Chovanec, 2018; Kotthoff, 2003). As highlighted above (section 2.6) indirectness can create room for misinterpretation of the speaker's intentions. However, when humour, used as a strategy for indirectness, is successful, it can have similar payoffs as using other forms of indirect speech in terms of building rapport and creating room for decommitment if the attempt at humour is not well received (Tannen, 1986; Tsakona and Chovanec, 2018). The successful accomplishment of sending and receiving messages that are only implied and not explicitly stated is satisfying and it is aesthetically pleasing. In the context of Tannen's (1986, 2005) work, having the same sense of humour is one of the bases of interpersonal relationships as it reinforces the sense one has of being understood. The more obscure and stylized meanings are correctly interpreted, the more the conversation seems interesting and the sense of being in *flow* or in sync with our interlocutors is heightened. However, if the joke is not well received or if it is misunderstood, one can always say "I was just joking" and minimise the damage to the relationship/interaction and the loss of face.

In this study, I will be looking at conversational humour in the participants' private and online (public) conversations. The most popular type of humour in the data took the form of teasing, but other types of humorous interactions such as the telling of funny stories, bantering, as well as instances where certain utterances made in the course of conversation would be creatively exploited for humorous purposes by the participants in subsequent conversations. I will refer to these types of

humorous interactions collectively as *conversational humour* or *conversational play* highlighting the interactional contexts in which they emerge. The research on conversational play revolves around the individual aspects of play and the entertainment value that play has for interlocutors. This study will be looking at the interactional accomplishment of play. I also explore the functions of play beyond its high entertainment value to how it works to build solidarity and foster intimacy.

2.8. Chapter summary

In this chapter, the main frameworks guiding the analysis of data in this study are introduced. These including: the community of practice approach, narrative analysis, interactional sociolinguistics and politeness theory. For ease of understanding, I have discussed these approaches separately, however, these perspectives overlap in different ways. One of the things all these approaches have in common is their interest in the subjective reality of everyday life and they are useful for understanding how interpersonal relationships are maintained in and through discourse practices. I return to my discussion of friendship in Chapter 4. In the following chapter, I outline the research approach and the data collection methods adopted for this project.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

"you know we can just - iron sharpens iron - sharpen each other"

3.1. Introduction

The study is based on the following theoretical positions: a) personal relationships form around the opposing needs for independence and involvement, b) these tensions are realised and managed in and through the discourse/conversations, relational and social practices through which we organise everyday life, c) interactions and the practices and relations that emerge because of them are embedded within larger socio-cultural contexts which they shape and are shaped by. In this chapter, I discuss the methodological and analytical implications of these assumptions grounded in the relevant theories as discussed in Chapter 2.

The data for this project were initially going to be collected in 2020 from three participants: Ajoh (myself), Bella and Quinta. The data were going to consist of transcripts of the video conversations uploaded on our YouTube channel, transcripts of audio recordings of our naturally occurring conversation from offline planning meetings, the episode briefs (written summary of what the topic and objectives of an upcoming episode) and posts on our social media platforms which referred directly to specific videos on the Girl Chat YouTube page. However, due to the COVID 19 pandemic and the ensuing national lockdown, creating new content was indefinitely suspended for Girl Chat and the amount of time we spent together was drastically affected. This meant that I did not have a source of new naturally occurring offline conversation, or new online video content. Fortunately, the participants for the initial study were also part of my masters (MA) research project in which I recorded naturally occurring conversations between five participants in 2017. The focus of my MA was on the narrative construction of identity. Since I did not use most of the data that was recorded, I was given ethical clearance to use the same data set for my PhD research project.

In this chapter I discuss the methodological and analytical decisions taken in the 2017 project and how those decisions affect how I am able to use the data for this current project. I first explain why a qualitative approach was preferred, then I introduce my participants and discuss the data collection, organisation and analysis procedures as well as the ethical concerns of the study. I highlight the areas in which this project departs from the 2017 MA study in the discussion.

3.2. Qualitative versus quantitative research design

Qualitative methods were developed in the social sciences as means to gain in-depth understanding of social and cultural phenomena (Johnstone, 2001; Attride-Stirling, 2001; Sanghera, 2003). While quantitative research methods aim to gain insight through analysis of statistics and numbers, qualitative approaches seek to understand why things are as they are (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). That is, they seek to study phenomena in their natural settings, and to explore the meanings that people attach to these phenomena. Although qualitative data collected from interviews or naturally occurring talk, for instance, may be difficult to quantify, their value lies in their capacity to uncover nuanced perspectives and attitudes determining participants' behaviours in ways that a questionnaire with pre-determined answers may be unable to.

In quantitative research the aim is often to reach generalizable conclusions. The capacity to study larger data samples due to the limited questions and pre-set answer categories makes it possible to reach these conclusions. In qualitative research, on the other hand, the aim is not to uncover a generalizable truth. Qualitative researchers are concerned with the in-depth understanding of phenomena from the perspective of those participating in its construction (Bucholtz, 2005; Sanghera, 2003). They aim to uncover the ways in which individuals understand their reality and the meaning making processes determining this understanding. Qualitative research requires a closeness between researchers and their participants that a questionnaire or other quantitative methods of data collection do not afford.

In addition, the tools of data collection prescribed within qualitative approaches, such as video and audio recordings of naturally occurring talk and one on one interviews, were the most suitable for achieving the objectives of this study. These qualitative tools provided the opportunity to access the participants' interactional activities in their natural context and witness how they relate with one another in real time. The long standing debate about whether qualitative or quantitative methods are better for understanding human experiences cannot be fully presented here. However, the capacity to gain in-depth knowledge of naturally occurring social phenomena, as explained above, is the main reason why I utilise the tenets of qualitative research in making research design and methodological decisions for this study.

3.3. Research Participants

As highlighted earlier, this data was collected as part of my MA research project (ethical clearance number HS17/3/17). There were five (5) participants in that study and they will now form the participants for the current PhD study (ethical clearance number HS20/3/16). The participants were Bella, Thandi, Quinta, Zinhle and I (referred to as Ajoh/Chiara in the transcripts). I had approached the four participants in 2017 and asked them if I could record our conversations as we spent most of our time together. They agreed to have me record our conversations if at least three of us were together at any time. Bella, Thandi and I lived together in a room that initially belonged to Bella. Zinhle's accommodation was a ten minute walking distance from where we stayed and so she usually stopped by on her way home from work. Bella, Thandi, Quinta and I created a YouTube channel called Girl Chat. We created most of the content for the platform at Quinta's apartment which was bigger and had better lighting for our video creating projects. Therefore, the conversations were recorded at the room the three of us shared (which will be referred to as Bella's room henceforth) and at Quinta's apartment.

The fact that I was a part of the research participants has some consequences for the overall project. Having close relationships with all the participants facilitated their willingness to take part in the study then, and also facilitated the process of gaining their consent to use the 2017 data in the current study. The fact that I was a member of the group may have helped my research process, especially the recording of their private offline conversations. I existed in these spaces as a participant and a part of the group, with my role as the researcher mainly coming into play after the recording process was over. When recording was in process, I was not taking notes or trying to direct the conversation in any way. Once there were three or more of us present, I would switch on the recorder if I had it with me, even if there was no active conversation going on. Because the participants were my friends and understood the importance of having enough data for my thesis, they would sometimes switch on the recorder when they found themselves in conversation, in my absence, to assist with my data collection process. Hence, the trust and rapport which are fundamental to success in qualitative research had already been established due to the nature of our relationship.

In my masters thesis I also gave myself a pseudonym and referred to myself in the third person. One comment I received was that this made it hard for the reader to remember that I was part of

my participants, and if they did remember, it was not always easy remembering which of the pseudonyms was mine. As a result, I will keep my real name as used by the other participants in the data: Ajoh (short for Ajohche) and Chiara which is the name I was given at baptism. When speaking about the data and in the analysis, I will refer to myself in the first person, so that I am always visible to the reader.

I will now provide a fuller description of each participant, and their relationship to the others, at the time of data collection, in 2017. I also describe Girl Chat and the ways in which it affects the relationship between the participants. In line with standard ethical requirements, all names of participants, characters, entities (such as Girl Chat and The Dinning) and names of projects or programs the participants organised (such as Music Night) found in the data are pseudonyms.

Bella: Bella was 27 years old in 2017 when the audio recordings of naturally occurring data were collected. She is a Cameroonian and had also been living in Cape Town for six years at the time the conversations were recorded. Bella and I had been friends since our undergraduate studies at university. We met in our first year in South Africa as first year students in our language and communications course (2011). This happened when she and another mutual friend of ours approached me in class to introduce themselves as fellow Cameroonians, but we only became friends in our second year (2012). We have remained friends ever since, and I still consider her my closest friend today. Bella dropped out of school shortly after we met in 2012 due to financial difficulties back home. She was working as a waitress for several event companies in Cape Town to make ends meet. In 2017, she started her own small staffing company where she supplied waiters and bartenders to events. She eventually went back to school in 2020 and completed her Bachelor of Arts. By 2021, her business had grown, and she now provides event planning and management services in addition to supplying waiters and bartenders to some of the top events around Cape Town. Bella speaks mainly English and Cameroonian Pidgin English. She speaks and understands French mainly at the conversational level and has a fair understanding of her mother tongue, Bakweri, even though she does not speak it fluently.

I had gone on to complete my BA and became friends with Quinta and Thandi during the first year of my postgraduate studies. I introduced Bella to Thandi and Quinta during this time in 2015/2016. We eventually hosted Girl Chat together (2016-2020). Over the years, Bella has developed stronger friendship bonds with Thandi, and Quinta and she is much closer to them than I am. Bella

met Zinhle through the roommate she had before Thandi and I eventually moved in. One day Zinhle came to visit her friend while Bella, Thandi and I were there and we struck up a relationship with her that lasted long after the roommate moved out.

Thandi: Thandi is a South African originally from the Northern Cape. In 2017, she was 25 years old pursuing her masters degree in English. Like most of us, she had moved to Cape Town to pursue her university studies. She and I had met briefly in 2015 at a meeting with one of our professors. In 2016 we worked together on a data capturing project for a department at the university and we became friends. I later introduced her to Bella. We got along very well and we all had financial struggles, so we decided to live together in Bella's room (after her (Bella's) former roommate moved out) in order to reduce the cost of living. Thandi worked as a tutor in the English department and eventually started working for Bella when Bella launched her staffing company in 2017.

Thandi and Quinta were both English majors and took a few classes in undergraduate together where they became friendly. When the idea to start a YouTube Channel came up, they both agreed to join and we all worked together. Thandi eventually left Girl Chat in 2018 to pursue other interests of hers. Now she's working in the corporate world in Johannesburg while pursuing her PhD. Thandi met Zinhle at the same time as Bella and I, but of all of us, Thandi is closest to Zinhle as they have remained close even after they both moved out of Cape Town. Thandi has also maintained a close relationship with Bella over the years. She and I still speak occasionally but we are not as close as we once were. The main thing that kept Thandi and Quinta together was Girl Chat, so when the channel shut down, their relationship faded. Thandi mainly speaks English when in Cape Town and when interacting with her Girl Chat hosts although she's fluent in her home language, Afrikaans, with a limited understanding of isiXhosa and isiZulu.

Quinta: Quinta is a Nigerian who moved to Cape Town in 2011 to begin her university studies. She was 27 years old at the time of data collection in 2017. She and I were pursuing our master's degrees in the same department at the time. She was also tutoring in multiple institutions around Cape Town to meet her financial needs. We were both foreign students from West Africa taking the same classes. We shared similar struggles as foreign students, we both spoke a variety of pidgin English and shared similar taste in food. We both agree that these were some of the reasons why we became friends. Thandi met Quinta before I did as they shared courses in their undergraduate

studies. Thandi recalls in the one-on-one interviews that Quinta had actively tried to be her friend by checking on her regularly through phone calls and inviting her to spend time together. Although the friendship did not materialise then, being co-hosts on Girl Chat created opportunities for them to interact with each other regularly. They eventually lost touch again after the channel shut down. Quinta and Bella met when I took Bella to visit Quinta at her house. At first they did not get along, but after working together on Girl Chat, they formed a close friendship which they both value and nurture till today. Zinhle and Quinta only met occasionally when Zinhle helped with make-up during Girl Chat photoshoots. They did not report having any contact with each other since Girl Chat stopped creating content. Quinta is now working in Canada while completing the PhD she had started while she was still in South Africa. She speaks mainly English with the other participants, but also speaks Pidgin English and Ibiobio, her mother tongue, fluently.

Zinhle: Zinhle was 25 years old at the time. She is South African, originally from the Eastern Cape. At the time she was working as a sales assistant at an art shop. As mentioned earlier, Bella once shared her room with a different girl (not included in this study) who was a close friend to Zinhle. Zinhle met the three of us (Thandi, Bella and I) when she visited her friend who was Bella's former roommate. We ended up maintaining the relationship after her friend moved out. Zinhle lived a walking distance away from Bella's room, so she stopped by regularly on her way home from work and on weekends. Zinhle is also a talented artist, and so she participated in some of our Girl Chat events, such as our music and poetry events. She also helped us with body art and styling when we had photoshoots for Girl Chat. She remains close to Thandi, while she and I speak occasionally. Her relationship with Bella and Quinta faded after we stopped creating content for Girl Chat and after she also moved to the Eastern Cape. Her first language is isiXhosa, however she mainly speaks English with the other participants who do not speak isiXhosa.

Ajoh: I came to Cape Town in 2011 when I registered for my first year in a Bachelor of Arts program in Cape Town. As mentioned, this is the year I met Bella. We started living together from 2012 when we realised we were spending too much time together while paying rent for two separate accommodations. We worked together at an events company throughout our undergraduate studies to assist our parents with life expenses. I took a gap year from school after I completed my BA degree in 2013, but I did not get a job as I had hoped. Bella had already dropped out of school at this point so in 2014, she and I started an informal eatery in our apartment. We cooked Cameroonian food for the Cameroonian population on our side of town. This helped

to keep the lights on and food on our table. In 2015, I went back to school, moved out of the flat I shared with Bella and moved in with another friend who was closer to campus. I took a job as a tutor in the department. This is when I met Quinta and we became friends as highlighted above. I also met Thandi during my postgraduate studies. Eventually I introduced both of them to Bella and met Zinhle through Bella.

When the idea for the YouTube channel came, Bella and I reached out to Thandi and Quinta who both agreed to join. This was also around the time Bella started her event company, so I worked with her as a waitress, while tutoring and completing my masters. Eventually I could not juggle the responsibilities on campus, Girl Chat and Bella's company. I had to stop working for Bella to focus on school and Girl Chat. I have maintained a close relationship with Bella and Quinta although the nature of both relationships is quite different. I talk with Thandi and Zinhle occasionally, I still consider them to be good friends of mine. I speak English and pidgin English. I understand French and I can speak it at a conversational level. I also understand Nweh, my mother tongue, but I can only construct simple sentences.

Girl Chat: Because Girl Chat played a defining role in the nature of the relationship between the participants and the videos we recorded and uploaded form part of the data of this current study, it is important to elaborate on what the platform was about**.** Girl Chat was an online platform consisting mainly of a YouTube Channel, but it also had an Instagram, Facebook and Twitter page to support and promote the YouTube Channel. Bella and I first came up with the concept of a book club to share some of the things we were learning about our lives as African women living within a patriarchal and highly racialised society. But when we invited Thandi and Quinta to join, we realised that the book club would not be the best way to go about it. It would have involved the additional cost of buying books regularly which at the time we could not always afford. Our audience may not be familiar with the books, and because we all worked and studied, we did not think we would always have time to read the books before filming, editing and uploading. And so, we decided to have weekly conversations around topics that we felt were relevant for us as black African women from our own lived experiences. Our goal with Girl Chat was to "change the narrative of the African woman through generative dialogue". Eventually this was rephrased to "changing the narrative of the African woman through real, informative and entertaining conversation". Our topics ranged from issues of culture such as lobola/bride price practice, the

implications of taking a man's surname at marriage, sex, social media, parenting, relationship advice and feminism among others.

The work we did on this channel required regular interaction between the members. We would meet weekly to decide on the topics for the upcoming episodes. In these meetings, we would regularly revisit the direction of the channel and reflect on the growth (or lack thereof) of the channel as a whole. Once we had made these decisions, we would meet on Sundays, as it was the day we were all relatively free, to film the conversations to be uploaded the following week. Girl Chat produced weekly filmed conversations that were uploaded on YouTube. We also created other visual content for our other social media platforms, such as photos and captions depicting ourselves as strong and liberated African women. Music Night was one of Girl Chat's offline events that provided opportunities for aspiring musicians and poets to showcase their work (Zinhle, who writes poetry, participated in some of these nights and also helped with setting up the events). We once organised an offline event in which we got entrepreneurs and professionals to come and talk to other aspiring young people about what it takes to be successful. Although these offline events were successful and had potential to grow, they were quite expensive and so we were unable to continue with either of them. There were other activities related to the channel, such as attending offline women empowerment events and seminars hosted by different individuals and groups. See appendix 4 for some of the documents that were produced to guide the work on Girl Chat towards achieving our goals.

The background provided for each participant, our relationship with each other and Girl Chat is necessary context for understanding the nature of the conversations collected. The activities that brought us together, the ventures we took on together, our financial situations and our dreams and ambitions shaped the types of conversations we had.

As stated previously, the goal of qualitative research such as this one is not to find generalizable truths but to deepen our understanding of the research area. Hence there are no rules guiding how many participants are acceptable within qualitative research. In fact, researchers within the qualitative framework argue that having too many participants may lead to superficial analysis instead of the depth and richness that qualitative research can contribute to our understanding of social phenomena.

3.4. The research site

The site of a study refers to the social environment or space in which data is collected. Space is not limited to the physical context and it is neither static nor uniform (Bucholtz & Hall, 2008). Rather, space is heterogeneous and it shapes and is shaped by choices individuals make within it. As a result, sites provide a context from which to explore not just the present interaction, but also the worlds created by participants in their conversations and the larger social contexts invoked by these interactions.

The data for this study was collected in Bella's room and in Quinta's apartment. These were usually conversations that took place during the participants' free time at home when we were not on campus or at work, as well as conversations we had in relation to content creation for Girl Chat. The videos for the channel were filmed at Quinta's place once a week and so Quinta's apartment needed to be converted from her living space into a makeshift studio on shoot days. We had extra lighting when needed, a camera and tripod set up opposite the table and the four chairs from which we discussed the topic of the day (see figure 3.1, 3.2. and appendix 2 for images of the set). The participants used the first part of the filming day to do our makeup and dress up for the video. When we were ready to shoot, we would pour ourselves some wine and begin filming. In this sense, the setting for the private and Girl Chat (public) conversations were approached differently, while the site of the casual (private) conversations needed no 'dressing up' as the conversations just happened, the setting of the video conversations was intentionally designed.

Although the Girl Chat conversations were not scripted, the topic and the general direction of the conversation were usually agreed upon before the shoot. Therefore, the different reasons that brought us together shaped the nature of the activities and the conversations produced as a result. If we were meeting for a photoshoot or video shoot, then most of the conversation would mainly revolve around that activity and other Girl Chat business. If we were just hanging out on the other hand, the conversations could be about anything that became relevant to the participant, including talk related to Girl Chat. This would be the case even if both types of meetings were happening in the same physical space. Hence, the idea of space goes beyond the physical place to include the activities and interactions that take place there.

Figure 3.1. Girl Chat 2017 - Bella, Thandi, Ajoh and Quinta

Figure 3.2. Girl Chat 2019 - Quinta, Bella, Ajoh. Thandi was now in Johannesburg.

3.5. Data collection

The data consist of transcripts of audio recorded conversations from our offline/private conversations, transcripts of video conversations from Girl Chat and playback semi structured interviews between each participant and I. The private conversations can further be divided into conversations that were had outside of any Girl Chat activity, conversations that they had before and after filming for Girl Chat, and conversations held during Girl Chat meetings. For the MA, I only looked at their stories in the private conversations held outside Girl Chat activities. I have, therefore, a large and rich set of data I had not analysed in my MA research project which I have now analysed using a more complex theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2. Below I look at each data type and how they will be used to make sense of the relationship between the participants.

Recording of audio conversation: I collected audio recordings of naturally occurring talk. Words, once spoken, are also gone, unless captured through a medium that gives them a more durable quality such as audio and video recording. Even the most detailed field notes cannot capture the details of a conversation as human senses and speed are not capable of noticing all aspects of a moment as it happens in real time (Cameron, 2001). Audio recording is one way to capture conversation as it occurs, with the only other tool being video recording (De Fina, 2006; Tannen, 2007).

Although video recording has similar affordances (if not more) than audio recording, I decided not to use video recordings for the private conversations. Video cameras are harder to ignore than audio recorders because they are usually larger in size. The audio recorder I used was very small and easily disappeared among the other things that were usually placed on the table. Video recorders often need to stand on a tripod which further draws attention. In addition, it would have required more than one camera to capture the room from different angles to ensure that participants were always visible on film. Bella's room was already quite a small space and fitting two cameras in there may have created an inconvenience for the participants and may have negatively impacted the conversations or quality of data. In addition, long hours of naturally occurring conversation need to be recorded to increase the chances of finding enough of any phenomena for study purposes. Hence, my limited storage capacity also facilitated the decision to use an audio recorder. Video files are too heavy, and I did not have enough storage capacity for a large amount of video

files. The audio recorder made it possible to record extended stretches of conversation which could not be possible with video recordings.

I started collecting data in March 2017 and continued on and off till August 2017. A total of fifteen different recordings ranging from twelve minutes to five hours and 49 minutes in length were collected. Due to the nature of the participants' individual schedules, it was difficult to predict when we would be together at the same time. Sometimes conversations happened when the recorder was not available, and sometimes when it was available, there would be long stretches of silence among the participants. It was thus necessary to switch on the recorder and let it run in case conversation started. I was interested in the use of stories to negotiate identity in the MA project. Thus, over 40 hours of conversation were recorded as this was the only way to guarantee the presence of enough stories in the data on which to base any valuable arguments.

The strategy of recording long hours of interaction over time paid off as the bits of data analysed for my MA came from only five of the recordings. The rest of the data were going to be used for this project. Unfortunately, at the beginning of 2022, thieves broke into my apartment and stole my laptop and the hard drive on which my data had been backed up. Only two of the audio recordings had been uploaded to my Google cloud. The first recording (R1) is four hours and 49 minutes long. It was recorded in Bella's room and consists of a stream of conversations that took place during the course of the evening as the participants relaxed at home. All participants except Quinta were present during this recording. The second audio recording (R2) was three hours and twelve minutes long. It was recorded in Quinta's house on one of Girl Chat's shoot days. Two conversations were filmed for Girl Chat that day. Thus, R2 contains both private conversations and audio versions of conversations that were being filmed for Girl Chat. Although I have rough transcripts of some parts of all the 15 tapes, I only have complete transcripts of these two surviving tapes. These two recordings thus formed the main source of data presented in the final write up of this dissertation as I could check the final transcriptions against the audio recordings. However, the rest of my transcripts and the analysis from my MA have been useful in making sense of the nature of the interaction between the participants in their private lives. The transcript of the R1 and R2 are 192 pages in length while the transcripts of bits of conversation from the remaining 13 recordings are 105 pages long. Although I no longer have all the recorded conversations, I still had enough to work with from a qualitative, specifically discourse analysis framework.

YouTube (public) conversations: The original plan for data collection before the pandemic had been to record new private conversations between the participants (especially conversations before and after filming videos and their planning meetings) and analyse them in relation to their YouTube videos that resulted from these private conversations. But as I have mentioned this was no longer possible after the government announced lockdown regulations for the country. Seeing as I still had the private conversations from March to August 2017, I tried to find videos uploaded to YouTube within that same time frame. Due to the fact that there was no intention to use the online videos for research purposes at the time, most of the videos within the time frame of March to August 2017 were unfortunately deleted from the site. We had felt that they no longer represented how we wanted to be seen, mainly in terms of our picture quality and set design. Fortunately, R2 captured the filming of two episodes for Girl Chat, and I found three videos that were still online uploaded in August. Therefore, there were five Girl Chat conversations used in this study, two of them captured on the audio recordings, and three in video format. The conversations are about ten to fifteen minutes each.

Given that the focus of my study had changed from looking at how pieces of discourse moved from the private to the public space, to looking at the interactional processes through which we sustained our relationships, it was no longer crucial to match the videos to the exact time frame of the private conversations or to have actual video recordings. What I found useful was mainly looking at the extent to which patterns of storytelling and play in private conversations changed or stayed the same in conversations designed for a public audience. I was interested in the way the practices of storytelling and play were exploited in the management of similar situations (e.g. in discussing taboo subjects or sharing sensitive information). In other words, I was interested in the ways in which our practices of conversational storytelling and playfulness changed or remained the same when our relationship as friends was foregrounded (private conversations) over our relationship as co-hosts on a public platform and vice versa. Of course, there is no clear boundary between both levels of our relationships as they both feed each other, but as I shall show in chapters 5-7, the dominant role had significant effects on how the discourse practices of storytelling and play were instrumentalised by the participants. The analysis of the public conversations in relation to the private conversations helped me get deeper insight into the relational work our discourse practices allowed us to do.

Playback interviews

These were semi structured conversations held with each participant. The goal of the interview was to fulfil the terms of my ethical clearance which required that I show the extracts that I would be analysing to the participants so as to get their consent. Instead of sending them the transcribed extracts, I figured that playing the actual recordings and capturing the participants' reactions to their 2017 selves could be useful for my final analysis. In addition to reflecting on the audio recordings, I also used the opportunity to get a sense of how the participants viewed friendships in general and their relationships with each other. Furthermore, I explored the evolution of these relationships in terms of how our different life trajectories and the COVID 19 pandemic have affected us. The interviews with Quinta and Bella were held in person at my apartment in 2021, before Quinta moved to Canada, while the interview with Zinhle and Thandi took place via Zoom as they no longer live in Cape Town. The conversations ranged from thirty minutes to sixty minutes each and they were recorded via Zoom and on my smartphone. Apart from the participants' views on their discourse practices in the 2017 recordings, the 2021 reflections provided rich insight into the relational dynamics between the participants then and now (some of which I was not privy to, even as a member of the group). This helped to complicate my view of the relationships between the participants. My commentary and analysis of the playback interviews form the basis for Chapter 4 in which I reflect on issues related to defining and situating friendships in context.

3.6. Working with recorded conversation

The offline conversations and stories are spontaneous and there was no influence from me as a researcher to direct the conversation towards a particular goal. Although the online conversations were planned, they were not scripted. The participants agreed on the topic to be discussed as well as what we hoped would be the lesson or the goal of the episode for example: women should be free to choose whether or not they want to have children. We would also agree on an opening question that would jump start the conversation, such as “how do you feel about having children?” and from there, the conversation would flow naturally in whichever direction with no influence from me as a researcher.

There are, however, still some issues when recording naturally occurring conversation and getting informed consent. Some critics have argued that once participants become aware of the tape recorder and of our research intentions, the conversation may no longer be ‘natural’. However

sociolinguists have countered this position by stating that depending on the number of people in the interaction, and the duration of the recording, participants tend to forget about the recorder and focus on the conversations or activities they are engaged in (Tannen, 2005; Blom and Gumperz, 1972; Labov, 1972a). This happened in my study, where the recorder would disappear into the background as the conversation swirled around the participants' activities. Sometimes it was only when I finally remembered to turn the recorder off that the participants expressed surprise at the fact that the recorder had been on that whole time. After each recording session, whether I was present or not, I would ask the other participants if they were still comfortable with me using the recordings of our conversations for my thesis. In the playback interviews, I played back the parts of the conversation that I wanted to include in the final write up so that the participants could confirm once more if I could use those specific extracts for the final write up of the project.

Regardless of the fact that I ensured that consent was given at multiple stages of the research process, analysing conversations that would have otherwise gone unanalysed creates opportunities for warping how these interactions are perceived as much as they shed light on the specific phenomena under enquiry. In addition, during the playback interviews conducted in 2021 (which fortunately I had recorded on Zoom and saved to my google drive) participants had to face a version of themselves they may no longer be aware of. Although the participants mostly found the transcripts amusing, without those recordings, they may never have been confronted with these memories. As Tannen (2005a: 45) aptly puts it,

> Everyone has had the experience of wincing on seeing themselves captured in a photograph; one's nose looks too long, one's cheeks look hollow, one has been trapped in a grimace. It is not that the expression reported by the camera is not true (the camera can only reflect what entered its lens), but the capturing for all time what was a fleeting moment within a stream of behaviour necessarily falsifies the nature of the expression.

Unfortunately, it is impossible for us to do our work as discourse analysts without recording and scrutinising texts that were not designed for our research purposes. What is non-negotiable is for the analyst to be reflexive about the fact that our analyses reflect only certain aspects of the data, fragments of the full picture and only one possible rendering, where there could be a variety of equally plausible interpretations. Tannen (1986, 2005a) states that once a conversation is recorded, it takes on a different quality from the conversation that actually took place. The utterances lose

their fleeting quality and take on a more durable form that can be revisited as needed, the nonverbal aspects of the conversation (e.g. body language, facial expressions, gaze) may be lost. Again, this makes the recorded conversation a distorted or at least, an incomplete version of the conversation that actually occurred.

Apart from this distortion that happens due to the recorder's inability to capture every aspect of the recorded conversations, there are also external noises that affect the quality of the recording. In my data for example, the volume of the TV was sometimes so loud that it made it impossible for me to hear what the participants were saying. Sometimes the participants were engaging in parallel conversations at the same time where the speech of the different participants overlapped in ways that made it impossible to hear everything that was said. The recorder was sometimes closer to some speakers than others. The voices of those who were farther away were not as audible as those that were closer. If someone whispered their utterance, it was not always clear in the recording what they had said. If one of the participants were to step outside or go to another room in Quinta's apartment where there was space for that, the recorder could not always be displaced with the moving person.

Despite all the issues that come with working with recorded conversations, they are still a viable research tool. As highlighted earlier, there are few tools available to help us capture and preserve conversation. Our work would not be possible without the use of video and audio recordings. Even though certain aspects of the 'real' conversations may be lost forever, what is lost usually serves to reinforce what we can perceive from the words, intonation, volume and the vocal reactions of interlocutors (Tannen, 2005). Nonetheless, as the analyst, I strived to remain aware of and constantly reflect on these issues as I studied the recordings and developed arguments from them.

3.6.1. Transcription

The process of recording the data does not end at the level of the tape recording. What is recorded is again transformed into text on paper through the process of transcription. This process, like the process of recording, further distorts the conversation in its own ways. Conversation analysts resist imposing features of written discourse onto spoken discourse during transcription. They believe that no aspect of a conversation may be dismissed as irrelevant (Heritage, 1984). As a result, transcripts often look like caricature representations of the event. Critics argue that using phonetic transcriptions, or conventions that aim to capture the sounds and accents of the speech may lead

to transcripts that are almost impossible to read by an untrained person, and may read as a parody on the recorded speech with a ridiculing effect on the speakers (Hepburn and Bolden, 2013).

Other researchers, such as Ochs (1979) argue that transcription should necessarily be a selective process; transcripts should not be overloaded with information, but they should reflect the interests of the researcher. Edwards (2001) argues that transcripts should be easy to read, thus transcriptionists should make use of standard orthography as much as possible given that readers are used to information that is presented in that format. Edwards (2001) further argues that transcription should also necessarily be open-ended to allow room for fine tuning the transcripts throughout the research process as the researcher's insights develop. One thing all theorists can agree on is that every transcript is an incomplete representation of the recorded conversation. There are limited ways to accurately capture the full quality of an utterance.

The guidelines above informed the steps that were taken in the transcription process for this study. Standard orthography was used in order to make the transcripts accessible. The timing of utterances was taken into account. Thus, latching, overlaps, gaps and pauses were noted. In terms of speech delivery and intonation, stressed utterances as well as dramatic volume shifts were also represented in the transcript. See appendix 1 for the full transcription key. I captured what was helping me make sense of the interactions and revisited the audio recording multiple times in the course of analysis to fine tune the transcripts further.

3.7. Data analysis

In terms of the analysis process, I used a platform that allowed me to time stamp my transcripts as I listened to the recordings. Thus, places where there was narrative activity and playful interactions were time stamped to facilitate the process of revisiting those particular parts of the tape recording. This was the first step in my transcription and analysis process. By time stamping and writing a brief description of what I could hear happening in the interaction, I started to notice recurring themes, the types of stories and playful interactions, and so on. All stories were highlighted using the same colour and all playful interactions were highlighted as well. Once this was done for each audio and video recording, I cut out all the instances of storytelling and pasted them on one document and did the same for instances of play. This allowed me to look at the interactions as a type of text, to see how these stories and playful interactions were constructed, what aspects of the particular type of text recurred and what was different from one instance of story or play to the

next. Once I was able to group the extracts into types of stories and types of play, I then went back to the full transcripts to look at the conversations that preceded and followed each extract. Once again, labelling each transcript and text type (story or play), using time stamps and colour coding played an indispensable role as it made the process of shuffling between different documents and the recorded conversations less time consuming than it would otherwise have been. This process was repeated multiple times throughout the analysis process.

By going through this process with the theoretical framework (outlined in chapter 2) in mind, I was able to start formulating arguments about what the discourse practices of play and storytelling were doing in the interactions and how they were working at the relational level as well. The frameworks used here were the community of practice approach, narrative analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, conversation analysis and politeness theory. This cocktail of frameworks allowed me to engage with the immediate context of the conversations in the here and now and make connections between these interactions, their relationship with each other, and the larger sociocultural contexts in which they were living.

3.7.1. Auto-ethnography

In addition to the theories highlighted above, auto-ethnography was also used to make sense of the interactions between the participants. As part of the analysis methods employed in this study, I incorporated an auto-ethnographic approach, capitalising on my unique position as both a researcher and a participant within the group. Auto-ethnography, as a method, involves using personal experiences and reflections to understand and interpret cultural experiences within a particular community or group (Anderson, 2006; Snow et al., 2003; Whitinui, 2014). This approach is not merely anecdotal or self-focused but provides a basis for drawing out deeper insights by connecting personal experiences to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings.

Being a participant within the conversations allowed me to provide first-person accounts of the discourse practices and relational dynamics we observed. These personal experiences, coupled with the observations made, were used to provide an emic, or insider's, perspective on the social constructs, nuances, and dynamics at play within our group and the larger sociocultural context we were situated in.

In examining these personal experiences and narratives, I utilized the same theoretical models as those applied to the larger dataset: communities of practice, narrative analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, and politeness theory. My presence as an active participant within the group enabled me to enhance the analysis, supplementing it with my first-hand experiences and contextual comprehension, resulting in a genuine portrayal of our exchanges.

Despite its unique benefits, the adoption of an auto-ethnographic approach brought about its distinct set of ethical and methodological obstacles, particularly around the question of validity and impartiality. To uphold the research's authenticity and neutrality, I made a conscious effort to ensure that my reflections weren't overly influenced by personal bias, focusing instead on the concrete textual evidence within the data. In other words, my insights and interpretations as a group member needed to align logically with the observed and recorded data patterns. Despite its inherent hurdles, the auto-ethnographic approach contributed significantly to the study, facilitating a more robust comprehension of the group's discourse practices and the dynamics of their relationships.

3.8. Ethical concerns

The research was conducted in line with UWC's Research Ethics policy and 'Code of Conduct' for research. The following measures were put in place to ensure that no harm comes to the participants as a result of their participation in this project and to ensure that the research is done ethically. The participants' identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms to refer to all participants, as well as any named entities or characters in their conversations and stories that could make them easily identifiable. Any details in the conversations that may lead to identification or which may put the participants in any danger were also removed from the data. The conversations on Girl Chat and in their private conversations often feature their views on taboo or controversial topics (for instance, sex, lobola/bride price practice), which they may not wish to put under research scrutiny. My analysis of these conversations could make the participant feel 'exposed'. As a result, all the data, except for the parts used in the final write-up of this project are treated as confidential. Participants were shown the collection of extracts that were going to be analysed in the final write up and they were informed of their right to remove any extracts they would not want analysed.

Furthermore, it was made clear that the participants' contribution to this project was voluntary and as such, they could withdraw from the project at any point without explanation and without any negative consequences. If the participants felt distressed or triggered by the extracts they read or for any other reason related to this project, they were to be immediately referred to professional counselling with a reputable Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). The data was password protected and stored on my computer and external hard drive, accessible only to me and my supervisor, and can only be reused for further research purposes with the participants' consent. The only way to use my stolen laptop would entail formatting and therefore erasing its contents. The files on the hard drive were password protected and would have to be deleted by the thieves as it would be of no use to them. What is left of the data will be kept for a minimum period of five years on a password protected hard drive and backed up in my private home as stipulated by the university research regulations.

3.9. Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed the factors that made qualitative research more favourable to this project than quantitative methods. I described the participants, the data collection instruments, the research sites and the ways in which the data collected were transcribed and organised. I discussed the ethical concerns to show how the participants were protected throughout the process. In the following chapters I present my analysis of the data. The data were analysed using a social constructivist and discourse analytic approach to the study of personal relationships. These frameworks take into account the relationality and interconnectedness of things, and they seek to represent the world in the way that research participants themselves perceive and engage with the world.

CHAPTER 4 - FRIENDSHIP IN CONTEXT

"this place where you are completely yourself with somebody… it feels good it feels warm it feels honest"

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to provide a rationale for this study which to some degree transcends the core interest in the workings of discourse. This chapter is an extension of the discussion on the participants and their relationship with each other which I started in the previous chapter. I explicate the levels of complexities involved in defining the relationships between the participants in this study. I use existing literature on personal relationships and friendships across cultures to map out the relationship between the five participants. I show the ways in which the participants' own definitions of their relationships with each other converge with existing conceptualisations of friendship in the literature and areas in which they diverge. Thus, although I review literature on personal relationships and friendships in this chapter, I also present data from the playback interviews collected in 2021 to illustrate my arguments. In this sense, this is the first data analysis chapter of this study. The goal of the discussion in this chapter is to highlight the importance of studying friendships in context. I argue that to reap the full benefits of studying friendships, it is not only necessary to situate them in their sociocultural, political and economic contexts, but even more so, to look at the idiosyncrasies present in each friendship situation. I contend that the tendency to describe friendships as essentially western, African or eastern, although well meaning, still leaves us with overgeneralised and oversimplified understandings of friendship. This hinders our ability to fully grasp the role they play in social organisation and in (re)constituting the social fabric of the world. I start the discussion by looking at some of the popular perspectives in the study of personal relationships in general. I then look at friendships, how they have been defined and the core areas of interest in the literature in terms of how they form and how they are maintained. I end the chapter by exploring Spencer and Pahl's (2006) work in which they provide a useful framework for the analysis of types of friendships, friendship trajectories and repertoires.

4.2. Personal relationships

Human beings are fundamentally social creatures. If the songs, poems, novels or movies are anything to go by, then we can say that most of what makes our existence meaningful is rooted in

relationships. Research has shown that individuals rank the quality of their relationships at the top of what they consider important, usually ahead of career success and material things (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Argyle, 1987; R. Goodwin, 1999; Leath, et al., 2022). In Klinger's (1997) study, he asked the participants "what is it that makes your life meaningful?" and found that about 89% of his respondents stated that being loved and wanted was what gave their lives meaning. Relationships have the ability to make our lives most enjoyable, they can lead to overall physical and mental wellbeing while their absence can be equally potent in causing immeasurable pain, stress and feelings of isolation. It is thus no surprise that a considerable amount of effort has been devoted to trying to understand social relationships and the impact they have on the wellbeing of humans.

We nurture relationships with family members, friends, the doctor, the hairdresser, the convenience store attendant and the neighbours and yet the question of what a relationship is can be difficult to answer. Most existing definitions are usually influenced by the discipline and theoretical standpoint of the researcher. In addition, most of what we know about personal relationships has come out of studies in predominantly western societies. When the studies involve non western societies, there is a tendency to apply western theories and methods to these contexts. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with using western theories to explain phenomena in non western contexts, critics have argued that when these theories are used in unreflexive ways, they fail to allow for the consideration of the wide range of historical, social and political elements at play in non western societies (Pelican, 2012; Obeid, 2013; Bell & Coleman, 1999). This leads to a narrow understanding of relationships, how they emerge and their functions in the lives of the individuals involved.

One popular definition of personal relationships was proposed by Argyle and Henderson (1985:4) which describes them as a "regular social encounter over a period of time". Kelley et al. (1983 cited in Dwyer, 2014: 2) propose a similar definition, stating that "a relationship exists to the extent that two people exert strong, frequent and diverse effects on one another over an extended period of time". These definitions do not always apply to different types of societies. In some eastern (Yang, 1995; Smart, 1999; Kipnis, 1997) and African societies (Pelican, 2012; Grätz, 2004; Aguilar, 1999), a crucial aspect of relationships is the role of obligations and economic support. The focus on interdependence and emotions in the definition of relationships usually ignore the role that external factors such as cultural beliefs about how people can come together may play in determining how personal relationships form (Aguilar, 1999; R. Goodwin, 1999). In addition, some relationships may not have the frequency of interaction or strong emotional interdependence, but they play

important roles in shaping how individuals perceive their personal communities (Spencer and Pahl, 2006; Trickett and Buchanan, 1997).

Although recognizing and reflecting on the larger and immediate contexts of a research study can enrich and deepen our understanding of social relationships, we should aim to avoid treating societies as homogenous, or assigning/assuming essentialised notions to/about certain societies or contexts. Lefebvre's (1991) idea that the particular is saturated by the general in particular ways reminds researchers to pay attention to the idiosyncrasies to be found in the individuals, relationships and communities being studied. Differences and similarities can be observed in relationships that develop between and within social contexts that may seem different or similar at a macro level. Thus, the theoretical, methodological and analytical frameworks for different studies need to be tailored for the specific research participant(s) under study. With these ideas in mind, R. Goodwin (1999: 7) who writes on personal relationships across cultures defines personal relationships as "the interaction between two or more individuals located within the context of wider societal and cultural forces." R. Goodwin's (1999) definition which is also echoed by Abrahams (1999) informs the way personal relationships are viewed in this study. Although there is a danger that such a broad definition could mean that any type of relationship could be seen as a personal relationship, it makes room for the examination of relationships as existing within specific heterogeneous contexts.

Despite the difficulties involved in defining personal relationships, researchers tend to agree that most relationships consist of varying levels of interdependence, need fulfilment and emotional attachment (which I will explore in more detail below) (Dwyer, 2000, 2014; R. Goodwin, 1999). Another aspect of relationships that researchers tend to agree upon is the idea that although emotions and thoughts are part of relationships, relationships are more so things we do (Duck, 2007; Dwyer, 2014). That is, they develop and are maintained as we share the activities that make up our everyday lives with others. For example, relationships may emerge because people work together, they have conversations and share stories, they plan leisure activities and they patronise each other's businesses among other activities.

In terms of the reasons why we form personal relationships in the first place, some researchers on personal relationships have theorised that people behave in ways that are beneficial to them (Dwyer, 2000; 2014). The idea is that if we cannot avoid relationships all together, then our predisposition

is to gravitate towards those relationships that have the most rewarding outcomes and to avoid or end relationships that are not or no longer rewarding (Dwyer, 2000). Another popular perspective on relationships comes from evolutionary psychology which stipulates that as social animals, relationships are crucial for the survival of the human species (Allan & Adam, 2006; Alemán, 2016; Brent, et al., 2014). Human babies are entirely dependent on the presence of others for their survival, and the attachments formed with caregivers in these early stages of human life set the tone for how well adjusted the child will grow up to be. This sociality has been argued to enable humans to be at the top of the ecological chain despite the fact that our physical abilities, compared to other animals, are significantly ill adapted to some of the harsh realities of the physical world (Caporeal 2007; Brent, et al., 2014). The establishment of relationships and the willingness to cooperate, at least at some levels, seems to be one of the more convincing arguments as to why the human species continue to thrive against the odds of environmental hazards and the existence of physically superior predators (Dwyer, 2000, 2014). These pressures to survive and to reproduce have been consequential to the evolution of social relationships.

Related to the necessity of personal relationships for the survival of the species is the idea that humans have an inherent need to belong or be affiliated with others (Dwyer, 2014; Tannen, 2005a, 1986; Bell & Coleman, 1999). We have a predisposition to seek and maintain positive and long term interpersonal relationships. This need to belong is a fundamental part of the human psyche and can be as powerful a motivator as our need for food and water (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Dwyer, 2014). Dwyer, (2014: 6) suggest the following as human characteristics which reinforce the idea that the need to belong is innate to being human:

- People in all cultures form into groups; social bonds form very easily within any society.
- Babies have an innate need to form attachments and form them with their caregivers very early in life. Throughout life, people form attachments readily and eagerly and resist breaking them.
- A great deal of human cognitive processing is devoted to abilities such as language and empathy which facilitate interpersonal relationships.
- Many psychological studies, as well as everyday observations, demonstrate that humans form into groups and show group allegiance even when there are no obvious benefits.
- Many of the strongest emotions people experience are concerned with human relationships. People greatly enjoy belonging and being needed but have a fear and dislike of being

rejected. People experience happiness, elation and contentment when relationships are going well, and anxiety, depression, grief, jealousy and loneliness when they are not.

- People are adversely affected by lack of attachment in terms of well-being, adjustment and health. People who lack belongingness have high levels of mental and physical illness.

The perspectives highlighted above are by no means an exhaustive discussion of how the subject of personal relationships has been theorised. The discussion I have presented serves mainly to highlight some of the most influential perspectives and those that are relevant to and provide justification for the study of personal relationships. I shall now turn my attention to the specific personal relationship of interest in this study: friendship.

4.3. Friendship

According to Brent et al. (2014), "friendship is a hallmark of human behaviour". Numerous studies have shown that having friends can positively affect one's health, financial success and survival, while the absence of friends or an inability to make friends can exacerbate or be a symptom of (mental) health problems (Brent, et al., 2014; Allan & Adams, 2006; Spencer & Pahl, 2006; Bell & Coleman, 1999). Despite the widespread acceptance of these facts about friendship, the scientific study of friendship ties, how they are formed, maintained or dissolved is not a common phenomenon. Interest in friendship ties have gained more research attention in the past three decades from researchers in fields such as psychology, neurobiology, anthropology and sociology. Despite the increased interest in the study of friendship, it remains a challenging concept to define in any absolute terms.

One of the reasons for this challenge stems from the various ways in which the term is used in everyday talk. The term *friend* is used in everyday lay conversation to describe a range of relationships. It is common to hear spouses refer to each other as 'best friends', while siblings and other blood relatives may call each other friends to demonstrate the closeness of their bond which goes beyond the fact that they belong to the same family. People may also assign the label to individuals we barely know, may not interact with regularly or may have never met (think of bonds formed online). Politicians tend to refer to their allies as friends, even though they only meet on formal occasions for official business. Friends may be defined along the lines of the pleasantness of association, e.g. co-workers or neighbours who get along well and people in our lives with whom we share interests or common activities (Spencer & Pahl, 2006). Some define friendships according

to the longevity of the relationship, such as people with whom we have had lifelong relationships and who feel 'more like family', while others define friends in terms of the regularity of interactions. Some people's definition of the term is so strict that they can sometimes only count one or two people as their friends (such as Quinta and Bella's definition in this study), while others have a rather loose approach and are able to include a host of varying relationships into their friendship circle (such as Thandi's and my definition) (Spencer & Pahl, 2006; Rawlins, 2009, 2017, Abraham, 1999).

In addition to the wide applicability of the term in lay talk, there are also many definitions of friendship in academic discourse which highlight different aspects of friendship ties. Brent et al. (2014: 2) in their neuroethological perspective, for instance, define friendship as "pairs of individuals that engage in bidirectional affiliative…interactions with such frequency and consistency so as to differentiate them from nonfriends". Leath et al. (2022: 838), in their work of black women's friendships in the USA, define friendship as a "a kind of relationship, one based on spontaneous and unconstrained sentiment or affection". Carrier (1999: 21) defines friendship as "a kind of relationship, one based on spontaneous and unconstrained sentiment or affection". Grätz (2004: 100) whose research is based on the friendship between male miners in Benin, defines friendship as

> a relationship involving relative durability, mutual appreciation, comprising shared moral standards, and expectations of reciprocity and trust, sustained by mutual affection, ideals of equity, fairness and support…[which] is first of all a dyadic relationship that may grow into polyadic (or group) relations.

In Obeid's (2013: 94-95) work on friendship in a Lebanese town, friendship is viewed by locals as "a relationship that is 'free' of the oppressive obligations dictated by kinship… and an autonomous and idealised social realm", while for the Finns, friendship may include close relations between siblings and cousins as well as unrelated persons (Abrahams, 1999). From the examples above, we can see that definitions are mainly influenced by the cultural and physical/geographical context in which research takes place. Although here are overlaps between definitions, the specific context of research places emphasis on some aspects more than others. Research from western societies tends to highlight the unconstrained emotional or affective aspects of the relationship as well as the quality and frequency of interactions. Western studies also tend to view friendships as relationships

that are unconstrained by the sociocultural contexts (Carrier, 1999; Gouldner & Strong, 1987; Rawlins, 2009, 2017). Research in eastern, African and Arab societies tend to emphasise the instrumental, economic and/or the commitment aspects of friendships. They also tend to pay more attention to the relationship between the sociocultural contexts in which the relationships emerge (Pelican, 2012; Grätz, 2004; Guichard, et al., 2014; Aguilar, 1999; Spencer, 2014; Warms, 2014; Tadesse & Guichard, 2014).

Although it is useful to highlight differences that exist across cultures and places, it is equally important to highlight the fact that friendships within specific cultural or geographical contexts are not homogenous. The sharp divisions between friendship and kinship and the view of friendships as purely emotional, egalitarian and non-utilitarian relationships is based on a western ideal that cannot always be successfully applied to friendship practices even within the same western societies (Pelican, 2012; Silver 1989; Abrahams, 1999). Abrahams (1999) describe the ways in which friendships differ within European societies. Friendship may be used to describe relationships between both blood relations and unrelated people in Finland, while Estonians' use of friendship usually includes acquaintances for whom no strong affection is felt. Keller (2004: 1) further states that "far from being voluntary, friendships [in some western societies] in the past were at times highly regulated, contained an asymmetrical structure or were constituted as a blood relationship resembling kinship". How friendship was viewed in the time of Aristotle and Cicero is not the way it is viewed today in those societies. The world has changed dramatically since then and so has the nature of friendship bonds.

In delineating the boundaries of friendships within some African contexts, such as among migrant workers in Northern Benin, sharp distinctions are made between friends and kin (Grätz, 2004, 2014). Among pastoral societies in Eastern Africa, kin and non-kid relations are viewed as complementary, but distinct from each other (Aguiler, 1999). Aguiler (1999) further highlights that although kinship has been the main form of social organisation among the pastoralists, modern religion and education are changing the way the youth relate with each other as these transformations in their society allows more room for non-kin relations. Smart (1999) echoes Yang's (1995) research in Chinese societies, where kinship is also the dominant social tie. There are distinctions between kin and non-kin as well as distinctions between affectionate friendships and instrumental friendships (*guanxi*). In other contexts, however, friendship ties may not be easily distinguished from kinship and other types of relationships such as, patron-client relationships, as

their meanings tend to overlap and these labels are used rather broadly (Pelican, 2012; Obeid, 2013; Aguiler, 1999). In Pelican's (2012) work, she studies the intra and interethnic relationships between the Mbororos, Hausa and Grassland (Graffi*)* people in the north western region of Cameroon. She observes that friendship may be used to describe multi-layered relationships that cut across economic, political, gender, moral and sometimes spiritual aspects of the lives of her participants.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the participants in this study are all of African descent (South Africa, Cameroon and Nigeria), which can lead to the simple assumption that their relationship will be fundamentally different from friendships in other parts of the world. However, we live in Cape Town, a modern, cosmopolitan city that is home to people from all over the world. We have access to the internet, we are active on most social media platforms, we are exposed to western philosophies, such as feminism and actively take part in global conversations on a wide range of issues, such as race and gender relations. In short, we are active participants in what has been referred to as "the global village" (Cameron & Palan, 2004) and we may, in this sense, be considered global citizens. The implications of these contextual details are that it becomes more challenging to detangle what may be considered a western friendship from an African friendship. Indeed, a lot of the work on western friendships could easily be applied to my group of friends. At the same time, while we share similarities to friendships studied in other African contexts, our relationship did not always fit neatly into any definition of friendship in African societies. Any useful analysis of friendship should therefore study friendship practices as embedded within specific socio-economic, political and cultural contexts and within a particular time and space, while paying attention to the idiosyncrasies that shape each specific relationship.

When I asked the participants how they define friendship in the playback interviews, their answers are similar, but they highlight different aspects of friendship that range from emotional to instrumental/pragmatic aspects. In discussing her views on friendship Bella states that:

Extract 4.1.

> I think it's like loyalty, love, patience, perseverance, like work cuz you need to work. I think it's just like a different kind of love friendship is a different kind of love because you really need to be there for somebody to be like this is my friend, like, you have to tolerate, you have to work for it to work. You have to be giving and you have to be receiving. Like it's a different kind of - like you

> have to take care of this person to be like you - I think that's why I take - like before I call people my friend because like I cannot just call you my friend and then I can't, you know, I cannot really hold you on to some shit, like, I cannot be like yoh I need this thing maybe I can call this person I know that this person has and I know this person can give it to me

Bella's definition echoes one of Pelican's (2012: 175) research participants, Kaboura, who described friendship as follows (translated from Fulfude to English by author):

- You communicate without problems; you are honest to each other and do not hide anything.
- With a good friend you can discuss your problems. He gives advice, and he tries to help; for example, if a cow toppled or if you have to organise a feast. Somebody who only smiles at you but is not interested in your problems or willing to help, is not a friend.
- If someone agrees to lend you money, you know, he is a true friend. But someone who refuses, even if he has money, is not a friend.

Although Bella mentions emotional elements that Kaboura does not, such as love, "a different kind of love" (from romantic or familial love), the key element for her, like in Kaboura's case, is the "work" involved maintaining a friendship. Bella's definition is based on loyalty, perseverance, reciprocity, tolerance (perhaps of things one does not like about the other) and willingness to help and take care of each other. This characterisation highlights the instrumental and moral expectations placed on friendship ties (see also, Bollig, 1998; Burnham, 1980; Guichard, 2002 cited in Pelican, 2012; Piot, 1991). Bella looks at friendship from a more pragmatic sense where friendship is "work", but Thandi's views, on the other hand, are more emotional, in line with those of Leath et al. (2022) where friendship is "easy" and warm as well as Carrier's (1999) idea of pure, unconstrained and sentimental bonds. Thandi states:

Extract 4.2.

> I used to think that friendship is complicated now I think friendship - friendship is just a very easy thing uhm it's easy it should be a space of warmth and softness…it is - fundamentally it is a place neh where you are yourself in ways that you cannot be yourself in any other space uhm I think that's one of like - that's one of the gems of friendship uhm the unique thing that friendship has that

family doesn't always have yeah although it relates in many aspects to my own construction of - of family as well - so it's this place where you are completely yourself with somebody or some people and you know it feels good it feels warm it feels honest uhm yeah I guess it's just yourself, like, I don't know - the support and love that you have for yourself manifesting in another person, in another person and another person. I don't know how to put but yeah that's how I think it is. It's very simple. I used to think it's complicated it's not its very simple and it's actually very principled uhm in accordance to I guess your "relationship contract" (using her fingers to signal quotation signs)

Thandi's definition highlights the emotional aspects of the relationship and the ability to be "completely" oneself in the company of a friend. The friend here is a 'mirror' through which the love and support one has for oneself is reflected back at one. But there is also a contract involved, a commitment or obligation involved in friendships (I will revisit this idea below). Quinta's perception of friendships rests primarily on the similarities she can identify between herself and the other.

Extract 4.3.

We share common interests, and uhm not just that, someone that is erm - that I find is very uhm - what's the word open minded has got a pure heart you know because for me my heart is gold (laughs) and and once someone that I know that is genuinely there in terms of your thoughts and your behaviour in terms of how you treat others generally not just how you treat me like your general disposition towards life you know your goals in life do they align with mine are you progressive (laughs) or are you just - you need to I need to see some fire you know in you and we need to match, energies needs to match cuz I am ambitious you know I want someone that is ambitious you know we can just - iron sharpens iron - sharpen each other and just keep being like - you know when we talk about love it's not now transactional love like - really like that type of person that loves from your heart every single person not just because Quinta is your friend thats the kind of that's the - what friendship is about

Similar to Thandi, Quinta's definition hinges on a person who mirrors back the qualities she appreciates most in herself. Open mindedness, ambition and passion are important. Quinta's perception of love is one that is not discriminatory, someone who treats others well, not just because they are friends, but because it is the right thing to do. "Work" in Quinta's context is somewhat different from Bella's understanding of it. Bella believes that both parties need to work on the relationship, while Quinta believes that each person needs to be working on themselves for a relationship of friendship to exist and survive: "iron sharpens iron".

The emotional aspects of relationships in the literature are ascribed to western friendships, but each of the participants here express that emotions form a big part of friendships. However, there are also those aspects of the definitions that are more pragmatic. Thus, simply liking someone is not always enough to sustain a friendship. The emotional aspects work when other important qualities such as reciprocity, loyalty and dependability are present. In other words, the emotional aspects go hand in hand with a sense of duty. In addition, the participants do not mention the frequency of interaction as a significant factor, although it is implied that there is some interaction (more on this point in Chapter 7). The point I am trying to make is that while classifying certain ideas as western or non-western can facilitate understanding of the concept of friendship and the contexts within which they occur, these generalisations are also prone to oversimplification. It is in looking at the daily lives of individuals and looking at how these relationships manifest in different contexts that we gain a clearer insight into the nature of friendship bonds across contexts. Despite the challenges in defining friendships, research on friendship ties tend to revolve around three main issues: *choice*, *joint activity/affection* and *(moral) commitment*.

Choice

Within western studies, friendships are viewed as mainly voluntary bonds that cannot be coerced (Rawlins 2009; Carrier, 1999). Unlike other types of social relationships, such as that between spouses, blood relatives, co-workers, parent-child, server-client or doctor-patient, there are no institutional grounds for friendships. Friendships are understood to emerge mainly because the individuals choose each other. Indeed, the fact that friends are chosen rather than given seems to be the most highly valued aspect of friendships especially within research in modern western societies. To be called a friend means that one has been *chosen* as a friend, flaws and all, reifying our sense of self and belonging which is crucial for wellbeing (Brent et al., 2014; Telfer, 1971).

That we freely choose our friends is true to a certain extent, but our ability to choose is usually constrained by the individual's material circumstances. One's race, gender, class, sexuality, age, as well as events taking place in the course of life (marriage, divorce, sickness etc) influence who can become friends. This perspective is strongly emphasised in research in African, eastern and Arab contexts (Obeid, 2013; Guichard, et al., 2014; Keller, 2004). Obeid (2013) showed that gender and physical proximity were the main constraining factors influencing how friendship bonds formed in Lebanon. This was especially the case among women who have limited mobility and thus could only fraternise with other women who lived in close proximity. The friendships between the women in Leath, et al.'s (2022) work were made possible partly by the fact that they happened to be black women in a previously white university in North America. The relationship between the women in Cronin's (2015) work was partially determined by the fact that they shared similar struggles as mothers. Similarly, the miners in Grätz's (2004) work, due to the requirements of their job, choose friends based on their ability to work hard and share profits fairly. Furthermore, the miners preferred to work with friends because they stood a better chance of having a more equitable distribution of profits. This was because the father or older brother could demand a larger share of the profits due to their seniority and status. As a result of the ethos of these relationships, the younger sibling or child would have no choice but to accept this unfair division of profits. Among friends, however, this could be avoided. Such external factors which influence how friendships form recurs in studies among migrant populations. This is because friendships become the dominant social tie given that family members are usually back in the homestead or home country (Grätz, 2004, 2015; Guichard, et al., 2014).

The discussion on migrant friendships are particularly relevant to this study, given that the participants are (im)migrants in Cape Town, including Thandi and Zinhle who are originally from the Eastern and Northern Cape. The development and sustenance of friendship between migrants is a process which helps manage the complexities involved with moving to new unpredictable places (Eisenstadt & Roninger 1984; Grätz, 2004; Guichard, et al., 2014). These friendship ties form the basis for everyday interaction, economic support and provide a sense of belonging. The group of friends in this study all came to Cape Town to further their studies. Through their interactions, they have managed to build trust and a sense of community and belonging as they share similar goals, ambitions and financial difficulties. When Quinta reflects on how and why she and I became friends, she states that:

Extract 4.4

> I found that immigrants tend to get together because of that sense of we are outsiders so let's be insiders in an outer space you get what I mean so personally I mean when I met you in Honours class and you were you didn't sound South African, that drew me to trying to be your friend you know what I mean because - and then I met Bella and she's from Cameroon so there's just that sense of what is the word I'm look for, shared, I don't know - that you feel like - you know like when you are a foreigner in a place and you find a fellow foreigner and you're like at least we have something in common you know something like that so for me it was there

Zinhle echoed Quinta's sentiments by stating that:

> uhm I don't think it was random at all I think uhm I think we find like comfort zones sort of in each other and uhm you know how - you know how when you visit somewhere that you like visit a place outside home you are quite vulnerable…so I think because we have that we had that similarity about us it was easy to attach to one another yeah

Our YouTube channel was yet another way in which we dealt with the uncertainties of living in a city/country with a history of gender and racial inequalities, as we sought to create a space for women who did not fit the common racial and gender stereotypes to find themselves and know that they were not alone. Therefore, while we chose to be friends, the fact that Quinta and I registered for the same subjects and our shared position as foreign students from West Africa created the opportunity for us to make the choices we made. Similarly, if Bella had been able to afford the rent by herself and had Zinhle's friend not become Bella's roommate, our paths might never have crossed. Without these external circumstances, we may never have met, and our friendship might never have existed. Thus, while we still ended up choosing to do the work of being each other's friend, the external factors that made this happen cannot be ignored.

In addition to external sociocultural, political and economic conditions that influence which people are available for friendship, Quinta and Zinhle shared a perspective on how friendships form that I found relevant to the discussion on choice. In the playback interviews, I asked Zinhle why she thought she was able to stay friends with us after that initial encounter in Bella's room. She said the following:

Extract 4.5

> we kind of vibed like I don't know when you when you first encounter people and then you just like their energy or /?/ yeah I think that's what happened and then we when we sit down and have conversations we actually see okay uhm we have sort of the same wavelength or mindset or so it grew like that yeah and we like we like joking around men and laughing and oh and dancing eh eh eh (both laugh) oooh God

She further adds that:

> weirdly enough it's star signs cuz I believe yey we have to we have to at least be compatible uhm (chuckles) it's weird but like I do it (laughs)...what else yeah I don't know like it's never happened that I don't like someone and then we end up being friends I don't think it's ever happened I - I usually just vibe with people like on the first like impression kind of thing yeah

Similarly, Quinta reflects:

Extract 4.6

> I don't think I pick hey, I think energy just flows that's what happens, I am an energy person and if our energies flow it flows if it doesn't flow it doesn't flow and like I said (laughs) it's actually very funny because even with romantic relationships it's the same, it just depends there's a thing, a chemistry that I feel with people and once it's there it grows naturally and if it doesn't grow then we're done I really don't pick people

This notion of "energies", "vibes" and "flow" which seem to match all on their own before any real interaction has taken place recurred in all playback interviews. Zinhle was the only one who referred specifically to astrology. She shared that she was on a spiritual journey. Her description of this

journey connected African traditional modes of spirituality, numerology and astrology which explains why she takes the notion of star signs into consideration when making friends. I did not encounter "energy", "vibes" or chemistry as a reason for friendship in the literature. However, there are thousands of channels on YouTube dedicated to tarot card readings based on astrology. Before YouTube channels, several magazines had small sections dedicated to star sign predictions and so on. Although I could not find academic research on the subject in relation to friendship or relationships in general, I am led to believe that (young) people draw from belief systems, other than mainstream religious or cultural beliefs, to make sense of at least some parts of their lives as we see Zinhle doing here.

This goes to show that there are several factors at play in determining how friendships are realised. Therefore, while there is always an element of choice involved in friendships, it might be more accurate to say that friendships (across cultural contexts) are made possible due to a combination of some element of fate, beliefs (religious or otherwise), the sociocultural, economic and political contexts, (that is, things out of our control) and some element of choice. Quinta and especially Zinhle's revelation further help to make the point that studying friendships as embedded within specific contexts, time and space can provide insight into the beliefs and ideologies that are (re)constituting the social fabric and shaping how the social world is organised.

Joint activity and affection

Furthermore, the issue of joint activities, interests and affection is highlighted in the research on how friendships form. People might become friends because they have the same sense of humour, they work together, go to the same church, play in the same teams, live in the same neighbourhood or are at the same stage in their life course. Elizabeth Telfer (1971: 223-224) proposes three types of activity which are all necessary conditions of friendship: reciprocal services, mutual contact and joint pursuits. She refers to these activities collectively as the "joint activity condition for friendship". She goes on to argue that joint activity alone is not enough to define a relationship as a friendship as we might perform services and engage in common activities with people we do not necessarily like or consider friends. Affection or desire/passion thus is perceived as another necessary condition for friendship. She makes a distinction between having special affection for a particular person, versus having a sense of benevolence, pity and/or duty. The latter causes one to have concern for people in general, while the former causes one to feel concern for some, which

they do not feel for everyone. This affection is felt for another, usually, in spite of their character, that is, 'flaws and all'. It is this special affection for some that causes us to engage in joint activity out of friendship (Carrier, 1999; Spencer and Pahl, 2006; Telfer, 1971).

This position is seen between the miners in Grätz (2004) study. They work together on the mines, but they also go out to the clubs together. The miners do not party with everyone they work with, they party with those they have grown to trust and like/love, for various reasons. One of the miners tells a story of how painful it had been when he lost a friend he had made in the mines. Their work relationship and the deep friendship they shared compelled him to travel all the way to his friend's hometown to attend the funeral. Between the male Mbororos, Hausas and the Grassfielders in North Western Cameroon, however, friendships revolve around the exchange of services or favours (reciprocity) instead of affection. It is mainly in women friendships that affection seems to play an important role (Pelican, 2012).

In this study, the participants met at university and eventually started to work on Girl Chat together. However, these joint activities by themselves, although they created the opportunities for frequent contact, did not guarantee affection or friendship. Bella describes how her friendship with Quinta evolved as follows:

Extract 4.7. Some parts of the transcript are in Pidgin English. Translations are provided in the square brackets.

> Quinta - I met Quinta through you and the purpose that we met Quinta was work yes was work and then apart from work okay it was like so there's also this sister who is from Nigeria so that type of - *okay we be foreigners dem den iy commot Nigeria so we no far so* [*we are foreigners and she's from Nigeria so we are not far so*] we can talk pidgin together that kind of thing you know but it wasn't like I want to take this person as my friend yeah then work now with Girl Chat now we started by force to be spending more time with each other and all that then yoh Quinta's friendship was really - I really had to work and undesrstand her person cuz that's another thing too about friendship if you really want thi - cuz I was like this thing has to work because first of all we are working together *I no go pikin di go work every day then I di vex wey I know sey I need for see Quinta* [*I can't be going to work every day angry knowing that I have to see Quinta]* so

> I need to see how I can first - it was work, basically for work purposes and then I don't know if it's you or Thandi - then you were like "Quinta likes you" I don't know who said it but I think both of you even said it. You - then I tried to now - okay so apart from work, so this person likes me - like, me, Bella, let me see what this person likes about - that like changed my attention and my direction - let me try - I think I'm very protective of myself because I don't let people in easily like I can talk to you for years but we are not friends and I'm not gonna be ashamed to tell you that (laughs)

Bella describes the fact that initially the extent of her relationship with Quinta revolved around the work they were doing on Girl Chat and the fact that they were both foreigners from West Africa who spoke Pidgin English. Bella had initially felt that Quinta was difficult (see explanation of "difficult" in extract 4.10). This is why she had to "work to understand her [Quinta's] person" so as to have an enjoyable work experience on Girl Chat. It was only after Thandi and I told her that Quinta actually liked her beyond the Girl Chat work that she (Bella) "changed her direction" to get to know and like Quinta as a friend. Quinta explained that she felt drawn to Bella because they had similar life experiences, but for reasons that Quinta explains in extract 4.10, Bella struggled to reciprocate Quinta's sentiments. In addition, Quinta engaged with Thandi regularly during the years in which Girl Chat was active, yet she did not count Thandi as a friend during that time nor afterwards. Therefore, some people can consider a relationship a friendship without the emotional aspects (e.g the participants in Pelican's (2012) study) while for others, sharing joint activity was not enough to qualify the relationship as friends without the emotional aspect. Friendships that lean towards the instrumental payoffs of the friendship do not require affection for friendships (Pelican, 2012; Yang, 1995; Kipnis, 1997).

(Moral) Commitment

In addition, to choice and joint activity/affection, friendship also requires a certain degree of (moral) commitment to the future relationship (Rawlins, 2009; Langkamp, 2022; Spencer and Pahl, 2006). Telfer (1971) makes a distinction between the affection shared by friends and benevolence, pity and duty which are directed towards people who may not consider themselves friends. This, however, does not mean that friendships are void of sense of duty and commitment. We cannot always point to the exact moment in which we decided to be someone's friend. However, as the

bond grows, certain rights and duties arise. We cannot speak of rights and duties in friendships in the same ways we speak of these issues in relation to romantic relationships, parent-child relationships and other institutional and impersonal relationships, but people commit to certain duties and enjoy certain rights in friendship. The acknowledgment of friendship allows the individuals to enter into a kind of committed relationship which involves the "endorsement of or consent to a policy which is by then enshrined in practice" (Telfer, 1997; 230) It is thus not commitment enforced by the state or society's moral expectations, but one that comes about through the continued decision to share in each other's lives. In extract 4.2 above Thandi mentions the issue of a "relationship contract" which she elaborates on as follows:

Extract 4.8.

> That one I think it's (chuckles) it's a - it's a interesting concept in a sense that we don't sit down and be like "this what we gon do in this friendship" but it's just kind of like automatically you - automatic maybe that's the wrong word but it's - it's - it's like you you meet this person and you are principally aligned (clapping) in terms of what it is that you want for your life and I think the principle then comes in or the the contract then comes in like your day to day engagement with these with these kinds of principles… it's like something that the two of you or the three of you or the four of you - you just you have the understanding of the concept of what is allowed in this space and how we talk about things in this space without having to say "that this is how we talk". There isn't a manifesto that you start off with, it just manifests in that way and and how you measure the violations is just in terms of feeling it's not something that has been scripted or written it's just in terms of feeling…it's a very hyperreal thing in the sense that like you know you can feel it's tangibility but you can't see the tangibility of the contract of the principles

Thandi describes the way in which through mutual engagement on a day to day basis, an intuitive understanding of how the friendship works is negotiated between those involved. She describes it as an implicit process where nothing is necessarily agreed upon on record. However, with time, an understanding of ways of relating such as, ways of speaking are formed as well as the

understanding of what may constitute a violation of this "contract". When I asked about how she thought they arrived at this intuitive understanding, she said the following:

Extract 4.9.

> I don't know how to how to put it right so this agreement in the relationship in the way that the relationship evolves uhm it's trial and error in the sense that Thandi will maybe put her phone on Bella's coffee table and Bella maybe doesn't like it when people put things on the coffee table, so you're not gonna know that on the first day, but from the point when that boundary that Bella has that she has never maybe highlighted uhm you know, when that boundary's been crossed then it gets addressed then okay now you guys know okay don't put things on Bella's table that becomes part of this agreement that you guys are building into the future so I think that's how it goes

Thandi describes a hypothetical situation in which one friend (Thandi) does something the other (Bella) does not like (e.g. putting things on Bella's coffee table) because she is unaware of how Bella feels about this. However, once Bella states that she does not like when people put things on her table, this becomes part of the shared understanding of how to relate with each other in ways that avoid trouble in the future. According to Thandi, it is through these types of interactions that the "relationship contract" gets established over time.

Another model of commitment relevant to friendships is Rusbult's (1980a, 1980b) *investment model*. It takes into account the reward-cost ratio, the attractiveness of alternatives and investment to explicate the reasons why people may choose to remain relationally committed. Direct investment could take the form of time, emotional energy, money, or self-disclosures (Rusbult, 1980: 97). Indirect investments are extraneous but important for the continuation of the relationship. They may include having mutual friends, shared memories or material possessions, activities, objects and events which are idiosyncratically connected to the bond (Johnson, et al., 2009). The two aspects of this model that appear relevant for friendship is that of investment and the reward-cost ratio. The higher the investment, the higher the level of commitment to the friendship. The

higher the satisfaction derived from being part of the bond (reward-cost ratio), the higher the commitment. The existence of and attractiveness of alternatives as a condition of relational commitment is not as relevant for friendships since one can have multiple friends at the same time and need not choose only the most attractive candidate. Quinta's reflection on the reasons why she keeps a small circle of friends highlight this type of commitment. She observes that:

Extract 4.10

> and personally because I am such an introvert, and I'm so self-absorbed, I feel like friendships can be draining and I can't even I don't think - the longest friend I have is probably a friend of mine that I've known for about eleven years then the other one is a childhood friend I can't even call her like friend friend per se just like I can call that one a sister, I'm not one to maintain really long relationships and the reason why this eleven year one has lasted is because we don't live in the same place so…I really don't know, maybe the person would have grown to hate me for one reason or the other like Quinta not showing up to things or Quinta not being available you know because I just feel like my lifestyle like my personality does not allow me to really give to friendships as much as people expect and you know and that can be problematic for social relationships and uhm that's why I just prefer acquaintances (laughs) you know it's demanding, you know friendship is demanding - it's I mean I have great friends but the investment that goes into maintaining friendships is a lot and sometimes my life does not just allow it but yeah we need humans to coexist what can I say

Quinta's sentiments are in line with Bella's idea of the "work" it takes to maintain a relationship in Extract 4.1. Thus, while the nature of commitment in friendship may look different from commitment and a sense of duty for institutionally recognised relationships, friends tend to have an intuitive understanding of the commitment necessary to sustain a friendship over time, even if they do not necessarily think they can live up to these commitments.

Furthermore, M. Johnson's (1991) model of commitment is useful for understanding how commitment works in friendships. He states that there are three types of commitment: *personal, moral* and *structural* commitment. People maintain a relationship because they want to (personal),

because they ought to (moral) or because they have to (structural). Fehr (1999) argues that personal commitment is that which is most relevant to friendships which seems appropriate given the somewhat voluntary nature of these ties. However, moral commitment is also relevant to friendships across different societies (Pelican, 2012, Grätz, 2004; R, Goodwin, 1999; Keller, 2004; Yang, 1995). When Bella states in Extract 4.1. that:

> I cannot just call you my friend and then I can't, you know, I cannot really hold you on to some shit, like, I cannot be like yoh I need this thing maybe I can call this person I know that this person has and I know this person can give it to me,

She is talking about what friends *ought* to do for each other. She can be heard saying that one *ought* to be able to rely on their friends for assistance, and friends ought to be willing to assist. Structural commitment is not as relevant to this study as the participants tend to acknowledge that they do not necessarily *have to* do anything; "it's an obligation but it is not an obligation type of thing" as Bella puts it.

Aristotle, writing over two thousand years ago, and whose ideas have been the foundation upon which some contemporary work on friendship is based, reflected that friendship had strong moral dimensions, "virtuous friends enlarge and extend each other's moral experience […] they recognise each other's moral excellence and become a mirror" through which they might see themselves (Pahl, 2000: 22; Bell & Coleman, 1999; Johnson, et al., 2009, Pahl & Pevalin, 2005). The moral significance of friendship bonds arises from both the choice to become friends in the early stages of friendship and the virtues involved in cultivating and maintaining them. Spencer and Pahl (2006) reflect on the way the movie makers exploit morality (or lack thereof) in friendships as a prominent theme. For example, should/can one be friends with a person who is cheating on their partner? What is one's moral duty as a friend of the couple in such an instance? This highlights the moral dilemmas involved in friendship ties.

One of the main criticisms of Aristotle's conceptualisation of friendship is how much he romanticises these bonds, as indicated by the term "virtue friendships". Even though researchers may agree that a function of friendship might be to create a space in which we can check our morality, in practice, the cultivation of friendships and its moral aspects are not clear cut or void of complexities. In most cases, individuals may have a list of traits that define a 'good friend', when indeed none of their friends possess all of these qualities. Spencer and Pahl (2006) and Pahl and

Pevalin (2005) have shown that friends may be valued for specific attributes which may make up for any shortcomings, so much so that a friend may be "fun but unreliable, trustworthy but dull and so on. It is the particular combination of qualities […] which gives friendship its distinct character". This is why the term friend can be applied to a wide variety of relations and why each friendship is different from the next.

4.4 Classifying friendships

How then might we classify friendships if they are all so unique? To attempt to answer this question, I look at Spencer and Pahl's (2006) framework in which types of friendships are placed on a spectrum from simple/superficial to complex and multidimensional. They also propose the notions of *friendship trajectories* and *repertoires* which I found useful in making sense of the relationship between the participants in this study. I will discuss each of these concepts in the last part of this chapter.

4.4.1 Types of friendships

Several studies have attempted to classify friendships (see Dwyer, 2000, 2014; Langkamp, 2022; Hall, 2012). However, the most useful of these classifications for this study is proposed by Spencer and Pahl (2006) as it accommodates the range of friendship ties between the participants in this study in simple terms. They propose eight different types of friendship that range from simple to complex.

Table 4.1. Types of friendships according to Spencer and Pahl (2006)

Simple friendships	**Complex friendships**
1. Associate	5. helpmate
2. Useful contact	6. comforter
3. Favour friend	7. confident
4. Fun friend	8. Soulmate

The eight types of friendships identified above may be roughly categorised into simple friendships with limited forms of interaction and complex friendship bonds with multidimensional roles involving multiple forms of interaction. Simple bonds include the first four. These are friendship ties that are more superficial as they are usually based on one main form of interaction and play limited roles in each other's life. One may belong to a choir or football team and as a result form the type of simple friendship called *associates* as they do not interact with each other outside of this shared activity. Some people are friends because they have access to important information, such as the friend I contact every time I have problems with my electronic devices and need a second opinion as well as advice on which electronic device to purchase based on my budget (*useful contacts*). Among *favour friends*, the interactions tend to be limited to favours they do for each other, such as neighbours who take turns babysitting each other's children (Cronin, 2015), while *fun friends*, as the name suggests, are those we call when we want to socialise and engage in leisure activities. Some aspect of each of the four elements may be found in all kinds of friendship bonds, but simple friendships tend to revolve around one main element. A fun friend may provide useful information or grant a favour every now and then, but the main aspect of the friendship is having fun together. There may be other types of simple friendships outside the four that Spencer and Pahl (2006) outline, such as business friends whose relationship is limited to the fact that they patronise each other's businesses (Storr, et al., 2021; Yang, 1995). However, what makes a relationship 'simple' is this limitation of interaction to just one dimension.

Complex friendships on the other hand are the last four on the list: helpmate, comforter, confidant and soulmate. *Helpmates* provide practical help with daily struggles and are considered "solid, reliable and dependable" (Spencer and Pahl, 2006: 66) while *comforters* do the same as helpmates except that they also provide emotional support and are sympathetic. *Confidants* are those who provide a trusted listening ear to one's 'secrets' and who are discreet (see the friendships in Tannen, 2017). Unlike helpmates or comforters, they may not live in close proximity to each other and so cannot always offer practical help or comfort through one's everyday struggles. *Soulmates*, considered the deepest and most multifaceted type of friendship (Spencer and Pahl, 2006), similar to the notion of heart-to-heart friends (Yang, 1995) and Aristotle's notion of "virtue friends" tend to share similar worldviews, typically associated with feelings of being 'on the same wavelength'. They play the role of confidant, comforter and helpmates with a strong emotional bond. This bond has high commitment and emotional attachment levels. The friendships between the participants

in this study may be seen as falling at different points on the spectrum between simple and complex. Those whose relationship lean towards more complex friendship would be the bond between Bella and I, Bella and Thandi, Bella and Quinta and Thandi and Zinhle. The bond between Quinta and Zinhle may fall more on the side of the simple friendship as their interactions mainly revolved around a few Girl Chat activities. Thandi and I, Quinta and Thandi and Zinhle and I would be somewhere between simple and complex friendships.

The quality of the friendship bond may be determined by varying levels of emotional attachment/affection, proximity/frequency of interaction and longevity. As one moves from the simple to complex friendships, they may also notice an increase in the levels of emotional attachment. Simple friends tend to be less complicated given their light-hearted nature, as compared to more complex friendships which may come with strong negative emotions such as rivalry or envy. In addition to emotional attachment, friendship bonds may also be affected by how long the individuals have known each other, and the frequency of their interactions. Typically, those who interact with each other regularly tend to form more complex relationships. They also usually share close physical proximity which facilitates the task of frequent interaction (Obeid, 2013; Johnson, et al., 2009). However, research also shows that complex relationships can exist between people who do not engage frequently such as between helpmates and confidants. This can also happen between friends who once lived in close proximity, but eventually moved to different states or countries (Johnson et al., 2009). For instance, Thandi and Bella, and Quinta and Bella remain close even though they no longer live in the same country or province. In terms of longevity, complex relationships tend to be those that one has known for extended periods. Although, it is not uncommon for new ties to develop into more complex relationships within a relatively short period, such as when people meet and immediately 'click'. Thus, the types of friendships highlighted by Spencer and Pahl (2006) offer only a loose guideline and vocabulary for defining different types of friendships. Whether a friendship is considered complex or simple should thus be based on that specific relationship and how the members involved define it.

4.4.2 Friendship trajectories

Friendship can develop on a number of different, unpredictable trajectories. Friendships typically start off as simple or casual relationships which over time and engagement may evolve into more complex relationships. However complex friendships may also fall apart, or become simple,

especially if one party moves to a different state or country. Spencer and Pahl (2006) identify three main friendship trajectories: *fixed* friendships (which do not evolve into more complex bonds nor deteriorate), *progressive* friendships (those that may start off simple and grow more complex with time and vice versa) and *variable* friendships (those that may shift between complex and simple states and different points in the lives of the individuals involved).

In Grätz's (2004) work among artisanal migrant miners, he observed that when miners arrive at the mines, they take up accommodation among the locals. These relationships may grow from a casual/simple relationship or "soft" relationship of landlord-tenant, into lifetime friendships, or from miners in the same work team to friends who socialise, help each other financially, keep each other's secrets and party together outside their initial work relationships. Similarly, the relationship between Bella and Quinta (see extract 4.7) initially revolved around work, but it eventually grew into a more complex relationship. Thandi and I initially met when we worked together on a data capturing project on campus. Our relationship became more complex as we started working on Girl Chat together and as we lived together. However, since she moved to another province, we have not been as close. Bella and I became very close almost instantly and over the years our relationship has remained the same despite the fact that our lives have taken us in different directions. When talking about how her relationship with the other participants as well as her other friends have progressed since 2017 in the playback interviews, Zinhle states,

Extract 4.11

> uhm at that time my friends right were the people that were physically around me you know so you guys Lele uhm Reshma I don't know if you remember Reshma yeah so all of you guys were like physically sort of here uhm but now uhm it's still the same people you know it's still you guys uhm uh still you, Quinta not really, Bella also not really Thandi yes, Lungi uhm yes-ish and Lele yes Reshma and so like yeah I can say /is it's half or yeah like/ half of you guys I still keep in touch with uhm even though now there's like a big distance uhm which to me doesn't really uhm it doesn't really it doesn't really matter to me much as long as we can still you know keep in touch

Thus, while her friendships with myself, Thandi, Lele and Reshma have remained more or less the same (in spite of distance), the relationship with Bella, Quinta and Lungi to a certain extent have

faded out. This goes to show that friendships are not linear in their development and they may move across the spectrum from simple to complex over the course of their life span. Friendships can also end if they no longer serve the needs of those involved. Sometimes they end when one person moves to a different state or country or as a result of conflict.

4.4.3 Friendship repertoires

Finally, Spencer and Pahl (2006) propose the notion of friendship repertoires. At the beginning of this discussion on friendship, I highlighted the idea that some individuals claim to have only two friends while others may count up to twenty people or more as friends. This is what the authors refer to as friendship repertoires: "the range of friendships people include in their personal communities". Four main friendship repertoires are identified (Spencer and Pahl, 2006: 77)

- *Basic repertoires* - here the individual only includes simple/casual friendships with more specialised roles (e.g fun friends for socialising and associates with whom they share a common activity) and looks to family for more complex attachments and support.
- *Intense repertoires* - These individuals only include their most complex friendships into their personal communities, and do not view acquaintances and other kinds of simple relationships as part of their personal community.
- *Focal repertoires:* Both simple and complex friendship ties are included in their personal community, although they have a core group of soulmates and confidants. These complex bonds are fewer in relation to simpler relationships
- *Broad repertoires*: The individual includes a broad range of friendship types, although more complex friendships will outweigh simpler friendships. Those within this category take friendship very seriously and tend to appreciate a variety of unique qualities that each bond adds to their life.

Based on this classification, Thandi, Zinhle and I may be said to have broad repertoires as we count a variety of relationships that differ in terms of levels of complexity as friendships, while Bella and Quinta have an intense repertoire given that they only count complex friendships. Those with whom they only have superficial relationships are not considered friends. Quinta does not view Zinhle or Thandi as friends, even though they are friendly towards each other. She states that:

Extract 4.12

> These participants like I said, two of them [Zinhle and Thandi] I do not know that well so there wasn't really a friendship there uhm yeah Thandi and I were not really friends I mean so I cannot say that it ended, it just life just happened

She later on shares that:

> acquaintances are all the people that I see and say hello to and once in a while we can have a meal together and, but in a group not alone (laughs) yeah those are acquaintances yeah I have more acquaintances than friends actually so for acquaintances the circle is very big /?/ but friends very very small

Thandi, on the other, hand uses the term friend to describe a larger range of relationships in which, even with limited interaction with Quinta after the end of Girl Chat, she still considered Quinta her friend. This brings into question Telfer's (1971) idea that all members of the friendship need to acknowledge the friendship for it to be considered a friendship

4.5. Chapter summary

In this chapter I have examined the notion of personal relationships, broadly discussing the way in which they have been conceptualised in research across disciplines and cultures. I have also discussed friendship as a type of personal relationship. I looked at existing definitions of friendship in relation to the way in which the participants in this study themselves define the term. I show the areas in which my study and conceptualisations of friendship converges with research from the western world and research carried out in African and eastern contexts, as well as areas in which there are diversions. Furthermore, I look at some of the key aspects around which research on friendship across cultures hinges: *choice, joint activity/affection* and *(moral) commitment* as well as a framework for classifying friendships: *simple/superficial* friendships and *complex multidimensional* friendships. I ended the discussion by looking at friendship trajectories and friendship repertoires.

This discussion highlights the nature of the relationship between the participants within a community of practice. It provides a framework for the understanding of the way the participants view friendship and their relationship with each other beyond the popular notion of the dyad. In the next chapters, I analyse specific instances of talk and interaction between participants to show

how the dynamics of their friendship may be linked to their discourse practices. I aimed to show the importance of looking at the specific context of the research participants instead of assuming essentialised qualities based on the larger sociocultural, political or economic contexts in which they find themselves. It is through looking at the idiosyncratic ways in which people design their personal communities that we stand to gain the most from the study of friendship and the role it plays in social organisation. Studying the multiple ways in which friendships are embedded across societies and the ways in which people view and define these relationships provides a more nuanced understanding of their functioning within society as a type of social glue.

CHAPTER 5: STORYTELLING AND FRIENDSHIP SUSTENANCE

"friendship…it's easy it should be a space of warmth and softness"

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I looked at friendships as relations that emerge within specific contexts. These contexts condition and are conditioned by the discourse practices through which the individuals organise their interactions. Chapters 5-7 looks at these discourse practices, specifically the role of conversational storytelling and play in their private conversations and in their online (public) conversations on Girl Chat. In these chapters, I will make a case for the ways in which relational dynamics can be tied to the details of talk in interaction. I begin in this chapter by analysing the storytelling practices of the group in their private conversations. The data presented here comes from the two audio recordings that capture conversations they had in Bella's room and in Quinta's house (before and after they filmed their Girl Chat videos).

I aim to show how storytelling functions as one of the maintaining mechanisms that sustains friendly relations. I start by showing how stories function as a vehicle for bringing new information into the group, updating the shared pool of knowledge between participants. In other words, I show how the practice of storytelling in everyday conversation becomes an important tool for expanding and adding nuances to what they know about each other, thereby co-constructing an updated common ground. I argue that these narrative updates are the fuel on which their friendship runs, as new information becomes the basis for future engagement. Far from being a straightforward or mindless process of simply logging in new information, I show how the process of updating the shared information is achieved interactionally and the kinds of contestations that can arise as a result.

In addition to updating the shared knowledge pool, storytelling also provides opportunities for the critical (re)assessment of self, other and the world. Storytelling interactions serve as sites in which interlocutors may collectively *witness* and critically engage with different perspectives. I argue that in sharing the events in their stories, the teller's evaluation or 'take-away' from these events, the reaction of the audience to the narrated experience and the way it is narrated, are jointly assessed by those in the interaction. In addition, as interlocutors collectively make sense of the events narrated, they also draw on, challenge or reject larger social discourses and ideologies (the

macro) within their interactions (the micro). They appropriate or critique these larger sociocultural discourses (*the* world) to achieve interactional and pragmatic goals in the here and now of their interaction (*their* world). This process of challenging or engaging critically is achieved through strategies that may be considered face threatening acts (FTAs) (Brown and Levinson, 1987). However, as I will argue, these ways of speaking are considered *appropriate* (Locher and Watts, 2005) (as opposed to (im)polite), in other words, the kinds of *politic behaviour* (Watts, 2003: 135) necessary to maintain relational equilibrium.

Lastly, I argue that storytelling interactions are also instances of vulnerability and care. In weaving experiences into a narrative or story form, through a process of *emplotment* (Polkinghorne, 1991), one imposes an order onto these experiences. This order is imbued with and justified by the social norms, ideologies, structures, prejudices and identity options being mobilised by the teller. In so doing, storytellers make themselves vulnerable by gambling with the possibilities that their 'reading' of a series of events may be supported, criticised or all together rejected. On the other hand, listening to the mundane details of another person's life, holding space for them and engaging actively with their stories can also be seen as a kind of care. I argue that the co-cultivation and preservation of a shared safe space through vulnerability and care practices is a necessary condition for continuous narrative activity, the informational fuel on which relationships run. Before I delve into my analysis however, I shall provide an overview of the characteristics of private offline conversations and stories.

5.2. Patterns in private conversation

In the first recording of naturally occurring conversation (R1), Bella, Thandi, Zinhle and myself (Ajoh) are hanging out in Bella's room and in the second recording (R2), Bella, Thandi and Quinta prepare for and shoot a video for Girl Chat in Quinta's sitting room. I am not present during the conversations leading up to the filming and I'm also absent from the filming of the Girl Chat video because I was taking a break from appearing in Girl Chat videos at the time for personal reasons. However, I still had to be part of all other activities necessary for the creation of Girl Chat content, which is why I joined them towards the end of the shoot for a Girl Chat meeting.

In both tapes, there are different activities happening either simultaneously or sequentially. The main activities in R1 are watching TV, picking out outfits and coming up with ideas for an upcoming photoshoot and eating food that is prepared and served by Bella who takes on the role

of hostess, and cake bought by Thandi. In R2, we meet to film Girl Chat conversations. R2 takes place in Quinta's house so she takes on the hostess role. She is the one who worries about what they will eat. She is the one who goes out to get snacks (where Bella cooked food) and takes care of anything the others might need from the 'owner' of the space. However, they also have to shoot videos for Girl Chat, so they get ready, all members help in putting the set together, they shoot the videos, and then have their planned Girl Chat meeting thereafter.

Discourse is the primary mode through which these activities are coordinated and realised. There is a consistent stream of talk on various issues occasioned by the interactional context. In R1 there are five main conversational threads. These include commentary on TV programs, talk related to photoshoots, talk related to the food they are eating, talk related to work/business and talk about family. Figure 5.1 shows the topics discussed within each of the conversational threads.

Table 5.1 Conversational threads in R1

Conversational thread	**topics**
Commentary about TV programs	● Talk about the events in the specific show or movie. ● Talk related to the TV personalities and celebrities in the movie or TV show e.g. talk about the real life relationship of a celebrity who is part of the program we are watching. ● Commentary about the clothes/fashion of the people on TV ● Talk about finding something interesting to watch on TV
Photoshoot	● Talk around what outfits to wear for a shoot that has already been planned by Thandi and Bella (not for Girl Chat) ● Borrowing each other's clothes ● Fantasising and creating excitement about future shoots that have not yet been planned ● Excitement about the effects the pictures will have on their online followers once they are posted on social media

Work	● Talk about events that happened at work (mainly from Zinhle) ● Talk about Bella's business ● Fantasising about future success, winning awards - references to Girl Chat ● Uncertainties about the future - 'will our dreams come true?' ● What needs to be done and what sacrifices that need to be made to succeed
Food	● Commentary about the food Bella cooked ● Commentary about the cake bought by Thandi and Zinhle
Family	● Challenges faced by siblings ● Commentary about parents' behaviour ● Talk about life with family when they were younger

Most of the conversations in R1 revolve around the programs they are watching on TV, followed by conversations around the photoshoot they have planned and other imaginary shoots. This recording is filmed around the time when participants have their dinner, so there is some talk related to the food and to the cake Thandi brought. There are a few instances in which participants talk about their families as well. How participants move from one thread to the next is mainly influenced by the activity taking place. If they are watching TV, the conversation will mostly involve commentary on the TV program. If they are eating, the conversation will revolve around the food, who is serving the food, how good the food tastes, how the food was made and so on. There can be overlaps between threads as conversation in one thread usually leads to conversation in another. For example, talk in the TV commentary thread can lead to photoshoot talk which can lead to fantasies about being successful and so on. Because there is no purpose for this meeting, unlike R2 where they are meeting specifically to create content for Girl Chat, the conversation is fluid and easily moves from topic to topic and from thread to thread.

In R2, there are four main conversational threads, namely: talk related to Girl Chat activities, commentary based on posts and messages coming from social media, talk related to celebrities and talk related to food. Table 5.2 outlines these conversational threads and their related topics.

Table 5.2 Conversational threads in R2

Conversational thread	**topics**
Girl Chat	● Going over content for the conversation they are about to film ● Conversation around preparing the set and getting ready for the shoot ● Filming the conversations ● Talk about how to grow their social media platform ● Talk about roles and responsibilities of each Girl Chat member ● Talk about the way forward for Girl Chat ● Lack of support from friends for Girl Chat
Commentary based on social media posts	● Reading and commenting on interesting posts from Twitter and Instagram ● Comments about messages coming through WhatsApp
Food	● Talk about what to eat ● Talk about who is buying snacks and how much to buy
Celebrities	● Celebrity gossip

Conversations in R2 mainly revolve around Girl Chat activities. The conversation leading up to the video shoot is similar to R1 in that participants easily move from one thread/topic to the next. However, once they start setting up for the shoot, during the shoot and during the Girl Chat meeting held afterwards, the conversations tend to stick to particular topics, usually within the Girl Chat thread. Conversational threads are picked up and dropped based on the interactional needs and the nonverbal activities taking place. Although I have presented the threads and topics as distinct categories, there are areas of overlap as highlighted in the discussion of R1.

Aside from the threads and topics I have identified, talk may also revolve around services such as, serving food, asking one participant to help pass a phone charger or asking for water if someone is going to the fridge. There is also talk related to solving practical problems, such as helping Quinta figure out how to resolve the problems she is having with her bank application. The

participants' joint activities (e.g. creating content for Girl Chat, watching TV and planning shoots) and the talk through which these activities are coordinated so that they are enjoyable to members form part of the joint enterprise of their community of practice. Storytelling and instances of conversational play may occur in all threads and topics. Below, I look specifically at the nature of storytelling within these conversations

5.2.1. Storytelling in private conversations

One of the first challenges I faced in the analysis phase of this study was deciding what was a story and what was not. Labov (1972a: 360) defines narrative as the "recapitulation of past, temporally and sequentially linked events", and suggests a six-part structure, that culminates in a crisis which is resolved by the protagonist[4]. As discussed in Chapter 2 (sections 2.4.2 and 2.4.3), stories within Labov and Waletzky's (1967) paradigm tend to have a clear beginning, middle and end, and they are usually about unusual events such as a near death experience. The events narrated are often known only to the teller and they are usually narrated in interview settings to the researcher. These stories can be more easily detached from the interview contexts in which they occur without losing much of the essence of the story. The stories told tend to have a clear moral stance or lesson learnt from the events narrated which are usually shared in the coda. These types of stories have been referred to as canonical stories or big stories.

Although the terminologies developed in Labov's framework have given me a vocabulary to use in describing and making sense of the stories in my data, the framework does not make room for the analysis of other types of narratives that may not fit his six stage criteria. Other researchers working with conversational data have experienced similar difficulties and this has led to the growth of other frameworks that allow for a larger variety of narrative activity to be studied (Ochs and Capps, 2001; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Georgakopoulou 2008; Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008). One such approach is the small stories paradigm (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008: Georgakopoulou, 2008) (see section 2.3.4.). This paradigm makes room for shared stories, stories that are not always about past events, and are not always narrated from start to finish. These stories do not always have a goal or coda, and the point of the stories are not always obvious or highlighted.

1) [4]Abstract 2) orientation 3) complicating action 4) evaluation 5) resolution 6) Coda. See section 2.4.3 for a description of each stage of Labov's framework

In line with small stories research, the stories found within my data are highly interactive with multiple active (co)tellers. They mainly cover everyday, mundane events such as what happened at the grocery store, a thought that crossed the teller's mind earlier in the day or a telephonic conversation the teller had with one of the participants or someone outside the group. They are not easily detachable from surrounding talk, as these stories are usually occasioned and tend to make sense only within the contexts within which they emerge. They are also open ended in terms of temporal or causal order. For instance, the telling of a story may begin in the middle of events if the beginning of the story is presumed to be known by interlocutors. Tellers may then back track if their interlocutors ask for clarifications. Lastly, the moral stance or lesson learnt in stories told in conversation are usually worked out during the telling and so they are usually fluid and uncertain (unlike stories told in the online context which will be discussed in chapter 7). The goal of these stories told in private conversations is not always to reflect on lessons learned or the moral stance; instead they are told for the purposes of updating each other on their individual experiences, achieving interactional or pragmatic goals and for creating opportunities for joint sense making.

5.2.2. Themes in private (offline) stories

The three dominant themes found in the stories include: *career aspiration, respectability/morality* and *beauty*/*the female body*. I use the term 'theme' to refer to the recurring issues and concerns that thread through their stories (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In other words, themes refer to the underlying issues that interlocutors orient to, and draw from, to make sense of their experiences. For instance, a story that is presented as being about watching "video hoes" on TV (which is a subtopic within the TV commentary thread) becomes a commentary on (their own) respectability and morality standards or career aspirations (theme). The theme may be seen as the connotative meaning of the stories that emerge in the unfolding of the telling. Below I discuss each of the three themes.

- **Career aspiration/ambition**: Career aspirations is the most salient theme in the stories within the data. The participants construct themselves as women who aspire to career success (money) and fame. They position themselves as women who value an entrepreneurial spirit, hard work, focus and self-motivation. The work the participants were doing on Girl Chat, their YouTube channel, was partly driven by a desire for career growth. It was a platform that could potentially grow to something bigger, that could improve their financial standing and overall

social status. They believed that if they kept on working and adapting their technique, sooner or later, they would gain the type of following that translates to success on social media platforms. Their obsession with career growth and financial success further pointed to the 'now' as a time when they did not yet possess the things they aspired to have. Their conversations and specifically the stories they told thus provided a space where their ambitions and present reality confronted each other.

- **Respectability/morality**: In terms of respectability/morality, the participants constructed themselves as strong and agentive women who consciously push back against stereotypes about what a 'good' African woman should be. They also portrayed themselves as women who operate within their own moral standards, although their standards were always in relation to conventional standards. They drew from and critiqued larger societal discourses about what is moral or respectable for a woman, and through storytelling they jointly negotiated the group's own norms about these issues.

- **Female body/beauty**: This theme is related to respectability and morality as it broadly covers the group's understanding of the politics of the female body in terms of what a woman may do with her body and what is taboo. They positioned themselves as women who embrace their feminine bodies, and believed it is their right to do as they please with their bodies. However, they recognized the negative consequences that may arise with this awareness or body consciousness. This theme also covers the issue of beauty and fashion, where the group presented themselves as women who place high value on looking beautiful and on how they style themselves. The nature of their work on Girl Chat further required this attention to physical aesthetics. They organised photoshoots for which clothes are curated to fit the image of the strong African queens they were constructing on their online platforms and in their daily lives.

Although I have discussed these themes separately, any single story may touch on some or all of them. Narratives allow tellers to connect different aspects of their experiences at any point in time. For instance, sometimes moral standards are seen as the cause of the group's lack of career success, and in other stories, there is the recognition that to be successful you need to first take care of the physical appearance and so on. I will now look at how storytelling in private conversations functions as a key part of the machinery through which friendship bonds between the participants

are sustained. I identify three main functions: Storytelling as a tool for 1) updating the shared stock of knowledge between participants, 2) assessing the self, other and world, and the state of their relationship 3) showing vulnerability and caring for each other at the level of discourse.

5.3. Narrative updates

Storytelling plays the role of keeping the shared stock of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) or the conversational and relational common ground between participants up to date. The conversations in the data build on and depend on the participants' history of sharing information and experiences with each other for meaning. To keep the relationships going, they must continuously update each other on what is happening in their individual lives as well as any other information they think will be meaningful, entertaining or useful to the group. I argue that the participants do not share every last detail of their lives at all times just to keep the relationship going. They need only share that which they can intuit, from their past interactions, will hold some value for their audience. In other words, they share stories they believe will add to the community's assets. This is why observing the kinds of stories told in the group's conversations, the themes they cover and the conclusions they draw can reveal some of the core ideological and interpretive frames that hold them together as a group. Sharing and jointly reflecting on their life experiences ensures that individuals have the most up to date information they need to engage in any kind of (re)assessment of self, relationships and sense of reality.

This process of updating each other on what is 'new' is not a systematic one. It is only a partially intentional process that no one participant has control over. Because this process of updating tends to happen during the course of naturally occurring conversation, interlocutors do not always know ahead of the interaction what they will be sharing. Of course, an individual can make a mental note to tell a certain story when next they are in conversation with a certain friend, but even then, they cannot always predict exactly how they will tell the story, even less how their audience might react to and interpret the details of the story. Narrative updates, as I will show, tend to be locally occasioned in the interactional context. The previous turn of one interlocutor, something on TV or a message that an interlocutor receives can trigger narrative updates.

Lastly, as participants share their (mostly recent) life experiences, it is not just the event in the story that gets added to the participants' common ground. In conversational storytelling, the teller's

experience, the teller's evaluation or 'take-away' from the experience, as well as the reaction of the audience to the telling are added to the existing stock of knowledge shared by participants. These updates tend to form the basis of and for future interactions. Within these narrative interactions, both teller and audience work together to arrive at what the significance of a certain narrative might be. This further ensures that no one person has control over what meanings and conclusions emerge from the narrative activity. This is not to say that the participants always agree with each other. Indeed, participants may leave a narrative event with the shared understanding that they hold a different perspective about that particular issue. Below I analyse two stories to illustrate the aforementioned arguments.

In the first extract, the participants are watching a movie called Rush Hour. It is an action comedy in which Chris Tucker and Jackie Chan play the role of detectives working together on a high-profile kidnapping case. The Chinese ambassador's daughter has been kidnapped, and both detectives work courageously to find her. The scene the participants are currently watching is the climax of the action in the movie with lots of guns, bombs and fight scenes as the detectives face the criminal mob to apprehend those responsible for the kidnapping. This scene triggers the telling of the story about the robbery at Pulse. Pulse is a restaurant in which the group usually hosts Girl Chat events. The gist of the story, that armed robbers attacked Pulse, is known by all participants except Zinhle. However, Thandi has acquired additional details about what happened from a known acquaintance while Bella and I also have more details, from Buhle, the manager of the restaurant, who was at the scene when the thieves attacked. This story, which starts out as Thandi's attempt to share the new information she has acquired concerning the robbery becomes a joint effort to unify all the different pieces of the story that both parties possess into one shared story, literally adding new information, like puzzle pieces, to form an updated and shared 'whole'. This interaction has been shortened to facilitate the presentation of arguments, hence, certain turns that consist of unrelated parallel conversations have been omitted. The complete transcript is included in Appendix 5.

Extract 5.1. Robbery at Pulse

1. Thandi: (in relation to the movie) what the fuck kind of job is this that you have to like (.2) set off and set bombs like yoh you can die any minute
   (.17)
2. Thandi: imagine if you were in a real life situation like that

3. Zinhle: like guns and shit
4. Thandi: YO::H guys so I went to ((Hami's)) (.1) and then he tells me about Pulse - about what happened at [Pulse]
5. Zinhle: [was he there]
6. Thandi: ***No::*** a customer came and then the customer was so depressed lost everything they came with <u>seven</u> <u>guns</u> seven whole guns seven men all having guns (claps once) seven (chuckles and claps once) how the fuck is that a reality like (.1.5)
7. Ajoh: Buhle said they entered they ordered two castle lights they ordered wings they sat they ate and then they went and they came back for their friend (.) they hit her in the head twice with the gun
8. Zinhle: and they were - sorry I can't [hear] <u>yo::h</u>
9. Thandi: [Did she fall - did she faint
10. Ajoh: I don't know they hit her in the head [with a gun
11. Zinhle: [who
12. Ajoh: Buhle the woman who (.) [/was there/ she's like her head was
13. Thandi: [***yoh guys*** what does she /look/
14. Ajoh: she's actually going to therapy
15. Thandi: hu:: is she fine
16. Ajoh: yeah
17. Zinhle: which one the one who owns /?/ place there
(Bella shows her new work jacket)
(omitted turns: unrelated conversation about Bella's jacket)
18. Thandi: [yoh Buhle fuck man (.1) yoh hai
19. Ajoh: but they say they have footage they boys came without any masks nothing nothing so their faces are [very visible] they're gonna get arrested
20. Thandi: [they're so stupid]
21. Ajoh: I don't think they'd - they had thought that Pulse would have cameras [because] it's so like
22. Thandi: [mhm] (.1) Pulse=
23. Ajoh: =[Pulse]
24. Zinhle: [vibey]
25. Ajoh: yeah
26. Zinhle: and hippy YOH [but they hit her in the head
27. Ajoh: [everybody's phone everybody's ph - everything they hit her on the head when she was trying to give them the money she was like they had a gun to her head
(.5)
28. Thandi: yoh
(.5)
29. Thandi: yoh
(omitted turns: Zinhle's second story about a robbery at Spar)
30. Thandi: ***yo::h that man had a gun to Khonzie's head bruh***=
31. Bella: =I'm telling you [that was like for real yoh] (.2) that was like for real
32. Thandi: **(*squeals*)** (.1) ***yuh gu::ys that is so deep***
(omitted turns: Bella offering Ajoh a drink)

33. Bella: Buh[hle] there was a gun on her head imagine
34. Thandi: [wo::w] yoh yoh yoh yoh yoh yoh yoh yoh yoh yoh I'm sure she [can't sleep]
35. Zinhle: [I don't know what I would have done hey]
(Thandi inhales loudly)
36. Bella: No but she's fine
37. Thandi: yoh [she's strong] hey [she went back to work]
38. Ajoh: [she's strong]
39. Bella: [she's fine] yeah - even - I think=
40. Ajoh: =she said the next day she / ?/
41. Bella: yeah and then she said [yoh]
42. Ajoh: [she's like] the saturday was empty saturday business was as if it never [/?/
43. Bella: [/it never happened?/ she says everything is fine the people are coming
44. Zinhle: that's good though that people are still going at least they they're not losing business
(.5)
45. Thandi: ***shu*:** (sucks teeth) ***hai man*** what is wrong with people human beings are so fucked up
46. Bella: she says they might (.1) they might find the people because they have (.)
47. Thandi: the footage
48. Bella: they had - they had the footage
49. Thandi: mhm Chiara (my other name) said (.2) YO::::::H
(omitted turns: commentary on movie)
50. Thandi: Guys life is so traumatic
51. Zinhle: yo:h
(.3)
52. Thandi: (***ha::::***) ye ye ye ye being alive is a constant state of fury not - not fury just like (.1.5) - like (.) like you don't know
53. Zinhle: right?
54. Bella: like you don't know (inaudible)
55. Thandi: like existence is so fragile

In turn 1 we can see Thandi making a comment about the movie, about how stressful working with bombs must be. Thandi and Zinhle's comments in turns 2 and 3 effectively occasion the storytelling that follows in Thandi's Turn 4. She shares the bits of information she got from Hami's place: seven men with seven guns attacked Pulse (turn 6) and I proceed to provide the details that Bella and I received from Buhle, the manager of Pulse who was there on the night of the robbery. Realising that I have more information on the story, Thandi and Zinhle start directing more questions at me (turn 8 - 17): "did she fall, did she faint", "is she fine", "who the one who owns the place there". These questions shape what information I am able to provide about the robbery and they are intended to fill up the gaps in Thandi's version of the story. In turn 18, Thandi goes

back to the story, after the detour in the conversation, still expressing her shock over what happened. This triggers the provision of additional details of what happened, which includes the fact that Pulse's security cameras picked up the faces of the perpetrators (turn 19), the armed robbers held a gun to Buhle's head and even hit her with it (turns 26 and 27), and later, that business was almost back to normal the following day at Pulse (turns 42 and 43).

Each participant, especially Thandi, demonstrates distress at what happened to Buhle. Thandi is beside herself. She squeals, speaks in a high pitched voice, cusses, exclaims loudly and repeatedly (turn 32, 34, 45 & 52), while Zinhle expresses that she does not know what she would have done if it had happened to her (turn 35). Bella steps in to reassure the group that Buhle is fine. This is her attempt to ease some of the distress the story is causing: "No but she's fine". This shifts the focus of their evaluations to Buhle, whom they all agree is "strong" because she went back to work the next day and seems to be coping fine. Eventually, they arrive at the coda, provided by Thandi: "guys life is so traumatic" and uncertain "you don't know", "existence is so fragile"

This interaction clearly shows how through conversational storytelling, the participants are able to jointly update their shared stock of knowledge as they provide each other with pieces of information they did not have prior to the narrative event. It is also an opportunity for them to jointly sympathise with Buhle and reflect on the fragility and uncertainty of life. What follows this transcript is two additional stories told by Zinhle about similarly shocking and traumatic events that she knows of: a robbery that took place at Spar (a chain store in South Africa) and a deadly accident that took place in her brother's school. Thandi, Bella and I are hearing about these events for the first time and once they are narrated, they add to the overall pool of stories about traumatic events that the group now shares. The additional stories told by Zinhle also reinforce the take away from the Pulse story about just how easily one's life can take a traumatic turn. Therefore, Thandi and Zinhle's stories serve the purpose of adding new information into the pool of shared knowledge. These stories also update the shared pool of knowledge by consolidating previously shared knowledge about life as a whole: "it is a constant state of fury" and "we do not know" what traumas we will suffer just by virtue of being alive. I describe updated information as *fuel* because without these updates, the relationship may not run as smoothly as the pool of knowledge from which they are able to make correct inferences about each other and what is happening in their interactions will grow stale, thus stifling the growth of their relationship.

Something worth mentioning, albeit somewhat off topic, is that this story is different from the majority of the stories in my data in three main ways: 1) the narrated events are highly unusual, 2) the storytelling is much longer than most other stories in the data and 3) the story does not deal with any of the main themes highlighted above due to the unusual events it covers. This story is the second longest story in both audio recordings on which my analysis is based. The longest storytelling interaction consists of similarly unusual events[5] and the transcript of that story goes on for several pages. Both stories do not deal with any of the themes. This leads me to believe that such stories which essentially disrupt the routines of everyday life require more attention. It is not normal for seven men with seven guns to attack a restaurant they frequent, putting the lives of people they know in danger. Apart from the highly interactive nature of this storytelling event and the fact that some details of the story are shared by some interlocutors, this story has more in common with big stories. It is a story about unusual events that disrupt our sense of the 'normal' and the routine and taken-for-granted nature of everyday life. As a result, the story is highly evaluated, it has a clear resolution and addresses the lessons learned or the participants moral stance towards the events narrated.

Our perception of what is 'normal' is informed by the various foundational myths we hold on to, without which life would seem completely random and chaotic (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Cameron & Palan, 2004). In order to keep on living life day to day, we hold on to the myths that keep our symbolic universe intact (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Some people, for example, are able to carry on living because they believe that a divine entity watches over them and protects them, while others rely on man-made laws or science to have a sense of safety and order. However, when events like the armed robbery narrated here, sickness or death happen, it becomes harder to ignore the chaos that is constantly lurking. We are confronted with the knowledge that completely unexpected and traumatic things can happen to anyone at any time. This may explain why the telling of such stories tends to last much longer than the telling of mundane events.

In the story above, the new information that is shared is accepted at face value by participants without any contestations. However, other attempts to update the shared stock of knowledge via narratives are met with resistance. In other words, some attempts to add a new entry into the shared pool of knowledge can become a negotiation of which interpretation of the events will be taken

[5] The participants asked that the details of this story be kept confidential.

up. Below, I look at an example of such an interaction. The story is told by Thandi about why she bought cake instead of apple crumble for dessert. At the beginning of the recording, Bella and I are at home and our conversation is mainly commentary about the show we are watching on TV. Around forty-nine minutes into the recording, Thandi and Zinhle walk into the room with bags of food from the grocery store. There is talk and excitement regarding the food, especially regarding the cake. A few minutes later, the group goes back to having conversation, mainly about the program on TV until about two hours and twenty five minutes into the tape, when Thandi suddenly launches the story about how she ended up buying a cake instead of the apple crumble.

This story, like the Pulse story, features an absent protagonist, a "white lady" who complimented Thandi's outfit, before suggesting that Thandi could buy apple crumble pie for dessert which she can serve with a "dollop" of yoghurt. The conversation with the "white lady", specifically the compliment, becomes the main point of focus in the interaction after Bella and Zinhle call Thandi out for overstating the compliment she received. This story, like the story about the robbery at Pulse, is used to share an account of something that happened in the absence of the interlocutors. It updates the stock of shared knowledge between the participants, but the up-take of the events narrated, and the teller's interpretation does not happen as easily as in the Pulse story. Indeed, Thandi has to 'fight' for the conversational floor to see her story through to the end.

Extract 5.2. Thandi's greatness

1. Thandi: I actually wanted to buy apple crumble and then that white lady said - she comes to me and she's like "woah you're fabulous" and I'm like ["yes"=
   [(Thandi snaps fingers once, then Thandi laughs)
2. Bella: =YOU LOOK SO GOOD (Thandi still laughing, but it's now a high pitched laughter)
3. Zinhle: right
4. Bella: why didn't you buy the apple thing
5. Zinhle: right
6. Thandi: and so and then she's like uh and then we talk we talk about my greatness and then I'm like=
7. Zinhle: =your gr[eatness WOW
8. Bella: [ha Thandi likes things like [THA:T ***oo:::h***
9. Thandi: [NO like that that's literally like that's
10. Zinhle: ["we talked about my greatness"
11. Thandi: [summary of that conversation
12. Bella: your greatness
13. Thandi: me and my greatness (Thandi laughs)
14. Zinhle: ["talk about my greatness"

15. Bella: [I think that's -[that's all
16. Thandi: [and then we were done speaking about [my greatness
17. Bella: [that's all you wanted us to know that [you were talking about your greatness
18. Thandi: [no no no t[hat's not
19. Bella: [fuck that that's what you wanted us to know
20. Thandi: ***no*** that's not motherfucker (.) let me finish my story and then I ask her oh and then I ask her like like like cuz i didn't know what kind of dessert I must buy like I didn't know so I was like what do you suggest and then she's like I must (chuckle) buy the apple crumble and "just a dollop of yoghurt?" (All three laugh)
21. Zinhle: a DOLLO:P [(Zinhle laughs loudly starts coughing)
22. Thandi: [that's what I wanted to tell you guys fuck=
23. Bella: =that's all
24. Zinhle: a doll[op
25. Bella: [a dollop
26. Thandi: a dollop of yoghurt
27. Zinhle: wooh (couch cough)
28. Thandi: "and grate some chocolate on top" and then I was like "yes that might sound delicious" but then I was like "yoh I have too many things to carry" *poop* I returned all of those things [and bought cake
29. Zinhle: [a dollop
30. Bella: you just want us to know about your greatness [/?/
31. Zinhle: [you know
32. Thandi: but my greatness is my greatness and it's not like you guys didn't see it when I came=
33. Bella: =yeah we know we saw your great[ness
34. Thandi: [I know you saw it so [I don't have to remind you
35. Zinhle: [so you just rub it in our fa[ces (.) wow *femeli* [*family*]
36. Bella: [so why are you trying to rub your greatness into our faces
37. Thandi: I am just telling you guys and like about an account an actual account (Bella laughs) that I had
38. Bella: why are you trying to like - yeah we are - we - [we saw it
39. Zinhle: [right [right
40. Thandi: [hate if you want
41. Bella: yeah let me just see what I am going [to wear tomorrow
42. Thandi: [hate if you want motherfuckers

As seen in the previous story, updating the shared stock of knowledge is not a systematic process, but one that is occasioned by the interactional context and history between participants. In some cases, as with this story about dessert, there is no immediate or explicit link between the conversation that immediately precedes the story and the story that emerges. It is difficult to say exactly what may have triggered Thandi's story (especially given the limitations of working only

with audio instead of, say, video recordings of the interaction). Before Thandi's turn 1, there was no silence she could have been trying to fill. In fact, there was an active ongoing conversation that had nothing to do with food. Zinhle had been talking about her younger sister and had just asked a question to the group that still needed to be answered when Thandi latched onto her utterance to launch her story. It could be that one of the participants reached for the cake that was placed on the table or that Thandi herself was about to have some of it and this triggered the memory of why she had bought cake instead of apple crumble. However, the argument can still be made that this story is locally occasioned by the fact that the food had been purchased, and the participants (especially Bella and I) had spent time, earlier in the conversation, being excited about the food and the cake in particular. Without these preceding actions, this story may not have emerged the way that it did.

Furthermore, updating the pool of shared information is not a systematic process, so it follows that all information that is presented to the group does not always receive the same treatment. In the story launcher[6] (a term I used to describe the turn within which the story is introduced into the conversation), Thandi announces that she actually wanted to buy apple crumble. She then proceeds to narrate the dialogue that transpired between the white lady and herself which involved the white lady complimenting her: "woah you're fabulous". Bella and Zinhle are willing to accept that this dialogue really did take place especially because they themselves agree with the white lady's supposed sentiments as seen in turns 2 and 3. Once they acknowledge that Thandi does look "SO GOOD" (turn 2), Bella brings the conversation back to the story that was promised in the story launcher: "why didn't you buy the apple thing" (turn 4). Before Thandi provides the answer, she presents what she later calls the summary of the conversation between herself and the white lady: "we talk about my greatness". This provokes Bella and Zinhle to playfully taunt Thandi from turns 7 to 19 as they accuse her of merely wanting to brag, and that this story had nothing to do with cake, as the story launcher had promised. What is important for now is that the terms of what Thandi's story is *really* about (new information) is being contested, and the group needs to jointly

[6] In many of the stories in my data, the boundaries between the abstract, orientation and the first narrative clause(s) were not always clear cut. In most cases, all three parts would be fused together especially when some of the details, such as the *where* and *when* of a story were assumed to be already known from past conversations. I found the term *story launcher* to be helpful in referring to the start of the narrative activity in a particular context as it includes those beginnings that do not necessarily have a fully developed abstract and orientation (Labov, 1972) or story preface (Sacks, 1972).

work out how this new information and its implications will be encoded into their shared pool of knowledge.

In addition, the teller, or the presenter of the new information (e.g. what happened in the grocery store) has no control over how that information will be received by their audience. We can see in turn 20 that there is more to Thandi's story, contrary to Bella's claim that Thandi's "greatness" was "all [Thandi] wanted [them] to know". According to Thandi, the white woman went on to suggest that she should buy apple crumble and enjoy it with a "dollop of yoghurt". "A dollop of yoghurt" is said with an accent that is meant to index what a middle class white lady might sound like. The switch in accents constructs the lady's supposed utterance as 'such a white lady thing to say', something Thandi believes her fellow black friends will also find amusing. This may also be why the woman's race was specified from the beginning of the story: "a white lady" and not simply "a lady". As intuited by Thandi, her audience finds the use of the phrase quite hilarious, evidenced by the laughter and repetition of the word "dollop" by all participants in turn 21, 24-26 and 29. In turn 22 Thandi insists that the white lady's amusing dessert recommendation is what she really wanted to share, contrary to Bella's accusations in turns 15, 17 and 19. Thandi is finally able to provide the coda to the story about why she bought cake instead of apple crumble that was promised in the story launcher: "and then I was like 'yes that might sound delicious' but then I was like 'yoh I have too many things to carry' *poop* I returned all of those things [the apple crumble and the yoghourt] and bought cake". Although Thandi's story has had the desired effect on her audience, Bella is still not convinced, and she insists, in turn 30, that this whole story had really been about Thandi's "greatness". What ensues is more teasing from Bella and Zinhle with Thandi having to defend herself.

Through this interaction, new information about what happened to Thandi earlier that day is updated and the idea that Thandi thoroughly enjoys compliments (which has been established in previous interactions and thus already common knowledge) is further consolidated through a negotiation process that is neither systematic, linear (from teller to audience) nor unanimous. A narrative update is thus achieved through joint effort in which meanings and interpretations of the new events may be contested, and the intentions of the teller may be derailed by the audience who may be using different interpretive frames to make sense of the events in the story. Similar to the story about the robbery at Pulse, multiple levels of meanings are encoded into the shared knowledge pool in this interaction. In addition to the reason why we are having cake instead of

apple crumble for dessert, and Thandi's love for compliments, certain differences between themselves as black women and the white lady which are intuitively understood by all participants are reaffirmed. We can see the *next-turn proof procedure* (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008) in the fact that Thandi's interlocutors understand and are entertained by the punchline of her story without Thandi having to explicitly explain why the white lady's utterance is funny. Their enjoyment of the funny story reaffirms their shared understanding of ways of speaking associated with different racial groups and social classes.

The analysis of the two stories above show that the process of updating the stock of knowledge via narrative entails jointly processing the events narrated by the (co)tellers. The principle teller has the responsibility to provide additional information and evaluations needed to make sense of the story, while the others make comments, ask questions, provide additional details or react in other sometimes unanticipated ways in relation to the story. All interlocutors play an active role in the storytelling activity in a process that simultaneously grounds multiple layers of meanings into a shared knowledge system. This recurring and collaborative process of storytelling works to send across the metamessage (Tannen, 1986) of involvement at the relational level. Although the story may not be accepted or interpreted as the teller intended, the willingness to tell and listen to each other's stories communicates and builds rapport between the participants. Both the acceptance of the details in the Pulse robbery story and the contestation of Thandi's telling of the events that took place at the store may be considered *appropriate* behaviour (Locher and Watts, 2005) in this group as opposed to polite or impolite behaviour. Normative ways of agreeing and disagreeing that have been jointly worked out through their discourse practices over time can only become visible in interaction rather than prior to it. This points to some of the tacit knowledge that form part of the participants "friendship contract" described by Thandi in Chapter 4 (section 4.3, extract 4.5). *Knowing* what to say, how to say it and what to leave unsaid is not automatic, it happens through continuous engagement.

Furthermore, updating the shared knowledge pool via narrative highlights the affordances of *double chronology* at play in narratives where the past is brought into the present. In narrative encounters, both teller and audience oscillate between the tale world and the world of the interaction. The audience is brought into the tale world through the animation of events, specifically the animation of the dialogue that transpired between the characters in the tale world.

In this way the audience *witnesses* the narrated events from the teller's point of view (Georgakopoulou, 1995, 2022; Anderst, 2019). By becoming witnesses, the teller's interpretations of events, the identities that are constructed of the taleworld characters and the *line* (Goffman, 1967) the teller is taking in relation to the narrated events in the interaction become available to the audience through explicit and implicit cues from the teller. That is, they are able to 'witness' what is said and what is not said through the telling. Just as would be the case if they had been there when the events actually took place, they can draw their own conclusions which may or may not align with the teller's own. Through this process of witnessing, and collaborating with the teller, multiple levels of knowledge are grounded into the shared knowledge pool.

5.4. Narrative as a mode for (re)assessing self, other and the world

In addition to updating the shared pool of knowledge through storytelling, I argue that storytelling in conversational discourse creates room for the implicit and explicit processes of (re)assessing the individual's sense of self, other, their relationship with each other and the world. Through the narrative interaction, established knowledge about fellow interlocutors such as, their beliefs, values, aspirations and ideological positions on a variety of issues, as well as the participants' relational positions towards each other are all open for renegotiation and re-evaluation. I argue that the practice of storytelling in everyday conversation becomes an important tool for expanding and adding nuances to what they know about each other, their relationship towards each other, and their world. Their ability to critically engage in these (re)assessments together in an honest and usually blunt fashion fosters a sense of friendship among the participants.

Again, this process is only partially intentional as no one participant has control of the way the conversation will unfold. As I have discussed, the participants do not have a systematic way of deciding which ideologies or frames for the understandings of self and reality will be utilised in the interpretation of stories, as they have no way of predicting what stories will be occasioned within any conversation. Nonetheless, once a story is launched, in negotiating the telling with one's interlocutors, a simultaneous process of (re)assessment of the interpretive frames being used to make sense of the events being narrated and to manage the turn by turn unfolding of the narrative is also underway. The way tellers construct the story reveals the interpretive frames or macro discourses they are drawing from and based on this, the audience may support the teller's interpretation or provide alternative interpretations that may be based on entirely different

interpretive frames. Below I look at two extracts to show how this process of reassessing one's self and reality is interactionally achieved in narrative events.

The first story is told by Bella to Thandi and I about a mutual friend, Nina (pseudonym), who is interested in getting contacts of people who can get her into night clubs. The emergent point of Bella's story is to highlight that she has her priorities in order as she is only interested in getting business contracts (not in going clubbing). This, for her, is a testament of how mature she has become. Bella's telling runs into trouble when Thandi explicitly challenges the conclusions that Bella has drawn from the events she narrated, leading to a negotiation of the meaning of the events narrated and its implications for the protagonists, narrator and audience.

Extract 5.3. Club vs contract stories

1. Bella: I have this friend chiara you know Emma
2. Ajoh: mhm
3. Bella: Emma that used to study together (.) she's like "do you know anybody who can take us to (.) em – who can take us to the club tonight and I'm like "girl I'm thinking of the person who is going to give me the next contract" (laughs)
4. Thandi: wo:w Bella what the fuck (.) who said she's not thinking about that, she's just wants to go to a club fuck you : (sucks teeth)
5. Bella: oh God I am here thinking (sucks teeth) stressing on how to get my next
6. Thandi: That's fucked up Bella I won't lie to you (.4) that's classist and egregious
7. Bella: that's when you know you guys (.1) you guys have the s - different perspective in life (almost whispering)
8. Thandi: who?
9. Bella: huh I am talking about me and this friend like we have diff-
10. Thandi: Just because your - your ass is bored (Bella laughs) and you ain't got no plans and no money doesn't mean (chuckles) that girl is not thinking about her future
11. Bella: no the thing is she is always on my head like because (.) that time we used to like - I used to have contacts (chuckles) for clubbing and all that [she doesn't] know that nigger has grown up yeah
12. Thandi: [mmm] mhm

There is no conversation before the launch of this story. The participants are silently watching TV, before Bella starts narrating the conversation she had with Nina (who Thandi does not know). Although Bella's story seems to have come out of the blue, links can still be seen between her desire for opportunities for financial growth and the conversation the participants were having before they paused to watch TV. The conversation had revolved around the participants

willingness to do whatever it took to become financially well off. Bella might have still been chewing on these reflections in her mind which prompted the telling of this story.

Bella's turn 1 is an indication to the other participants that Bella is about to say something about Nina, the character she has just introduced. Turn 1 is also an invitation for engagement as Bella gets me involved by mentioning that I know this character. Bella then proceeds to give additional information about Nina as a girl they studied with at UWC. Given that I already know who Nina is, the background information is provided for Thandi's benefit. The background information provided by Bella simultaneously positions her as being in solidarity with Nina by creating the image of them as friends.

Bella gives a report of the conversation that she had with Nina in turn 3. It takes the form of dialogue consisting of two turns:

A. she's like "do you know anybody who can take us to (.) em - who can take us to the club tonight"
B. and I'm like "girl I'm thinking of the person who is going to give me the next contract" (laughs)

In the clauses above the alignment that was created in the story launcher is followed by Bella's constructed version of their dialogue which puts the two characters in opposition to one another. In the story launcher, she and Nina were referred to as 'we' in line with the idea of solidarity and friendship followed by a separation: then "she's like…" and "I'm like…" These two turns in the dialogue propose that the desire for "contracts" or opportunities for financial and overall advancement should take priority over less 'productive' activities such as going clubbing. This emerges as the goal of Bella's story in addition to showing how much she believes she has "grown up" since she can now prioritise accordingly. Within the larger context of their lives as individuals and their relationship with each other, which goes beyond this specific interaction, they are all working together and independently to secure opportunities for financial growth among other aspirations. In addition, the participants share ideas about what it will take to achieve their goals, including ideas about which activities should take priority in their lives at this point in time. Bella's story and others like it become the micro instances in which these larger aspirations and ideologies are (re)assessed, (re)affirmed, contested or reworked.

In this interaction, Bella's proposition that her ability to prioritise work over play is a sign of maturity on her part, is challenged by Thandi in turns 4, 6 and 10, in which she raises two alternative interpretations of Bella's story. The first point is that Nina's desire to go clubbing is not a clear indication that she does not care about her future (turn 4). In other words, she points out the false correlation upon which Bella's story and interpretations are built. The second alternative is that Bella has no choice but to prioritise "contracts" because "her ass is bored and [she] ain't got no plans and no money" (turn 10). In turn 6, Thandi point blank accuses Bella of being "classist and egregious[7]" for looking down on someone else's choices. Bella only addresses Thandi's counter propositions in turn 11. Bella continues with her version of the interpretation almost as if she could not hear Thandi's protests. In turn 5, she is about to emphasise just how much she is concerned with her future before Thandi interrupts to call her "classist and egregious". In turn 7, Bella states that the conversation with Nina let her know that they both have "different perspectives in life." At this point it seems Bella is talking more to herself than to Thandi as her volume decreases and Thandi does not clearly hear what she is saying, hence, turns 8 and 9 followed by Thandi's last challenge in turn 10.

Finally, Bella responds in turn 11 by providing additional details to counter Thandi's contestation. She explains that once upon a time she used to have a lot of clubbing contacts, and she would be the one who would hook her friends up. Having the contacts implies that she used to frequent the club scene, but now she does not, and this is why she no longer has contacts. Bella provides this explanation to justify why she perceives this as a sign of growth and maturity on her part. Bella does not explicitly address her opinion about Nina even after Thandi's points, nor does she address Thandi's accusation that she (Bella) is being prejudiced towards Nina. However, her explanation in turn 11 could imply that she used to be like Nina as they partied together once upon a time, but she has changed. It may also imply that the story was not meant to make Nina look like a person who does not have her priorities in order, but instead to show how Bella has finally got hers in order. Thandi seems to accept this explanation and thus concedes.

[7] I suspect that Thandi borrowed her words from an American TV show called *Girlfriends.* The show portrays the lives of four black female friends as they navigate life, love, work, family and their friendship. In season 4, episode 21, one of the friends (Maya) chastised the other (Joan) for being "classist and egregious" when Joan, who is an educated middle/upper class woman looked down at the things Maya wanted for her upcoming wedding. For Joan Maya's taste was too "ghetto". This is one of those eerie moments when life imitates art. It is also an instance of *intertextuality* where popular culture finds its way dialogically into everyday conversations..

The way the story is told and the interaction that follows between Bella and Thandi is one example of how storytelling becomes a multilayered activity. On one level, Bella is recounting a conversation she had with a friend and this reported conversation is used to further serve as evidence that she has grown up. In other words, an assessment of or reflection about how far she believes she has come since her clubbing days. On another level, they are jointly working out what it takes to be successful or the kinds of activities that may lead to financial success or contribute to one's "growing up". Thandi's alternative interpretations invite Bella to either rethink how she is evaluating herself in relation to Nina, or to provide additional information to show why her interpretation is the preferred one over Thandi's suggestions. Furthermore, Thandi emerges from the interaction as one who engages critically with information she receives from her friend and does not shy away from bluntly challenging Bella's views.

From a politeness paradigm, Thandi's challenge could be considered a face threatening act, but the need to engage critically and honestly with one's friend takes precedence over trying to save face. Narrative in conversational settings thus go beyond simply narrating events, to opening up opportunities for the participants to critically engage with the interpretive frameworks they use to make sense of the world around them and the personas they each try to construct for themselves in and through their stories. Critical engagement is considered an important aspect of what it means to be someone's friend by the participants in this study. It forms part of what Thandi referred to as their "friendship contract" which has been established and reinforced through their interactions over time. Holding each other accountable, being blunt and honest, in other words 'keeping things real' or telling it as it is has become part of the mutual engagements that hold this community of practice together. Literature on women friendships postulates that women strive for sameness in their relationships. Women are also said to utilise involvement strategies and to orient discourse towards positive face wants (Tannen, 2021; Alemán, 2016; Cronin, 2015). But as I argued in Chapter 4, while there may be some value in generalisations, they need to be tested in different contexts where different sociocultural factors and value systems may be at play. In this group the ability to challenge and accept challenges is considered more valuable than being similar to each other or avoiding what may be described as a face threatening act. It can be said that critical engagement is part of the participants' personal and, to a certain extent, moral commitment towards each other.

In addition to the critical reception a teller's interpretation of a story may receive, participants may draw on larger social discourses and ideologies in local conversation, creating room for these larger discourses to be assessed in terms of whether or not they work in these local contexts. This evaluation may lead to the consolidation of or the contestation and sometimes rejection of certain socially accepted ideological standpoints. In the story below, I show how the participants use available knowledge about marriage, specifically the issue of (in)fidelity in marriage and romantic relationships to their advantage at a micro level.

The extract consists of a hypothetical narrative told by Thandi to Bella, Zinhle and me. The conversation just before this story is minimal and involves mainly commentary on the show they are watching on TV. Bella then requests for a movie instead of the TV show they have been watching (in turn 1). Bella's request for a movie becomes an argument between Bella and Thandi over who has the right to choose what TV program to watch. It is important to note that Bella, Thandi and myself lived together. But for a brief period and at the time of this conversation, Thandi had been staying with Zinhle. This is why Thandi believes she should have the right to decide what they should watch since she has been away and has not watched her fair share of TV(see Appendix 5 for the turns leading up to this extract). The parallel between the hypothetical scenario and the right to choose what to view is explained in the analysis that follows.

Extract 5.4. "His business is my business"

1. Thandi: what so like say for instance this is like a weird example to use
   but anyway say for instance if you - if you have a husband right .
2. Bella: uhm
3. Thandi: and your husband has like a side bae right (Zinhle and Thandi chuckle) I just wanna understand
   if your husband is getting some extra things outside of - you know - outside of you and then also getting some things with you like how is it your business like the outside (all three laugh) it's not your business (.1) like you guys are here you're together
4. Bella: [I'm so
5. Zinhle: [you were right that is a weird example
6. Bella: I am so happy that you said it that it - if - if my husband (laughs) is that what you said (.)
   you should learn to choose your words you said my husband so like his business is my business
7. Thandi: listen (.) no his (all three laugh) yoh people people
8. Zinhle: yoh Bella you just turned that around hey (Bella laughs)
9. Thandi: okay let's say if you - is your husband's business your business
10. Bella: yeah
11. Zinhle: use your words
12. Thandi: okay let's not say husband

13. Bella: choose your words nicely
14. Thandi: is Bryan's business your business I mean is is your business Bryan's business
15. Bella: what now now
16. Zinhle: Bryan Bryan
17. Thandi: ***Bryan*** (sexy voice)
18. Bella: which Bryan
19. Thandi: your Bryan
20. Bella: like his business is my business
21. Thandi: is your business his business
22. Bella: yea - my business no (Thandi squeals) my business is my business his business is my business
23. Thandi: ehein
24. Zinhle: YO::H YOH
25. Thandi: that's exactly what I am saying
26. Bella: his business is my business my business is my business
27. Thandi: wow you're fucked up (Bella laughs) but your marriage will work
28. Zinhle: Bella is fucked up (all three laugh) I concur (Bella still laugh) I agree fully comrade (Zinhle laughs) I support you (whole utterance spoken in a smiley voice)

This extract is not a story in the traditional sense as it is not a story about past events. It is a hypothetical scenario constructed as a narrative text. In this way it may be considered a small story just like projections or refusals to tell (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008), which have interactional implications. In the story launcher, Thandi warns her audience that what she is about to share is "weird"; then she starts to build the hypothetical scenario, introduced by the hypothetical discourse marker "say for instance" (turn 1). In the hypothetical scenario, Thandi draws parallels between their living arrangements and a marriage in which the husband is unfaithful. In this scenario, Thandi is the husband, Zinhle (and her wifi) is the mistress, and Bella is the wife. Bella's position is that because Thandi has been enjoying other benefits with the mistress (wifi), she does not get any special treatment when she comes back home. Thandi's hypothetical scenario is then created to show that she should still have the right to choose what they will watch, as what the husband (Thandi) does out of the home/marriage is none of Bella's (the wife's) business: "it's not your business" (turn 3). But Bella, as Zinhle puts it, "turns it around" by providing the counter argument that her husband's business is indeed her business. If Thandi had the opportunity to watch all the same shows as those on TV while she had access to wifi at Zinhle's (the mistress) place, she gets no special TV privileges when she comes back home. In other words "his business is my business" (Turn 6).

Hypothetical narratives such as these allow the participants to assess themselves, their sense of agency and their beliefs and ideologies in relation to events that may or may not happen. Interlocutors may stretch their understandings of self and reality beyond their lived experiences and things they know to have actually happened into a realm of possibilities and imagination. None of the participants are married, but they are able to use what they know about themselves, marriage, (stereotypical) gender roles and life in general to imagine a reality in which they are married, and what would happen in such a reality. This point is further illustrated in the rest of the extract.

Thandi reformulates the hypothetical scenario hoping to outwit Bella and gain control of the TV, despite Bella and Zinhle's goading in turns 11 and 13; "choose your words nicely". Thandi's new scenario involves Bella's real life boyfriend, Bryan, instead of a hypothetical husband (12, 14). Since all members already know what happens from the previous scenario (one partner "[gets] some extra things outside… and then also [gets] some things with you" (turn 3), Thandi asks the question directly, "is your business Bryan's business"? (turn 14). (that is, if Bella has an affair ("business"), would it be Bryan's business? To which Bella replies, "my business is my business and his business is my business" (turn 22). Applying Thandi's logic from the previous scenario here (that the partner who has been "away" gets to choose what they watch), we would expect Bella's answer to mean that Thandi wins. Indeed, Thandi's comment in turn 25 also suggests that she believes she has finally gotten Bella to say what she needed, but it is possible that Zinhle's reaction in turn 24 and the way Bella restates her point in turn 26 convinces Thandi she has lost. So she finally gives in in turn 27 "wow you're fucked up… but your marriage will work".

Although it seems that Zinhle's reaction and Bella's confidence in her position may have fooled Thandi into believing that she lost the argument, the playful co-construction of these scenarios allow the participants to insert themselves into a world that is not 'real'. They are able to use available understandings of (gender) norms around fidelity in marriage and relationships from the 'real' world to make claims to certain rights in the hypothetical reality. Notice that at the end, Thandi's final comment evaluates Bella's hypothetical marriage and not their initial issue with the TV: "you're fucked up but your marriage will work". The story emerges within a playful context. As we shall see in the next chapter, during playful discourse, participants may borrow meanings and perspectives they do not necessarily believe in to heighten their playful exchange. Bella and Thandi who do not necessarily believe that infidelity or secrecy are healthy in romantic

relationships (evidence in the data) are able to suspend their own beliefs at this moment, borrowing from what they believe happens in at least some marriages and relationships in order to win the argument and control of the TV. The main goal of such narrative events may be something as mundane and small as determining who chooses what to watch on TV, but they simultaneously do the work of allowing the participants to put their 'real' world knowledge about a variety of issues from a variety of perspectives, in this case, marriage, relationships and fidelity, to work. This creates opportunities for rethinking, contestation or consolidation of their 'real' world ideologies.

The analysis of such discourse activities that do not fit the traditional definition of a story (the telling of past events), but still have some of the other narrative qualities can provide, as we have seen above, rich insight to the ways in which narrative text function as a mode for evaluating and reflecting on a wide range of issues. Hypothetical narratives, for instance, provide alternative or counterfactual series of events from which we may draw conclusions about, or justify our actions in the current 'real life' situations in which they emerge (Carannza, 1998; Georgakopoulou, 2008). Their hypothetical nature also allows for the exploration of themes that may otherwise go unexplored if the participants were to rely only on experiences they have had. They may take on personas that could be contradictory to what they believe themselves to be and voice perspectives that they may not be able to use outside of the hypothetical scenario. This creates a window into what they know about the world out there (marriage, fidelity and commitment), available perspectives and their individual and group position in relation to these larger discourses.

5.5. Narratives as acts of vulnerability and care

In this last section, I argue that narrative interactions can also be seen as acts of vulnerability and care. In weaving experiences into a narrative or story form, the teller imposes an order onto these experiences. This order is imbued with and justified by the social norms, ideologies, structures, prejudices and identity options being mobilised by the teller. Storytellers thus make themselves vulnerable by gambling with the possibility that their 'reading' of a series of events may be supported, challenged or altogether rejected. In Chapter 2 I discussed the inherent human need for belonging and attachments to others. If the teller's views are constantly being rejected or challenged by the people with whom they spend most of their lives, it can lead to feelings of being misunderstood and isolated. Despite the potential issues that could arise from sharing stories, being willing to take this risk in daily conversations is necessary for the sustenance of the relationship over time. Without the willingness to

be vulnerable, some of the other narrative processes needed to maintain their relationship, such as those discussed above (jointly updating the knowledge pool and assessing self, other and reality) may not be possible.

Although there's an element of risk associated with sharing stories, the element of care is also present. Creating space for someone else to share and reflect on their experiences and being actively involved in the process of sensemaking may be seen as an act of care. Research has shown that having a network of supportive friends is key to experiencing feelings of happiness as one's friends can make one feel like they belong, they are accepted and cared for. These positive feelings contribute to better mental health and overall wellbeing (Brent, et al., 2014; Spencer and Pahl, 2006; D. Dwyer, 2014). In Thandi's story about the "white lady" above, she is mostly teased by her interlocutors, but even that may be seen as a sign that her friends care for her because they know her ("Thandi likes things like that"), they accept her for who she is and also know how to taunt her without taking it too far. This points to the issues of *choice* and *affection* in the constitution of friendships discussed in Chapter 4 (section 4.3). Although choice was discussed more so in relation to the early phases of a friendship, it does not stop there. Individuals continuously make choices in daily interactions that allow for the growth of the relationship. Choosing to share information about one's life and choosing to listen to these stories are examples of the discursive means through which friendships are sustained. The choice to listen and engage sensitively or appropriately can be seen as a discursive act of care or affection. Below I analyse two extracts that show how vulnerability and care are interactionally achieved and managed in narrative interactions and the relational significance of these negotiations.

The first story is from the conversation recorded at Quinta's house as Quinta, Thandi and Bella prepare to film new Girl Chat content. In this extract, I share a small story about a dream I had in the little room I had just moved into. As I mentioned, Thandi, Bella and I lived together, but I eventually rented out a small room not too far from where we had been staying as I felt like I needed my own space and I could finally afford to do so financially. The conversation below takes place a few days after I move into the new place. I had found out that I would be the only girl living in the shared house only after moving in and that had made me anxious to the point of having nightmares about it. This is the context from which I share a small story about how I got myself to stop being afraid so I could live and sleep comfortably in the new place.

Extract 5.5. Ajoh's new room

1. Ajoh: Yoh guys I slept like a baby last night. I had those insecure – those I – the night before I was feeling like yoh someone's gonna reach through my window and grab me
2. Quinta: ***Why would someone reach through your window and grab you=***
3. Ajoh: =Because my window faces the corridor it has no burglar bars so anybody who wants to just take a stroll into my room for their own reasons easily can
4. Bella: [Wow
5. Thandi: [Yoh guys that's so deep
6. Bella: [(Laughs)
7. Ajoh: So I was just like – I was just like oh my God
8. Thandi: [That's a lot to be going through
9. Ajoh: [how am I going to sleep, and I actually dreamt and saw someone send their hand through. So I was like "Jesus why", and then when I woke up in the morning I was like "I will not let this fear control my life. I will live until something has happened, I will be fine".
10. Thandi: [Yah
11. Quinta: [Okay
12. Ajoh: And I slept
13. Bella: I love the way Quinta said "Okay" I think she was waiting [for the last word (laughing)
14. Thandi: [I think she was waiting for the last word (smiley voice)
15. Quinta: And it worked
16. Thandi: It worked
17. Quinta: Great
18. Ajoh: I slept

This story starts at the end since I inform the group that I slept better that night, before telling them how I had managed to shift my perspective which then allowed me to feel better and sleep soundly. My new room was very small and it strangely had no direct sunlight coming in. The small window faced the hallway which led to the other rooms in the house. I had to keep the window open so that whatever fresh air came through the hallway could also get into my room, especially at night. The window was big enough for a regular sized person to squeeze through and this is why I feared that one of my male flatmates, who at the time were complete strangers to me, might want to take advantage of that while I slept (turn 3). Later on, in turn 9, I claim that I had a dream in which this actually happened, which only made the anxiety worse. None of the other participants had been to my new place and the details I shared about my new living situation was concerning to them too as seen in turns 4, 5 and 8. Their comments, especially Thandi's, show that they appreciate the seriousness of the situation and understand how unsettling it must be for me, even before I get to

the end of my story. In turns 7 and 9, I tell the group the rest of the story; how I managed to stop feeling vulnerable and afraid which allowed me to get some rest. Essentially I had a pep talk with myself after waking up from the bad dream, I was not going to "let this fear control my life", I would live normally, until something bad *actually* happened, and "I will be fine"[8]. When I am done sharing, Thandi agrees with my decision to not be afraid: "yah" (turn 10) while Quinta is still expecting more from the story, "the last word" as Bella puts it (turn 13), hence her follow up question "and it worked"? To which both Thandi and myself respond "it worked" "I slept".

In this extract, we can see vulnerability and care in what is shared and how it is responded to. I feel vulnerable and exposed in my new accommodation, and telling the story makes it even more so. Sharing one's fears and worries with others is always risky as one can never predict how other people might respond and how their perspectives about one might change as a result of what has been shared. Thus, the ease with which stories are told, and particularly stories about one's fears and anxiety may be evidence that a 'safe' space has been created among interlocutors, in this case, through their relational and interactional history. Although a rich interactional history helps, telling stories is always a gamble, as conversational stories are highly fluid and the telling and interpretation of the events narrated, as we have seen, are not always in the teller's control. In this case, however, the interlocutors reward the 'risk' I have taken to tell the story with support and genuine concern for what I was going through, in other words, care.

The majority, if not all of the stories in this thesis so far, have very little in common with the kinds of stories that have captured traditional narrative researchers. These stories, as it must be obvious by now, are short and usually about mundane events, unlike canonical stories which often deal with highly marked events that stand out against what has become routine and mundane. The pervasiveness of such narratives in everyday conversations in the data and in research on conversational storytelling (De Fina, 2008; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) tells us that people *need* to share and reflect on both the unusual and mundane experiences in their lives. Not everyone can boast of having people who will listen to the seemingly uninteresting details of their lives. Thus, holding space for others, listening, and engaging in the mundanities of another's life may be seen as caring, an act of loving.

[8] I was fine after all. I eventually moved to a more beautiful room with a large window overlooking the busy street outside. My housemates turned out to be amazing people and I enjoyed my stay there.

In the following story we see that vulnerability and care showing up when Zinhle narrates the still unfolding story about her pending promotion. Zinhle, who works at an art shop, narrates the events leading up to the promotion. She had been asked to fill in for an absent colleague at work, and because she did a good job, she will now be taking over his work as part of the office staff, while he will be "demoted" to her current role as a floor staff. The events in this story are still ongoing given that the managers are yet to give a final announcement in an upcoming meeting. Zinhle's promotion is something she is happy about, even though the details surrounding the promotion are a cause for concern. Telling the story allows Zinhle to share the good news, while also allowing her to share her concerns. Thandi and I congratulate her and show our interest in the story and for Zinhle's wellbeing through our comments and questions. Some turns in the extract (consisting mainly of a parallel conversation between myself and Bella) have been omitted as indicated to shorten the extract and to make it easier to follow the transcript. Please see appendix 5 for the complete transcript.

Extract 5.6. Zinhle's promotion

1. Zinhle: YO:H guys
2. Thandi: what?
   (omitted turns)
3. Zinhle: SO: (.) this guy right (.) at work (.) he goes on leave (.) right (.) and then they like "Zinhle"
4. Thandi: "fill in"
5. Zinhle: "fill in?"=
6. Thandi: =oh God what happened
7. Zinhle: and then the guy comes back
8. Thandi: Yo:h Zinhle
9. Zinhle: and then they're like (.) "guy move away because Zinhle has been [/doing a good job/"
10. Thandi: [YO:::::H ***well do::ne*** so
    (6 claps)
    they like (.) [is the guy fired now] what t'fuck?
11. Ajoh: [are you serious?]
12. Zinhle: No: but he is gonna work
13. Thandi: so he got demoted (.) [and you go promoted] ***yu::h*** these things happen in real life to people I know
14. Zinhle: [basically] (laughs)
15. Ajoh: Yo:h (.) I hope he doesn't bring bad energy your way though=
16. Thandi =into your life
17. Zinhle: No:: that's the thing he's like um cuz they've been complaining about him a lot
    [before [he left right
18. Ajoh: [mmm

19. Thandi: [mhm
20. Zinhle: but it's not like it's his fault cuz
(omitted turns: Bella and Ajoh parallel conversation)
21. Zinhle: him and the other branch manager (.) don't get along
(omitted turns: Bella and Ajoh parallel conversation)
22. Zinhle: so he does things by the book and then the other manager wants to do his things on the side uhm and then he's like no he can't
23. Thandi: so what are you gonna do now
24. Zinhle: hey=
25. Thandi: =since you know the other manager is shady
(.3)
26. Zinhle: I::
27. Thandi: you jus gon' shut your mouth and let shady happen?
(omitted turn: Ajoh and Bella parallel conversation)
28. Zinhle: no I won't
(omitted turn: Ajoh and Bella parallel conversation)
29. Zinhle: but like
(omitted turn: Ajoh and Bella parallel conversation)
30. Zinhle: I haven't decided yet
31. Thandi: mmm
32. Zinhle: cuz like (.) the guy now has to work in front and I'm gonna work [(.1)] in the office
33. Thandi: [wow]
34. Zinhle: and I feel shitty hey
35. Thandi: ***why***
36. Zinhle: because like I was only trying to help and then now (.)
37. Thandi: [you helped your way into a /job/]
38. Zinhle: [obviously he's going to get] paid (.) for someone who works in front and I'll get paid [for] someone who works in the office =
39. Thandi: [his salary] (0.1) =at least you know how much you are getting paid so you can [take me /out/ (chuckles)]
40. Zinhle: [well I'm not yet] because (.1.5) the owner had a meeting with him right? (.) and then (.1) he came and told me the story so apparently we gonna have a meeting all of us but then (.1) she was basically like you not in charge of distribution anymore (.1) like (.) uh:m we gonna work on the floor what not what not like he he didn't have a choice in the whole thing
41. Thandi: yoh (.1) well ***congratulations*** (5 claps)
42. Zinhle: thank you
43. Thandi: [you got yourself a [promotion girl
44. Ajoh: [Well done]
45. Bella: [congratul]ations for your [promotion
46. Thandi: [Moving up in life (.1) now you got more money so that means you (chuckles) you gon' buy me something (chuckles) it's gon' be my birthday soon in like five months (styling: black american accent)

Although the events narrated in this case are known only by Zinhle, Thandi is able to anticipate that once Zinhle's colleague goes on leave she's asked to "fill in" (turn 4), and Zinhle uses the words that Thandi has provided (turn 5) confirming Thandi's guess. In turn 6 and 8 Thandi again shows that she can tell something dramatic happened even before Zinhle says it does. Her suspicions are confirmed in turn 9 when Zinhle talks about how her colleague was asked to "move away" because she had done a good job. Thandi exclaims loudly and congratulates Zinhle in a high pitched voice before proceeding to ask for the rest of the story (turn 10), but before Zinhle can complete her answer, Thandi interrupts and proposes what she thinks happened "so he go demoted (.) and you got promoted" (turn 13). Thandi's excitement, which is most observable in the volume and tone of voice, leads her to almost take over the telling of the story. This may be seen as her attempt to show genuine happiness for Zinhhle's promotion especially due to the circumstances under which it happened: "these things happen in real life to people I know" (turn 13).

I, like Thandi, also expressed my disbelief in the way the events unfolded in turn 11: "are you serious". But in turn 15, I am concerned that this promotion might affect Zinhle's relationship with her colleague. Zinhle responds by providing additional details surrounding the events of her promotion (17, 20 - 22). She explains that her colleague already had a rocky relationship with a manager who did not always want to do things by the books. She believes, I assume, that because of this pre-existing trouble, her colleague will not blame her for what happened. When Thandi then asks "are you jus gon' shut your mouth and let shady happen" (turn 27), Zinhle's response shows that while she will not let "shady happen" (turn 28), she has also not decided yet (turns 30). Given the novelty of the news and the fact that it is unofficial and still ongoing, it is possible that Zinhle may not have thought about all the different implications of her pending promotion. However, she feels bad for being in this position even though she was only trying to help. Thandi consoles her by saying she "helped [her] way into a job". Zinhle provides additional information which reveals that the events are still ongoing and not much about her promotion has been confirmed (turns 38 & 40). On that note, all participants congratulate Zinhle for "moving up in life".

Zinhle's story comes with elements of risk in terms of the way in which the story might be received by her audience. This puts her, as the principal teller, in a vulnerable position. Her interlocutors' excitement for her and concern for her wellbeing show that Zinhle's gamble to tell the story,

despite the risk pays off. The interlocutors, on the other hand, demonstrate care for Zinhle through their excitement and support for her promotion. While their questions and comments, which show their concerns for how the promotion might negatively affect Zinhle, creates space for Zinhle to reflect on the implications of her promotion from varied perspectives. In research on canonical narratives, stories that are not coherent with a clear plotline, start, middle and end tend to be dismissed as poorly told narratives or noise in the data. However, in such interactions, we can see that the telling of events that have not been thoroughly reflected on and are still unfolding contributes towards feelings of being cared for. The questions and comments Thandi and I contribute facilitate Zinhle's reflections on the details of her pending promotion without judgement. This, I argue, is another way through which narratives function as care, as the audience holds space for Zinhle to consider different takes on the nature of her promotion while supporting and congratulating her on a job well done.

What I have shown with the analysis of storytelling in this chapter, but more so with the last two stories is a practice of actively listening and engaging with stories in ways that make future storytelling events possible is crucial for the sustenance of the discursive relationship between participants. In addition, if we consider that maintaining a friendly relationship is part of the joint enterprise of this group, then nurturing a safe space for self-expression and the willingness to disclose information, no matter how risky, is part of the commitment or investment the participants make to ensure the maintenance for friendships.

5.6. Chapter summary

In this chapter I presented a discussion on the role of stories in sustaining the relationship between the participants. I argued that storytelling as a practice is not an objective system capturing past events exactly as they happened, and it does more than simply pass on pieces of information about one's life. Instead, following Polkinghorne's notion of *emplotment*, storytelling is a mode for organising the usually chaotic events in one's life, constructing relations and causalities between these events to serve particular goals in interaction. Within conversational settings, unlike research interview settings, this process of emplotment is achieved through the joint efforts of all participants in a process in which views may be accepted, challenged, or rejected.

I argued that without the willingness to take narrative risks and the presence of a narrative care

practise the relationship may be stunted as relationships rely on fuel, in the form of new/updated information to be sustained over time. Storytelling is, of course, only one way through which new information may be entered into the shared knowledge pool. However, through stories and storytelling, multiple levels of information (the events, the way they are narrated, the teller's interpretation, the audience's usually unpredictable reaction to the story and the telling, identity claims and ideological positions etc) become available for joint interpretation or sense making. Therefore, although storytelling is something that people who know each other do (mutual engagement or joint activity), it is also part of the mechanisms through which depth and breadth of information is shared and updated. This information forms the foundation for future interactions and from which accurate inferences about the self and its relationship with the other, the group and the world may be drawn.

CHAPTER 6 - THE RELATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CONVERSATIONAL PLAY

"I think it's like loyalty, love, patience, perseverance…"

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter I look specifically at the realisation of playfulness within our conversations. Playful interactions in the data usually emerge embedded with elements of what may be called impoliteness or face threatening acts. Through the analysis of strategies of conversational play in the data, I show how participants navigate between practices of association and involvement and strategies of dissociation and distance without a complete breakdown or dramatic change in the conversational 'rhythm'. I argue that this seamless flow and easy negotiation of the competing needs for involvement and distance creates the sense that the participants get along well or the sense that they have 'the same vibe' or 'energy'. I argue that face threatening acts cannot be determined prior to interaction. That is, no act is inherently a face threatening or face saving act. The terms of what may constitute either of these categories are negotiated in interaction between interlocutors over time. This argument is illustrated through an analysis of instances of conversational play between participants. I show how a friendly disposition is sustained even when they do not agree with each other, even if their personal boundaries are not necessarily being respected, and even if their expectations of reciprocity, social support, or equality are not being met at the interactional level.

In addition, I argue that although conversational play has high entertainment value for interlocutors, and it is a practice that highlights creativity and spontaneity in language use (Tarone, 2000, Cook, 2000), it also has implications for the relationship between interlocutors. The successful achievement of conversational play, when both on record and off record meanings (Tannen, 1978) are correctly interpreted and responded to, reinforces the sense of friendship or friendliness between the interlocutors. In addition, humour in conversational play comes from the juxtaposition of the interaction against shared understandings about the self, the other and the world. Therefore, an analysis of conversational humour provides a window into the taken-for-granted, usually implicit worlds within which they occur.

This chapter further highlights the notion that conversational play is not an isolated phenomenon and the functioning of these interactions can only be excavated through the turn-by-turn analysis

of extended stretches of talk. These analyses must take into consideration what preceded the playful interaction, the discourse activities that followed it and what the participants themselves think about what they are doing with their utterances. This attention to the context of playful interactions in this study shows that they are opportunistic, highly contingent on the interactional context and rely on sufficient interactional history among interlocutors to be effective.

I begin the discussion in this chapter by providing an overview of the conversational play patterns observed in the offline/private conversations. I shall then proceed with a discourse analysis of instances of the sequential unfolding of playful conversation. I identify and analyse three specific play practices found in the data[9]: *teasing*, *deviation from individual, group and social norms;* and *repurposing/reusing past shared interaction for humorous purposes*.

6.2. Overview of playful discourse

The participants use a combination of (linguistic) strategies to signal and engage in conversational play. For a piece of discourse to be categorised as playful, they must contain a combination of devices used to signal playfulness plus sufficient contextual and historical common ground for the utterance to be interpreted as playful (instead of, say, offensive) by the other interlocutors. Common ground for a playful exchange is established within the immediate interactional exchange and in prior engagement with each other over the course of their relationship. Through the numerous interactions and (shared) experiences which have preceded those being analysed here, the participants have acquired knowledge about the other participants, such as knowledge of how they talk and behave when they are serious versus when they are being playful, the kinds of things they are likely to joke about, and a sense of what their personalities, principles, values and beliefs are.

Shared knowledge allows for the use of certain discourse strategies to speak in particular ways about particular topics to be interpreted from within a play frame. The devices that I have identified

[9]The telling of funny stories, like the story about Thandi's greatness in Chapter 5 (section 5.3), is another type of play found in the data. It is a story with a punchline ("a dollop of yoghurt") aimed at creating a humorous response from the audience. The audience reaction is also an example of teasing. However, there were only two instances of funny stories in my data, hence I decided to focus on the three forms of play analysed here.

are *repetition*, *intonation*, *accent*, *creativity*, *profanity*, *laughter*, *register* and *absurdity*. These devices are common in everyday talk, but different combinations of some or all of them in my data tend to work together with shared interactional history for conversational play to be realised. Because my participants have known each other for at least a year in 2017, with the dyadic relationship between myself and Bella spanning over six years at the time, a lot of our interactions are shorthand references to or abbreviations of shared experiences and interactions. As such, it is not always obvious from the text alone why a specific utterance is oriented to playfully. A stranger might need more contextual and historical information to find the humour/play in what has been said.

I will focus my analysis on the use of teasing, deviating from conventional group/social scripts and the repurposing of prior utterances for humorous purposes. I further categorise these three forms of play as instances in which participants play at the level of the person (teasing and deviations) and at the textual level (repurposing prior utterances). Within the activity of teasing, the person(s) being teased is the target. It has a humorous effect because of the playful antagonisation of the identity of the person being teased. Deviations play on group and individual norms and ideological positions. Engaging in this type of play takes into account what they know about each other's beliefs, values and personalities as well, which is why I consider it to be play at a personal and sociocultural level. In the activity of reusing prior utterances for humorous purposes, the text, or the words themselves are the target of humour when specific words become somewhat crystallised and can be reused for humorous purposes. The text or words take on some qualities of canned or formulaic jokes as they can be used to create humour outside their original context. Teasing and deviations on the other hand may not be easily detachable from the contexts within which they emerge.

These categories of personal and textual humour are not mutually exclusive categories as playing at the personal level requires the use of text and playing at the textual level has implications for the identities of the persons involved. But each type of play is considered humorous for different reasons and has distinctive effects on how the participants relate to each other at the interactional and relational/interpersonal levels. I am focusing on these three forms of playful interactions because they recurred most frequently in the data, thus providing more evidence of how they function in maintaining and deepening relational ties.

6.3. Teasing

The most common playful interaction in the private conversations was teasing. Research has illustrated the ambivalence in the practice of teasing between aggression/criticisms and playfulness or humour. In Priego-Valverde's (2016: 219) words, teasing involves "a peculiar combination of friendliness and antagonism". Drew (1987: 219) describes teasing as the verbal activity of "taking playful jibes at someone". Boxer and Cortes-Conde (1997: 275) state that it is a "double-edged sword" used to "playfully annoy or challenge the interlocutor" Dynel (2008: 242). Haugh (2010:) describes it as belittling (diminishing) within a "non serious or jocular frame". In Mulkay's (1988:79) terms, teasing is "a device for reformulating others' speech and actions, and thereby proposing an alternative reality, without seriously doing so". One can say that teasing involves operating from within the maxim of camaraderie (playfulness) while potentially violating the maxims of deference or distance (antagonism). In other words, teasing comes embedded with FTAs towards the teased person, yet it seems to be the most common type of play in friendly conversations.

Before looking at the implications of teasing on the participants' relationship, I will first look at the elements that make up a teasing interaction which I have identified in my data. I draw from Drew's (1987) work on teasing and on the patterns in my data to propose the following as features of teasing interactions. The verbal activity of teasing in the data typically consists of four different aspects: 1) *opportunity*, 2) *taking a playful jibe(s) at an interlocutor*, 3) *a response or reaction from the teased*, and 4) *repair/decommitment* by the teaser if their playful taunts do not have the desired effect or if the antagonism is taken seriously by the teased. I propose that *sufficient interactional history*, which makes anticipating particular responses to jibes possible, is a necessary condition for the realisation of teasing and the other forms of play in the data.

1. *Opportunity*: Teasing is usually not topic initiating. It often emerges as a response or reaction to prior interactional cues. Drew (1987) argues that teasing is always sequentially 'next' or second to another utterance, usually one uttered by the person being teased. Although this is true in some cases, my data shows that although teasing does depend on some contextual trigger, this trigger can be anything in the conversational environment, including, but not limited to the prior turn of the person who is being teased. Consider the three-turn teasing activity below:

1. Quinta: ***WHA:T ROACHES IN MY HOUSE NO:: hmm since when*** Bella did it come out of your bag
2. Bella: Fuck you!
3. Quinta: (Laughs)

Quinta's jab at Bella is not triggered by anything Bella did or said. The presence of the cockroach at that particular moment provides Quinta the opportunity to taunt Bella for no apparent reason. Quinta is clearly 'looking for trouble' and counting on the absurdity of her claim to provoke a reaction from Bella. In response, Bella cusses Quinta. Quinta responds to this by laughing, seemingly satisfied with and tickled by Bella's reaction to her jab. In the following extract, Thandi seizes an opportunity to tease Bella when she suddenly has a coughing fit at the same moment in which Bella is taking off her clothes to go shower. Thandi sees in this coincidence an opportunity to tease Bella:

Thandi: (coughs) yo (burp's loudly) (.)so you're just naked in front of me making me burp here (.)

The point I am making with the two excerpts above is that teasing, like most instances of conversational play, is opportunistic as it relies on the right interactional and contextual elements coming together at a particular time, and for participants to be willing to seize and exploit these coincidences for playful purposes. These opportunities for teasing may be found in a variety of occurrences within the conversational context of which the teased person's prior turns are only a fraction.

2. *Taking playful jibe(s) at an interlocutor:* There are several strategies through which conversationalists may humorously taunt each other. They may embellish, satirise, make a play on, doubt, trivialise and find hidden meaning to conversational and contextual material (Drew, 1978; Attardo, 1994). They may also use clearly exaggerated terms to describe what has happened, put on an exaggerated performance of each other's words or make an absurd, illogical or unreasonable claim. The strategies highlighted here are by no means a complete list of the different ways in which participants may exploit opportunities for teasing. They are however some of the main strategies found in my data. To illustrate how participants may exploit interactional opportunities for teasing, consider the ways in which Thandi and Zinhle formulate their playful jibes towards Bella below.

Extract 6.1

1. Thandi: (coughs) yo (burp's loudly) (.1) so you're just naked in front of me making me burp here (.1) Simba showed me your pictures again it's like he's obsessed with your pictures hey
2. Bella: [/?/]
3. Zinhle: [YO::H]
4. Thandi: I'm telling you huh?
5. Bella: he should stop looking at my - /now it's gonna be scary to ?/
6. Zinhle: YOH Bella (.) [what are you doing to the boy].
7. Thandi: [(laughs) your vagina pictures] hey ye ye ye ye (.) I'm telling you
8. Bella: it's gonna make me now to be scared to go there
9. Thandi: [who] no: don't be weird (.) [go and take your pictures
10. Zinhle: [ye]
11. Bella: [it's you who is making me /feel/ weird=
12. Thandi: =her pictures are really lovely shame=
13. Zinhle: =they're [beautiful]
14. Bella: [I don't have any more] pictures
15. Thandi: yeah (.) Oh I'm saying you must go and take more
16. Bella: a:h yeah yeah
17. Thandi: cuz like your pictures are really nice shit!
18. Bella: I'll go there (.) just that today I wasn't - did you take pictures

In Thandi's turn 1, 4 and 7 Thandi uses explicit language, "vagina pictures"; expressive phonology, "ye ye ye ye"; the repetition of "I'm telling you", the embellishment around Simba's alleged obsession and exaggeration in calling Bella's photos "vagina pictures"[10] to achieve the result of taunting Bella. As I analyse more extracts, it will become evident that taunts may be formulated in a variety of ways, using a combination of different discourse strategies as highlighted above.

Within multi-party interactions such as those in this study, the other participants in the interaction may participate in the teasing interaction in a number of ways. They may demonstrate alignment with the teaser by adding a further quip, laughing or they may align with the teased person by defending her against the insinuations embedded in the taunt or they may find a middle ground between the teaser and the teased. In the example above, Zinhle joins Thandi in playfully antagonising Bella. In turn 3 and 6, she orients her utterance to Thandi's playful turn using marked increase in volume and an illogical question to playfully insinuate that Bella's nudity has the power to make the photographer obsessed with her.

[10] In one set of photos, Bella actually had a white sheet that draped over her naked body, leaving only her shoulder and feet exposed. In the other set of photos, she had a long yellow scarf around her neck which draped conveniently over her breasts and groin region, working together with strategic poses to make the photos more suggestive than explicit as Thandi makes it sound. See an example of one of the photos in appendix 3

3. *Response/reaction ranging from playful to serious:* The range of responses to playful jibes by the teased in conversation can be placed on a continuum from providing a serious response to the antagonism usually embedded in playful verbal taunts, with no observable orientation to the playful aspects on one end, to completely surrendering and playing along with the joke on the other end. Drew, (1987: 225) outlines the following responses to playful interactions:

> (i) initial serious response to reject the teasing proposal, prompted to laugh by others, returning to po-faced [serious] rejection; (ii) simultaneously laughing at tease and rejecting its proposal; (iii) laughing acceptance, followed by serious rejection of the proposal in the tease; (iv) going along with the tease (as with laughing acceptance + further quip).

He goes further to argue that:

> In each of these response types there is [usually] some treatment by recipients of the humour of the tease, though usually (that is, except in type iv) combined with a po-faced component of rejection/correction.

While many of the extracts in my study corroborate Drew's (1987) claims, he does not account for instances where the teased person does not visibly orient to the humour. Bella's responses to Thandi and Zinhle's teasing here shows no overt treatment of the humour. She orients her talk towards the newly acquired knowledge that the photographer might be obsessed with her nude pictures. Her response expresses her discomfort with that possibility and her wariness about going back to the same photographer in the future. Her voice retains the same flat and serious quality through both turns that show none of the strategies used to signal playfulness.

5. he should stop looking at my -
/now it's gonna be scary to ?/
8. it's gonna make me now to be scared to go there

It is also important to note that when dealing with responses, taunts may be completely ignored by the person it is directed at. Although I should also state that there is a difference between *recognition* and *displaying recognition* of a playful utterance (Drew, 1987). In the latter, the teased person linguistically or non-verbally orients themselves towards the proposal(s) embedded in the tease and, in most cases, to its humorous aspects as well. However,

sometimes, one might recognise the joke, without overtly orienting oneself to it as we shall see in a subsequent example.

4. *Repair and/or decommitment:* Last but not the least, depending on the reaction of the teased, the teaser might do some repair work or decommit from the face threatening elements in her playful jibe. Repair and decommitment are usually achieved indirectly through the use of compliments or positive statements/affirmation to placate the teased. Repair and decommitment could also include explicitly stating that the utterance was a joke. As seen above, Bella does not respond to the jibe within a playful frame because the image of the photographer being obsessed with her nude pictures make her "scared to go there". In the rest of the exchange (turns 12 - 17), Thandi and Zinhle then work to repair the 'damage' their taunting has caused by making Bella feel uncomfortable, as this may not have been the response they had anticipated.

   Thandi's reaction to Bella's serious response is to call Bella "weird" because Bella takes a serious stance towards something that was meant to be a joke, followed by an imperative to "go and take your pictures". This may be Thandi's indirect admission that she might have embellished Simba's supposed obsession with Bella's pictures. She may be heard saying that Simba is not really obsessed with her pictures, and her joke should not keep Bella from taking more pictures if she wants to do so. Bella's turn 11 makes Thandi directly responsible for making her feel "weird" and "scared" which may not have been the desired effect of Thandi's playful taunts. Turns 9, 12 and 17 serve to repair the damage. Since Zinhle also participated in the teasing, she also participates in the repair by contributing turns 10 and 13 which work with Thandi's turns to reassure Bella and repair the damage. Their efforts seem to be successful as Bella agrees to go take more pictures in turn 18.

In addition to the four components of the teasing exchange discussed here*, sufficient interactional history* between the participants is required to be able to anticipate that the teased person might respond playfully to the taunt and for the utterances to be interpreted as playful. It is important to note that teasing can happen between people who are not necessarily close. Research has shown that teasing can also happen between people who are still getting acquainted with each other and in brief encounters as between server and client at a restaurant (Drew, 1987). Thus, 'sufficient' shared interactional and historical information between participants refers only to the minimum amount of context one might need to interpret a piece of talk as play. For instance, in an interaction

between a waiter and a client, teasing may very well occur if within their brief interchange, enough information has been shared to allow utterances to be interpreted within a play frame. In the case of this study, the participants have a rich interactional history which makes it easier to signal one's playful intentions and for the interlocutors to interpret one's utterance from within this play frame. The participants admitted during the playback interviews that most of the jokes they shared with each other were only possible because they knew each other well and that some of their jokes would most likely be considered inappropriate or offensive to strangers or new acquaintances.

The oscillation between antagony, play and repair in teasing allows the conversation to continue (regardless of whether or not there was some truth to the playful taunts) without affecting the amicable stance they have taken within the specific local interaction and at the level of their relationship as friends in general. If the person being teased does not respond playfully and the teaser does nothing to repair, it could lead to the teased believing that the antagonism insinuated within the playful taunt is the true opinion of the teaser and not a joke. This can lead to more serious problems. In the case of the extract above, for instance, without the repair work done by Thandi and Zinhle, Bella may seriously make the decision to stop working with this particular photographer, or at the very least, it would confirm that her fears in turns 5 and 8 are legitimate.

Each teasing situation ultimately has its own unique characteristics, but the five aspects discussed above were useful when attempting to categorise texts as instances of teasing. They were also useful for assessing what the participants were doing with their utterances within teasing activities. In short, these elements provided a vocabulary and a frame from which I could analyse teasing interactions and their interpersonal or relational implications.

6.3.1. Teasing and relational work

If we agree that individuals tend to avoid FTAs in an effort to preserve their face and the face of their fellow interlocutors (Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987; Lakoff, 1973; Tannen, 1986, 2005) and by extension, relational harmony, we would be unable to provide a justification for the dominant presence of teasing interactions in my data. Teasing someone always involves pushing the limits of or completely violating what might be considered the interlocutors' needs for camaraderie or independence and distance. The presence of several instances of teasing thus points to my argument that interactions between individuals may be guided by interactional goals and

their relational values rather than the need to preserve an individualistic notion of face. For this specific community of practice, the preservation of a shared space in which each member can express themselves authentically seems to override the performance of politeness as traditionally conceptualised. Most of our guests on Girl Chat had watched our videos online, but they had never spent time with us in our private spaces. The most popular comment we used to get from our guests had to do with the level of bluntness and the lack of social/discourse filters in the way we spoke to each other. Furthermore, the discussions in the playback interviews with the participants also revealed that we used to and continue to place significant value on our ability to 'tell it as it is' or 'keep it real' with each other. The relational value placed on being able to freely express oneself and on being honest results in interactional patterns that do not always fit traditional understandings of (im)politeness.

I draw from Csikszentmihalyi's (2008) notion of *flow* to refer to the state in the participants' friendship in which they have gained mastery of appropriate and enjoyable ways of relating with each other. These ways of relating include *appropriate* (Locher and Watts, 2005) ways of speaking that have become intuitive to members of a community of practice (CoP) so that members can say 'this is how we are' or 'this is how we speak'. Styles of speaking and therefore styles of playing are cultivated through interactions in which members test the limits of what can be said and learn ways of repairing and correcting in those instances where these limits are crossed. This recurring process of testing and repairing or correcting leads to a situation in which members gain an understanding of things they can get away with saying bluntly, things that need to be carefully negotiated or things that must be left unsaid. The seamlessness of playful interactions such as teasing become the discourse manifestations of their relational flow, as acceptable or appropriate ways of speaking become more and more intuitive to members. The two extracts analysed below will be used to illustrate this argument.

Earlier on in the first recording (R1), Zinhle shared the news of her potential promotion at work. The announcement of the potential promotion was analysed in chapter 5 (extract 5.6). I showed how all participants, especially Thandi, congratulated Zinhle and helped her work through the implications of the promotion given the circumstances in which she was being promoted. Almost three hours after that interaction, Thandi uses the details of this story to tease Zinhle. Thandi had been staying at Zinhle's place temporarily at this time so on this day they were only visiting Bella

and I. Thandi had asked that they stay for two more hours and Zinhle agreed. Now, Zinhle was ready to go home, but Thandi was still not willing to leave and this led to the following interaction.

Extract 6.2. "That was a jump"

1. Zihle: Thandi it's two hours [already
2. Thandi: [It's NOT can't you count? I thought you got a promotion how did you get that promotion if you can't even count (chuckles) minutes
3. Bella: [/wow that was a jump/
4. Zinhle: [excel doen't need me to count] fuck you (smiley voice)
5. Thandi: (chuckles) I'm playing *quaqoqoza*
6. Zinhle: google does the counting for me
7. Thandi: I'm sure you're doing the counting also cuz you need to know what to put in what to punch in

Thandi uses the information Zinhle shared about her promotion to tease Zinhle in an attempt to deflect attention from herself given that she is not yet ready to go home. She teases Zinhle by questioning her ability to count and her promotion. This is an absurd claim Thandi is making because she knows that Zinhle can count. She is only using this tactic to playfully avoid stating that she is still not ready to go home. She signals playfulness by combining the mock seriousness of her tone and a chuckle while making an unreasonable claim. Bella recognises just how far-fetched Thandi's statement is by calling it a "jump", which it quite literally is. Thandi has 'jumped' from the context in which Zinhle is waiting for her to go home to something completely unrelated that was shared and celebrated earlier. Zinhle responds in turn 4 with a mixture of a serious and playful response. First she corrects Thandi: "excel[11] does the counting" and then she cusses Thandi: "fuck you" without the seriousness or emotion of a person who feels insulted or disrespected by her friend. However, Zinhle's turn 6 shows no indication of play. Thandi knows that her comment is unwarranted since the issue of Zinhle's promotion is not relevant for the current discussion and Zinhle has already been patient with her by staying for two extra hours. Based on the unreasonable nature of her comments combined with Zinhle's serious corrections in turns 4 and 6, Thandi intuitively senses that some repair work is needed to maintain the flow of friendly interaction. This may explain why Thandi knows to explicitly state that it is just a joke (turn 5), followed by an improvised nickname: "quaqoqoza"[12] and a statement which explicitly

[11] Microsoft Excel
[12] This an endearing play on Zinhle's real name

contradicts her claims in turn 2 (turn 7). These repair strategies work to show that turn 2 is not a true reflection of what she actually believes about Zinhle.

Thandi is able to tease Zinhle in this way because of the conversation that was had when Zinhle first shared the news of her promotion. Thandi congratulated her and asked many questions to show support in a positive and encouraging way. Thus, it has been previously established that Thandi believes in Zinhle's abilities and she is happy for the progress that Zinhle is making at work. As a result, this playful encounter is less likely to be interpreted as an instance of jealousy or 'hating'. The interactional history, in addition to Thandi's turns 5 and 7 work together to keep the interaction within a playful frame and to mitigate any potential damage turn 2 might cause. Furthermore, in the playback interviews, Zinhle explained that she values her friendships because they support and empower her. Thus, the interactional and relational history between the participants make it possible for Thandi to get away with this type of play in a way that may not be possible if she was a stranger or just an acquaintance.

The *success* of this interaction which potentially threatens the positive face of both participants points to the amicable stance they have taken towards each other and not necessarily to the violation of an essential notion of politeness or face. The fact that the conversation following this extract remains friendly and the fact that Zinhle still welcomes Thandi into her home provides evidence that both participants maintain face in spite of Thandi's teasing. Knowing that her comment has the potential to be hurtful, but stating it anyway shows that Thandi knows what she can get away with or that she is actively testing how far she can push the boundaries of what is acceptable. It is in and through this recurring activity of testing the limits and providing repairs or corrections when necessary that participants hone their relational skills, at least with regards to acceptable ways of speaking to each other.

Furthermore, in traditional conceptualisations of politeness strategies, certain acts are viewed as essentially face threatening and therefore impolite. However, the analysis of teasing interaction in the data reveals that whether an act is perceived as face threatening or not is contingent on the relational values of the participants and the goals of specific interactions. In the extract above, Thandi's actions are not so much aimed at insulting Zinhle as they are aimed at deflecting attention from the fact that she is not ready to leave. In the following extract a similar pattern is observed in which multiple potentially face threatening acts are performed by all participants through teasing,

but only some of them are oriented to as face threatening through the indirectness used to manage the claims and the repair work done by the participants.

This extract comes from R2 recorded at Quinta's apartment. In the extract, Quinta wants to go to the convenience store next door to get snacks for herself. She asked Bella and Thandi if they want anything from the store. Both participants say they want bananas, but they also want Quinta to pay for their bananas with her own money. This leads to a kind of tit for tat teasing activity in which all three interlocutors playfully taunt each other to achieve different interactional goals. This leads to a (bi)multilinear activity in which the person who is being teased in one utterance may become the person doing the teasing in the next utterance.

Extract 6.3 - Tit for tat

1. Quinta: I wanna go to the shop so Thandi what do you wanna eat now
2. Thandi: anything
3. Quinta: no I'm going to buy peanuts /from the shop/
4. Thandi: (chuckles)
5. Bella: buy me one [banana
6. Thandi: [banana
7. Bella: one banana so he's saying uhm
8. Thandi: you can buy as many bananas (noise from coins being moved around)
9. Quinta: is banana enough for
10. Thandi: (dramatic inhale)
11. Quinta: (laughs) give - (laughs and sucks teeth) give [give give (laughing)
12. Bella: [wait what
13. Thandi: she has a hundred rand she wants [my money
14. Bella: [THEN WHY ARE YOU GIVING HER THE COINS don't give her (smiley voice) (Quinta laughing loudly)
15. Thandi: [NO (laughs) NO
16. Bella: [don't give her Thandi don't disappoint me don't
17. Thandi: FUCK THAT (laughing voice)
18. Quinta: wait I'm asking you about something else is the banana enough for you to eat
19. Bella: I just wann -
20. Quinta: because you are the one who wants to do night meeting
21. (Both Bella and Thandi laugh)
22. Quinta: but y'all need to get out of my house by 6 to go - cuz I wanna work
23. Thandi: but what - what else do they have at the store if they have this thing of yours you can get it for me
24. Quinta: what crackers
25. Thandi: mhm

26. Quinta: you want to finish the whole crackers
27. Bella: (bursts out laughing)\
28. Quinta: [(laughs) /?/
29. Thandi: [we won't finish the whole of it I just want you to have some more
30. Bella: just buy me two bananas that will be fine
31. Thani: and banana
32. Quinta: who has money to buy you [two bananas
33. Thandi: [okay now I'll give you
34. Bella: But Thandi says you have a hundred rand (laughs)
35. Quinta: two - hmm hei:: so it's for two bananas [you see how you are
36. Thandi: [okay here are two bananas (.) two bananas and crackers (.) [then we eat
37. Bella: [(laughs) wait how much are you giving for [two bananas again (laughs)
38. Quinta: [banana is three rand
39. Thandi: [okay here's one rand two bananas and [crackers
40. Bella: [(laughs) [/?/
41. Thandi: [I swear Quinta even comes back to get the money brah (sucks teeth) (.2) but it's fine even me I do that /I just started to change my/
42. Bella: [(laughs loudly)
43. Quinta: [(laughs) (.) [but wait] it is really cold
44. Bella: [self] (.) self-reflection is [going on
45. Thandi: [I'm telling you] cuz I need all [o' that
46. Quinta: [it's quite cold Bella give me your jacket please let me go
47. Bella: so I told you - according to you I'm not feeling cold (laughs)
48. Thandi: wo:w? (laughs)
49. Quinta: but you're inside the house I'm going to the shop
50. Thandi: WO::[:W
51. Bella: [it's like you - come and take (laughing)
52. Thandi: Bella da:mn
53. Quinta: give me jacket
54. Bella: it's because you're buying me banana that's why I'm giving you this jacket (laughing)
55. Thandi: (laughs and claps)
56. Quinta: you see how people are (.) I'm only buying you one banana
57. Bella: after I've given you my jacket
58. Quinta: there's a saying that "if if if you see a house you should stand and sleep don't ask for a bed" someone wants to buy you banana you not asking for one you're asking for two (all three laugh)
59. Bella: but you have a hundred rand mos=
60. Quinta: =and ***so***? the peanuts I wanna buy is forty rand

In turn 8, Thandi is reaching for coins to give Quinta for her bananas. But once she sees Quinta's hundred rand note, signalled by her sharp intake of breath (turn 10), she decides that Quinta has to

buy snacks for everyone since she has more money. Quinta responds playfully to Thandi's reaction by laughing and repeating the word "give", as in “give me your money for your snacks” (turn 11). I imagine that she is reaching her hand out towards Thandi so Thandi can give her the coins that can be heard in the audio tape. Bella is unable to interpret Quinta's reaction because she has not yet seen the hundred rand note (turn 12). Thandi's turn 13 almost sounds like a child reporting an older sibling to the parents for not playing fair. Bella aligns with Thandi and they both playfully resist giving Quinta the money (turns 14-17). Their playful taunts are meant to persuade Quinta to buy snacks for everyone. Quinta does not address Thandi and Bella's teasing after turn 11, instead she inquires about whether the bananas will be enough since they will be staying for the Girl Chat “night meeting” (turns 18 & 20). This gets a chuckle from both Thandi and Bella although none of them address it as they are more focused on trying to get Quinta to buy them snacks with her money.

In turn 26, Quinta takes a jab at Thandi by asking if she wants to finish a box of crackers. The box of crackers Thandi wants, in my opinion, is not that big, and between Thandi and Bella it can easily be finished in one sitting. But Quinta is a health enthusiast who watches her diet closely and so this question is meant to tease Thandi and Bella for eating too much. Bella's reaction is to laugh, but she offers no further response to Quinta’s jab. Thandi on the other hand uses sarcasm in her response. She states that she is only buying the crackers because she wants Quinta to have more, since according to Quinta, they cannot or should not finish a box of crackers in one sitting. At this point, Bella now wants two bananas instead of one since Quinta can afford it (turn 34). In Quinta’s turn 35, she can be heard saying that Bella is now asking for too much and her hundred Rands is meant for other things, not just snacks. When Quinta insists on taking Thandi’s money, Thandi again takes a shot at Quinta for actually coming back to take the money even though she has enough to buy snacks for all of them (turn 41), but before Quinta can respond, Thandi confesses that she would do the same if she was in Quinta’s shoes: “but it’s fine even me I do that”. “That” refers to insisting that people foot their own bill even when she has the money to spare. This causes Bella and Quinta to laugh loudly because she has been teasing Quinta for something that, upon "self-reflection" (turn 44), she is also guilty of. The playful banter continues with Bella refusing to give Quinta her jacket and then giving it up in turn 51. Quinta then uses a saying (turn 58) which indirectly calls Bella out for imposing (asking for a bed i.e two bananas), where she should just be content with what has been offered (a roof over her head i.e. one banana).

In this context, the potentially face threatening acts of asking for favours and turning down requests are explicitly performed, on record. They are not treated as face threatening acts. Thandi and Bella have no issues asking Quinta to pay for their snacks (imposition) and Quinta has no issues with insisting that they pay for their own snacks (rejection). These are acts that would be categorised as face threatening, but as the interaction shows, they are carried out explicitly, on record, with little or no negotiation, hesitation or hedging, and without trouble. However, embedded in their playful taunts are insinuations that are oriented to as potentially face threatening. Thandi and Bella's teasing connote that Quinta is being stingy for refusing to pay for their snacks, while Quinta's jabs imply that Bella and Thandi are being greedy or that they are asking for too much. These meanings are mainly implied, off record. In addition, Thandi provides a repair for hers and Bella's insinuations by stating that she too would do the same if she was in Quinta's position. The indirect ways in which these meanings are communicated and the repair provided by Thandi point to the fact that they perceive these acts as potentially face threatening in the conversation at hand, which is why they are handled more delicately than the request for a favour and the refusal to grant the favour. This interaction therefore shows that face threatening acts cannot be determined prior to the interaction. It is only when we consider the interactional goals of the participants, their relational history and the ways in which acts are oriented to in interaction that we gain an understanding of what may be considered threatening or acceptable in specific situations.

The way the interaction is successfully managed, that is, without causing trouble at the interactional or interpersonal level further passes on the message that even if there is some truth to all the jabs that have been given (being stingy, being greedy or eating too much), this does not interfere with the friendly stances they have taken towards each other. There is a shared understanding that the current interaction is more about buying snacks than it is about the participants' character. The evidence to support this point is found in subsequent conversation in which the interactional goals shift from the playful negotiation of who needs to pay for snacks to serious Girl Chat business. In the meeting that Quinta described as a "night meeting", Thandi goes on record to say that Quinta is stingy, which makes it difficult for them to raise the funds they need to solve some of Girl Chat's problems. Quinta explains that she is not stingy, rather, she is cautious about how she spends her money. She also accuses Bella, Thandi and I of being negligent and irresponsible because we are usually willing to spend money without first thinking about cheaper alternatives. As the interactional goals shift from playful banter to serious business, participants

are able to go on record to express views they playfully implied earlier on, once again without the loss of face. The understanding that they need to freely and honestly discuss what they perceive as the problems interfering with Girl Chat business allows them to make claims that could be considered threatening in other contexts without trouble. The ability to determine when indirectness is necessary and when being straightforward and blunt is ideal further points to the argument of being in a state of relational flow as far as ways of speaking to each other. The participants have cultivated a mastery of what to say and how to say it in different conversational contexts that allow for their interactions to unfold seamlessly as analysed.

6.3.2. Failure to launch: when one's playful taunts are 'ignored' by interlocutors

In the extracts I have analysed above, the person teasing and the person being teased are actively involved in the playful interaction. In this section I look at instances in which the person who is being teased does not orient their talk towards the person teasing her. The analysis here is aimed at adding to what we know about teasing and how it unfolds in conversation, and not so much its relational consequences. It shows that not all attempts at play may be successful when there are more important or serious issues at stake in the conversation. However, this 'failed' attempt to play still provides opportunities for relational work to be done and provides opportunity for participants to comment on larger social narratives that are not directly relevant to the current interactional goals. Consider the extract below in which Quinta teases Bella for the way in which she says the name "Thomas" while Bella is in the middle of telling a story of issues she was having with her other friends Beatrice and Thomas.

Extract 6.4. How to say "Thomas"

1. Thandi: so ↓Tho**mas**↑ came to you and was like
2. Bella: yeah ↓Tho**mas**↑ called me ↓Tho**mas**↑ is just like this is what your friend (Beatrice) said
3. Quinta: Who - What is ↓Tho**mas**↑? ↑***Tho****mas*↓?
4. Bella: ↑***Tho****mas*↓
5. Quinta: (Laughs loudly]) Thandi you see [Cameroon people, Cameroon people Nigerian people they kill me
6. Thandi: [He's black what do you want
7. Bella: yeah so
8. Quinta: [they say] - they say ↑**Jus**tin↓ or no what is that [other name.
9. Thandi: [↓Jus**tin**↑?
10. Quinta: apart from ↓Jus**tin**↑ There is this other name that they just ruined and I don't understand it.
11. Thandi: (Plates clanging in the background) Quinta, are you British?

12. Quinta: I'm [not], but I don't say these names like this.
13. Thandi: [(chuckles)] did you go to a white school
14. Bella: So the guy - me and him - we just - he just told me and I'm just like "ah (sucks teeth) I don't have that energy to start calling Beatrice to start asking 'so you went and called my name'" that's childish I told Ajoh Ajoh is like "you know what, forget Beatrice"

Quinta is pointing out that Bella is putting the accent or stress on the wrong syllable and thus 'ruining' the name. She attributes this tendency to 'ruin' names to Bella's Cameroonian origins. The last part of Quinta's turn 5 may function simultaneously as a jab and as a repair. Quinta is Nigerian and so by adding that Nigerian people do the same thing, she makes it less of a personal attack at Bella and more a comment about a tendency she has observed among Cameroonian and Nigerian people in general. This has the effect of reducing the force of the jab. It is Thandi who responds to Quinta's taunt in Bella's defence in turn 6, stating that Thomas is a black man hence the 'black' pronunciation of his name. Bella tries to continue her story in turn 7 but she's interrupted by Quinta who provides examples of other names that are, in her opinion, mispronounced by Cameroonian and Nigerian people.

In turn 11 Thandi also takes a jab at Quinta by asking "are you British", implying that only British people would/should care so much about how names are pronounced in English. Quinta answers the question literally to show that one does not have to be British to say the name 'correctly'. Thandi takes another jab at Quinta "did you go to a white school". This can be interpreted as Thandi asking why Quinta cares so much about the pronunciation in English which she constructs as a 'white' language. Thandi is resisting the idea that there is a 'correct' way to speak from the perspective that if you are black, not British and did not go to a white school, you can pronounce words the way you want or can. Both Thandi and Quinta use play to frame their opposing views of what speaking English 'properly' means. This interaction goes beyond playful taunting each other to point to the participants' different language ideologies. This further points to the sociocultural contexts in which the participants exist and the colonial and racial histories that shape perspectives on appropriate ways of speaking. We also see Thandi standing up for Bella, even though Quinta's remarks did not affect her. Thandi's jabs at Quinta work both to challenge Quinta's views and to defend Bella in the interaction.

Throughout this interaction, Bella waits for the right time to continue her story and does not participate in the playful banter. As Drew (1987) remarks, there is a difference between the

recognition of playful utterances, and *the display* of the recognition of the playful utterance. In other words, the fact that Bella herself does not display or observably orient her talk towards the playful discourse does not mean that she did not recognize or interpret her interlocutors' utterances within a play frame. Evidence to support this claim comes about a minute after the extract above when Bella uses Quinta's 'correct' pronunciation of the name in an attempt to trigger a playful exchange.

Extract 6.5. How to say "Thomas" 2

1. Bella: No, everybody says that. (.) [Everybody]
2. Thandi: But why would you fuck your own /brother/sister/
3. Bella: Even - Even - Even - Even this ↑***Th****omas*↓ guy, this ↑***Th****omas*↓.
4. Quinta: You sounded like you never heard brothers and sisters
5. Thandi: I've heard but like why would somebody just /?/
6. Bella: Even - Even this Tho - Even this ↑***Th****omas*↓ guy
7. Quinta: No, before the water whatever, you need to /?/
8. Thandi: [Oh]
9. Bella: Even this ↑***Th****omas*↓ guy even said it.
10. Thandi: [It's not right]
11. Bella: /?/
12. Thandi: He shouldn't - she should - they shouldn't do that. That's wrong. (.) That is so immoral! (Laughs)...

Bella tries to use Quinta's teasing of her pronunciation of Thomas from earlier to create a humorous exchange even though it fails to get a reaction from Quinta. The first time she says the name Thomas in turn 3, there is an exaggerated emphasis on the word with the stress pattern Quinta had suggested as the 'proper' way of saying the name. In turn 6 when she says it a third time, there is a marked increase in volume (compared to turn 3), and again a dramatic accentuation of the intonation of the name. When Bella realises that no one is picking up on her joke, or no one is orienting themselves towards the joke, even if they can hear her and know what she is doing, she removes the exaggerated emphasis on the word in turn 9 but maintains the 'correct' pronunciation of the name. This is an example of a 'failed' attempt to tease or play. It could be that the disturbing nature of the matter currently being discussed is more pressing to the participants than Bella's joke, just like Bella had seemed more interested in finishing her story in the previous extract. This implies that teasing or play may be introduced but it may not be attended to by the other participants.

Not all invitations to play are accepted. The person making the utterance might be intending to instigate a playful exchange, while the other participants may not orient themselves towards the playful utterance, usually because there is a more 'serious' conversation at hand or because the utterance was not heard amidst ongoing/simultaneously unfolding conversations or background noises. Is the talk still considered playful if the other interlocutors do not engage? During play back conversations with the participants, I found that even if the other interlocutors did not attend to playful intentions, the specific participant still considered their utterance to be playful. So while participants must engage actively in the play for it to be a playful *interaction*, utterances by themselves can be considered playful even if they do not lead to a playful exchange.

6.4. Deviation from conventional group or sociocultural scripts as humour

Conversational play may emerge when participants deviate from conventional conversational and sociocultural scripts. (Close) friendship and the intimacy it allows creates spaces in which people are temporarily 'freed' of their need to do or say what is conventionally acceptable (Rawlins, 2009; Grätz, 2004; Allan and Adams, 2004). One of the main reasons why we become or stay friends with someone is that they have similar ways of viewing the world as we do, or perhaps, we do not mind their different views of the world. But we hardly become friends with people whose values, and principles we do not approve of or are contradictory to ours. Spencer and Pahl (2006) show that an individual's beliefs and values are more likely to be reinforced and perpetuated by their close relationships than challenged (see also Rawlins, 1991, 2009). Shared views about the world translate into a shared understanding about what is 'good' or 'bad', what is offensive and what is not, what can be said and what is unacceptable etc. These shared understandings can be exploited as a resource for play in conversation. In my data, the participants use playful strategies to voice perspectives that are transgressive of the group's norms specifically or social norms in general, for humorous purposes. In addition to the discourse strategies used to generate (intentionally) transgressive humour in conversation, sufficient interactional history or shared contextual information is crucial, more so than is the case with teasing, for potentially offensive deviations to be interpreted and oriented to within a playful frame.

During the playback interviews, the participants stated that they would not engage in such talk with strangers, online or with people they did not know well. To make a joke that could make me sound homophobic for instance, I first need to figure out whether or not my interlocutors' sense of

humour allows them to appreciate such a joke regardless of their sexuality, whether or not interlocutors know that I am not homophobic 'in reality' and this is 'just a joke' before I can proceed to make this joke. This is because transgressive utterances in conversation become funny (or less offensive) when juxtaposed with what is known about the person uttering them and the context within which they are uttered. Thus, although friends might come together because of some similar ways of viewing the world, friendships may also become sites in which people (safely) test or experiment difference or deviance. Doing so within a play frame has the effect of reducing the risk of doing serious damage to one's face or that of the interlocutors given that one can easily decommit from the playful utterance if the interlocutors do not react as anticipated.

In the extract below, Bella and Zinhle are chatting in the background while Thandi is trying to watch an American show that is playing on TV with white actors on the screen. Thandi chooses an interesting way to tell the others to quiet down.

Extract 6.6. "don't you know your masters"

1. Thandi: black people won't stop talking when the white people are speaking
2. Bella: why are you tal - why are you [/?/ bitches
3. Zinhle: [**O:::H**
4. Thandi: (chuckles mischievously)
5. Zinhle: white people
6. Thandi: white people are talking shush
7. Bella: so [I should listen
8. Zinhle: [so we should keep quiet
9. Thandi: mhm don't you know your [masters
10. Zinhle: [not even listen keep [quiet
11. Bella: [you know that those days is gone right
12. Thandi: don't you know your masters
13. Bella: /?/
14. Zinhle: [(/singing inaudible words/) we are slaves
15. Thandi: shush

Before Thandi's turn 1, the other two participants are talking but it is not loud enough to be distracting Thandi from what she was watching as I could clearly hear the TV over the other participants voices in the tape recording. In most other instances of play, the participant's tone would usually carry some of these hints of the play frame from which the speech is uttered. Rising intonations and sing-song voice and volume are usually indicators that what is being said may not be intended seriously. Thandi's utterance does not. Thandi's tone in turn 1 is a flat deep voice

which can be interpreted as serious. Her statement could be considered offensive or racist if it came from someone who did not belong to this group of friends or anyone who could not identify as a black person. However, based on what she knows about her friends and what they know about her, she can anticipate that her statement will not be taken seriously. She is counting on the absurdity of the statement within their context to generate a reaction from her interlocutors. Her objective cannot be said simply to get the others to quieten down. If anything, instead of getting the other participants to stop talking, it fuels more conversation as we can see in the extract.

In the playback interviews, almost 5 years later, Thandi could not help herself from bursting into laughter when she listened to the recording. When I asked her what she thought about the extract she said

Extract 6.7

> I like to tease a lot you know I like to tease I like to play like that so uhm (.) I actually knew - I knew (with hand gestures to emphasise) that that was going to be their response (.) like you know you spend enough time around people to know how they are going to respond to things so when you make a joke (.) you know the audience is going to get it because you know how what you're saying is going to - which part of their brain it's going to tickle
>
> so yeah so that's de - that's definitely I knew they were gonna be like "bitch - masters - who?" you know like I knew that that would happen but - and eventually we would get to a point where (.) they would stop talking while I watched the show you know like uhm but I don't know I guess maybe I wanted the conversation factor cuz it wasn't that serious the show that I was watching if it were something that I was like (makes gesture with hand and head to indicate seriously watching something) committed to I'll be like "guys stop" but it just you know (hand gestures) I don't know it added to the whole vibe.

In the voice recordings, conversations that deal mainly or explicitly with race issues (or any of the other larger social issues such as issues on gender, religion or nationality) are not common, but their YouTube channel is dedicated to tackling these issues head on. Based on this and my membership to the group, I can say that the participants have a good understanding of their group and individual positions in relation to such topics. Shared knowledge about each other's ideological standpoints creates opportunities for playfulness that may not be available to them elsewhere and to people with whom no such common ground has been established. The ability to

intuitively exploit the juxtaposition of what is said with what is known about the speaker or the situation for humorous purposes has a high relational payoff for the interlocutors.

When I asked Thandi in the play back interviews the kinds of contexts in which she would engage in this kind of play she said:

Extract 6.8

> … I do have my spaces where I do like to like push just a little bit of a boundary and then see how the people engage with - some of the things that I say are not meant to be taken literally uhm because I like to joke a lot… but if you listen well enough you'll be able to understand my point (.) when I say well enough I mean if you if you listen contextually uhm (.) because I wouldn't - I wouldn't make a joke if you don't have the context to understand yeah so yeah

Interactions such as these, which seem trivial, do the work of reinforcing what they know about each other and their relationship. The 'success' of these interactions signal to the speaker that their reading of their fellow interlocutors is accurate as their utterance successfully triggers the expected reaction. These interactions reinforce the sense of knowing each other well. It also signals to the speaker that the audience is "listening contextually", as Thandi puts it, in order to understand the metamessage being communicated. That is, they are listening to the actual words, but they are also taking into consideration the person uttering them, their shared interactional history and their knowledge about how the world works to find the humour in the utterance. Thus, conversational play provides space in which participants may exploit deviations from societal and group conventions to trigger playful interactions without the loss of face. In addition, this interaction further highlights the fact that one cannot predict prior to interaction or to the investigation of relational history what may be considered offensive or a violation of face needs. These aspects of interpersonal relations are actively negotiated in the group's discourse practices over time.

6.5. Playing at the level of the text - repurposing past conversations

In the previous sections (6.3 and 6.4), I looked at how playing works mainly at the personal level, where the discourse or text is used to playfully antagonise fellow interlocutors by challenging or annoying them and by using scripts that may otherwise be considered socially or culturally offensive for playful purposes. In this section we look at playfulness at the level of the text, that is, instances in which the text itself is the object or the target of the conversational play, not the

interlocutors. Playfulness at the level of the text occurs in the data when the text of previous conversation is repurposed in new conversation for humorous or playful purposes. The initial context of the repurposed conversation need not be playful for it to be reused in new playful situations. These repurposed utterances take on some of the qualities of canned jokes[13] (Coates, 2007) in the sense that they can be, to a certain degree, uprooted from their original context and used in new contexts for humorous purposes among the same participants. The initial utterance becomes an inside joke shared by the participants. With each reuse or repurposing, the interlocutors find creative situations to use the utterance that has now been established as a joke. Although these instances work to show creativity and spontaneity in language use for entertainment purposes (Tarone, 2000, Cook, 2000, Bakhtin, 1981; Larsen-Freeman 1997), they work to show that the participants are in sync with each other as they can make old texts relevant to new contexts in creative ways without the need to explain. Its high rapport pay off also comes from the fact that the interlocutors involved enjoy the way previous utterances are cleverly made relevant to unrelated conversational contexts and from the fact that they all 'get it' and therefore 'get each other'.

To illustrate how this repurposing of previous utterances works, I will analyse a string of three extracts from different points in the conversation in their sequential order to show how the same text from the initial interaction is reused in future contexts. This analysis follows conversational content that was first shared 1 hour and 20 minutes into the recording. The content of this interaction is then reused almost fifteen minutes later in the tape (1 hour and 36 minutes). The third instantiation of the text happens almost three hours after the second (4 hours and 45 minutes). In the initial conversational episode, Thandi describes an advertisement that just aired on TV about an upcoming reality TV show, Being Bonang, based on the life of South African media personality and businesswoman, Bonang Matheba. The summary of the advert is what will be reused in subsequent conversation.

Extract 6.9. #queening #fabday (1)

1. Thandi: what's Bonang doing (.3) woah
2. Zinhle: yoh I don't know what to say

[13] "A very specific speech act that is, a short formulaic utterance, ending with a punchline, which produces (or is meant to produce) laugher " (Coates, 2007: 30)v

3. Thandi: yoh (.) HEY BEING BONANG IS GONNA TO BE DEEP MOS
4. Zinhle: what did it have
5. Thandi: so the - the thing that - the advert that they put is of Bonang like lying in bed but like we don't like see properly so they just hair and what what what so it almost looks like - like a glamorous life and also like a sad life at the same time but you don't really know for sure and then they zoom in and she's laying on the bed with her phone in hand (burps) and she's tweeting but she's crying at the same time and they - and not - yeah twitting or instagramming and like what she tweets is like "having a fab day queening hashtag queening" and what and what but she's crying
6. Zinhle: obviously they're gonna make [it contro]versial like that so that [people] wanna watch
7. Thandi: [mhm] [mhm] that's true (.2) that is so true but I think it's gonna be cool
8. Zinhle: cuz i don't think Bonang cries everyday maybe she does [/like/ once or twice]
9. Thandi: [maybe she does - I don't think] she cries every day but I'm glad like it's a show that actually shows like - it's not just (imitating what reality shows sound like in a nasal voice) "***huh*** going to meetings and doing (snap) this and (snap) doing this and being happy happy happy all the time people get sad it - like - it's life but I think - and I think that's why I would appreciate watching it (.) I hope they don't like (.) stay on it too much then it'll just depress [the fuck out] of me
10. Zinhle: [yea:h]
11. Thandi: wow that's such a game changer because all the reality shows are literally about being fabulous (.1)and then boom! (laughing) ***Bonang comes with a sad one*** (laughing)
12. Zinhle: queening hashtag meanwhile (.1) [you're crying]
13. Thandi: (laughs) ***what the [fuck] who works with this woman*** (laughs and claps)

The extract begins when Thandi reacts to the advert on TV. It seems that Zinhle misses some parts of the commercial (turn 4) and so Thandi describes the advert to Zinhle. It portrays Bonang lying in bed crying while posting on Instagram. Thandi describes the scene as "a glamorous life and also like a sad life at the same time but you don't really know for sure". This advert is meant to show that what happens online is not always a reflection of what is going on in 'real life' as Bonang's supposed caption: "having a fab day queening hashtag queening" contradicts the fact that she's actually crying in bed. Both participants share their impressions on why they chose this concept for the advert: to create controversy and therefore gain more viewers, and to show that sadness is a part of life. Zinhle sums up the gist of the advert in turn 12, "hashtag queening meanwhile you're crying". This hashtag is the part of the interaction that will be reused in subsequent conversation.

Later on, when the participants are discussing the hypothetical situation in which their nude photos are leaked onto the internet by the photographer, the hashtag is reused by Zinhle to the amusement of all. Bella had just taken some photos (the same ones Thandi had teased her about in extract 6.1).

Thandi had been complimenting Bella on how well the pictures turned out when Zinhle expressed her desire to take nude pictures too, claiming she had been inspired by Bella's photos. Thandi warns her that because the photographer does not charge for the pictures, he could use them inappropriately by posting them online. The extract below starts as they discuss what would happen if the nude photos were leaked onto the internet and this leads to the reuse of content from the initial conversational episode to playfully deal with what would happen if the photos were leaked to the internet by the photographer.

Extract 6.10. #queening #fabday (2)

1. Zinhkle: you know actually it's not a bad thing if he releases one day [he decides to fuck you over
2. Thandi: [(chuckles) the] release is a different story [like
3. Zinhle: [why
4. Thandi: cuz like you didn't give permission (.2) /gonna/ be annoying
5. Zinhle: right
6. Thandi: but anyway you won't [die
7. Zinhle: [but then] you can use that to your advantage
8. Thandi: what advantage dear one
9. Zinhle: your nude pictures being out
10. Thandi: who are <u>you</u> that your nude pictures are out
11. Zinhle: I am (.) a queen (Thandi & Zinhle laugh)
12. Thandi: you are [a queen
13. Zinhle: ["QUEENING but I'm crying actually in the background" (Thandi & Zinhle laughing) "cuz my pictures are out" and I'll be like "hashtag (.) fab day" [(both laugh loudly)
14. Thandi: ["hashtag greatness (both laugh) oh God the tears

On social media, things that are controversial or taboo seem to get the most attention. So Zinhle is thinking that since being nude in public is still a socially contested issue, having one's nude pictures leaked could bring attention to one's social media page (turns 7 and 9). As the saying goes 'negative publicity is still publicity'. But Thandi makes Zinhle realise that such a strategy may only work if you are 'somebody'. Thandi is not literally asking "who are <u>you</u> that your pictures are out" (turn 10). She uses this question to imply that Zinhle is not known/famous enough for her pictures to cause an advantageous stir. Thandi's question triggers the start of a playful/humorous turn to the conversation. In turn 11 Zinhle answers the question that was really not a question (turn 10) with "I am a queen" which leads to laughter from both participants. This leads to the appropriation of the initial utterance for humorous effects.

In the initial conversational context, we do not know why Bonang is crying, we just know that she is crying in the background, while online she posts as if she is happy. In this case Zinhle fills in the blanks. She is crying in the background because her nude pictures are out, but online or on the 'outside' she is pretending to be fine by using the hashtags from the initial conversational episode: "queening" "hashtag fab day". Thandi plays along in turn 14 by providing her own version of the "hashtag" formulation, given that several (related) hashtags are usually strung together on online posts. Thandi's "hashtag greatness" can be seen as the next hashtag after #fabday on this hypothetical online post they are co-creating. These tags are followed by the tears that are flowing 'in reality' in the background. Turn 11-14 are punctuated by loud exaggerated laughter indicative of how entertained the participants are by their reuse of the original utterance in this context. Using the words from previous context within this extract generates playful banter between the two participants. Playfulness diffuses the discomfort from the conversation they were having, thereby turning it into something funny and less serious.

Further on in this interaction, the same lines of text from the initial conversational episode are once again used to playfully manage Thandi's FTA towards Zinhle. Every time one of the other participants would post a photo on their individual or Girl Chat instagram page, Zinhle would comment "love love love love". In this extract Thandi talks about Zinhle's signature comment. But every time Bella tries to contribute to the conversation, she is interrupted by Zinhle. Thandi, who has been observing this, intervenes so that Bella can finally say what she's been trying to say. This leads to the reuse of the " #queening #fabday" joke by Zinhle.

Extract 6.11. #queening #fabday (3)

1. Thandi: "love love love love" whole time on our wall
2. Zinhle: (laughs) that's [my signature
3. Thandi: [all your comments "love love [love love"
4. Bella: [that's how Zinhle - you'll post - [Zinhle will not post - she'll
5. Zinhle: [that's my signature
6. Bella: when you post she'll [not like
7. Zinhle: [I'm glad you noticed because it's my signature now from now on (Thandi chuckles)
8. Bella: she doesn't [like eh
9. Zinhle: [even this other celebrity was like "love love love [love"
10. Thandi: [Y:OOH so every time Bella opens her mouth you gonna say something do you know how long she's been trying to say one sentence (Bella laughs softly) it's just the truth girl let the girl speak (in black american accent)

11. Bella: (Laughs) oh God
12. Thandi: I'm sorry please Bella finish your - cuz I'm trying like I've been trying to finish listening to Bella's sentence so I can move on to you (Zinhle laughs) but every time my ear goes she's like "aah" and then i'm like "hhe" and then like it was confusing me also
13. Bella: [(laughs) oh god]
14. Zinhle: [I wanna go to the bathroom
15. Thandi: DON'T CRY (laughs) don't cry on the way please be strong
16. Zinhle: (chuckles) I might, hashtag fab (Thandi laughs) day queening (both laugh)
17. Thandi: slaycation
18. Zinhle: I'll be /wailing/ in the bathroom (laughs)
19. Thandi: please don't /wail/
20. Zinhle: (still laughing) can I have some tissue

In turn 1, Thandi, who is most probably browsing through Instagram, speaks about how Zinhle always comments "love love love love" on images she likes on Instagram. Bella tries to contribute (turn 4) but she is interrupted by Zinhle who excitedly shares how this will be her signature comment henceforth. Bella tries again to say something (turn 6 and 8) but is again interrupted by Zinhle. Thandi finally intervenes in turn 10. The utterance is spoken with a smiley voice, and at the end of the utterance she styles an American accent. These devices which signal playfulness are used to soften the blow of Thandi's intervention which may be seen as a FTA towards Zinhle. Thandi's comment is serious in the sense that she would like to hear what Bella has to say but it contains some elements of play and as a result the other participants are also able to take on a playful stance towards Thandi's comment. Thandi's turn 12 works as a sort of repair to both Zinhle and Bella. It explains or tries to justify why she abrasively interrupts Zinhle while at the same time creating the space for Bella to speak[14]. She constructs a humorous scenario in which she has been trying to listen to Bella but before Bella can say "aah" (which symbolises how little Bella is able to say) she is interrupted by Zinhle. Thandi's "hhe" is meant to capture Thandi's 'confusion' since she is also trying to listen to what Bella was going to say. Thandi is effectively teasing or taking a jab at Zinhle for not being sensitive to the conversational needs of her fellow interlocutors.

We see Bella and Zinhle laughing at Thandi's dramatisation, but instead of providing a comment relevant to what Thandi has said, Zinhle instead announces that she wants to go to the bathroom. Even though Zinhle laughs and offers no further reaction to Thandi's observations, we can see how in trying to create space for Bella to speak, Thandi has equally violated Zinhle's own desires

[14] This may also be seen as evidence that their discourse practices also work as ways of caring for each other as analysed in the previous chapter. Being interested in what each member has to say while also protecting each other's feelings are all signs of care and evidence of the affection that makes them friends.

to be uninhibited. Thus, Thandi's turn 15 may be seen as repair work, even if it is also executed playfully. She manages to make Zinhle's arguably unrelated need for the bathroom part of her joke "DON'T CRY (laughs) don't cry on the way please be strong". Turn 15 also signals that Thandi is aware that a line might have been crossed, and since Zinhle does not explicitly respond, Thandi feels the need to use these repair strategies of mock consolation. This finally gets a playful reaction from Zinhle in which she reuses the established joke "I might, hashtag fab day queening" (16). Similar to the previous extract, Thandi contributes an improvised element to the joke. Instead of "hashtag greatness", this time she uses "slaycation". This is social media speak for looking great. Furthermore, in this recontextualization of the joke, "while I'm crying in the background" is replaced by "I'll be wailing in the bathroom". The conversation therefore ends with Zinhle announcing her need to go to the bathroom, and Bella never gets to share what she had wanted to say all along.

The use of humour in conversation again points to the satisfaction derived from being able to understand what was meant in spite of what was said. Each time the utterance is reused, there is no need to remind any of the participants where it came from and no need to explain how it makes sense in this new situation. They all just get it. It makes sense even after several hours have gone by. This works to reinforce the idea that they have a similar sense of humour, they think alike and they enjoy being in conversation with each other. This further highlights the relational stance they have taken towards each other, that of being friends, or at least of being friendly. Thus the understanding of language or conversational play simply as the use of language in specific ways for the sole purpose of entertainment (Cook, 2000, Tarone, 2000, Coates, 2007) and the view that language play is a highly individualistic aspect of a person's conversational style (Tannen, 1986) does not fully appreciate the work of conversational play at the relational level as demonstrated in these analyses.

6.6. Chapter summary

Overall, the analysis presented in this chapter reveals that the participants align their utterances more towards their interpersonal goals of maintaining a sense of friendliness and community over their individual face needs. This takes the notions of face and politeness as conceptualised by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) beyond the focus on the preservation of an individual's face into the management of interpersonal or relational bonds. I have shown that through the history of

their interactions, the participants have created a state of relational flow in which knowledge of what can or cannot be said and how it can be said has become intuitive through negotiation in interaction. The analysis of their conversational play practices shows that acts that may be perceived as face threatening according to popular theories on politeness are viewed as a welcome part of the discourse practices of the participants in this study. This therefore reinforces the social constructionist argument that FTAs cannot be determined prior to the interaction or to the relationship (Watts, 2003; Locher and Watts, 2005; Tannen, 2021). FTAs are negotiated between interlocutors in their interactions with each other over time. Their interactional history, shared knowledge about each other's beliefs, ideological standpoints, personalities and past experiences give the participants the necessary context from which to extend the benefit of the doubt and considerateness to each other. It is based on this contextual information and history that speech acts are 'read' or 'heard' and made sense of.

My analysis further shows that although entertainment and creativity are important aspects of conversational play, the different types of play (teasing, reusing previous utterances for playful purposes) also perform a metafunction or pass on a metamessage of building and sustaining rapport. When one's fellow interlocutors correctly interpret the contextual cues that point to a play frame in one's utterance, and respond accordingly, this creates the sense of mutual enjoyment of each other's company. The success of playful interactions communicates the metamessage that the interlocutors get along well, they have a similar sense of humour and they intuitively know how to relate with each other without the loss of face. Finding funny, subtle or stylised ways of saying something is found to be aesthetically pleasing in itself. When one's fellow interlocutor gets the off record messages that are being communicated, it has a conversational payoff of pleasure while sending a metamessage of rapport and intimacy.

CHAPTER 7 - PLAY AND STORYTELLING FOR AN ONLINE AUDIENCE

"it's that uhm we kinda liked the same things…I don't know how to put it, we kinda vibed"

7.1. Introduction

This chapter looks at the storytelling and conversational play practices in the conversations that are filmed for the online Girl Chat platform. I argue that the presence of a largely unknown audience with whom the participants do not share a rich interactional and relational history creates a situation in which participants are more sensitive to issues of face and respectability. As our relationship as individuals working together towards the common goal of educating young African women takes precedence over our relationship as friends, the strategies used to signal rapport in our discourse practices shift as well. The analysis shows that politeness strategies and face work, even between the same participants, change as the context and the purpose of the conversation shifts. Strategies that may signal friendliness in one context may not be seen in the same light in different contexts. This reinforces the arguments posited in Chapters 5 and 6 about the situatedness of face needs and the discursive nature of politeness.

My analysis of playful interactions in online conversations shows that play in these contexts serves as a tool for managing the discussion of sensitive topics which, if poorly handled, might affect the sense of respectability that the participants would like to protect, in other words, face work. It also serves as a strategy to keep the discussion of rather serious and sometimes controversial topics lighthearted, entertaining and informal. Storytelling in online conversations, on the other hand, serves mainly as evidence for the point that the teller is trying to make and to show that the advice being given is from our lived experiences, rather than from an abstract or theoretical position. I show that traditional notions of politeness thus seem more productive in the analyses of the online conversations which involve an unknown audience, than the private offline conversations.

Before I begin the analysis of specific extracts, I will first provide background information about Girl Chat and the overarching features which distinguish the Girl Chat conversations from their private conversations. This will be followed by the analysis of specific instances of play and storytelling to show how discourse practices are employed for strategic purposes in Girl Chat conversation.

In the last part of the chapter, I will present some findings which diverge somewhat from my focus on play and storytelling to look at the symbolic role that digital technologies play in the way that relationships are managed today. This study focuses primarily on the relationship between their discourse practices and the participants' friendship bonds. However, because the use of digital technologies to manage relationships is a recurring theme in their conversations, I felt it necessary to comment on it.

The internet and the digital technologies used to access it have affected almost every aspect of human existence including personal relationships. The discussion in this section will look at the ways in which symbolic value is attached to digital technologies in organising social relationships. I will argue that the ways in which we interact in the virtual space using these technologies have 'real' implications on our personal relationships, thus blurring the lines between the virtual and the material. I will also show how these technologies are used to facilitate long distance relationships, arguing that close proximity and regular face-to-face interaction is not a compulsory condition for the maintenance or evolution of intimate relationships. I will use the participants' stories from the offline private conversations as well as data from the playback interviews to illustrate this symbolic relationship between digital technologies and social ties. This analysis is in line with the discussion in Chapter 4 where I argue that looking at friendships as situated in specific time and place can provide insight into the ways in which individuals are organising their social lives.

7.2. Online/public Girl Chat conversation and its distinguishing features

Girl chat was created in 2016 and officially stopped producing content in 2020. Thandi, Bella, Quinta and I were the co-founders and hosts of the platform. Girl Chat was created with the aim of "changing the narrative of the African woman through real, informative and entertaining conversation" (written on the about section of our YouTube page as shown in appendix 4). This overall objective guided the decision making process for which topics would be discussed, how the topics would be approached and decisions about how to divide the work that needed to be done so that we could consistently create fresh content on a weekly (then biweekly) basis. The YouTube channel was supported by Instagram, Twitter and Facebook accounts on which we promoted and directed traffic towards our YouTube content.

Girl Chat was not a big platform when compared to other channels on YouTube with millions of subscribers and views. Girl Chat grew to eight hundred and seventy nine subscribers on YouTube, with about five hundred or less followers on our other social media platforms, except for Facebook on which we had one thousand five hundred followers. The number of views per video averaged between a hundred and twenty views to five hundred views per video, the only exceptions being two videos which got over ten thousand views. One of these videos dealt with an altercation between a white male and black female which was trending on social media at the time, and we believe our video only got so much attention because most people were online watching different interpretations of the event. This was further proven by the fact that the video we uploaded the following week, which still dealt with issues of race, only got about a hundred views. The only other video which received over ten thousand views was one in which the participants discussed vaginal health issues and tips for sexually active women. We are still unsure why that video received so much attention, because once again, the video that followed it, which tackled similar issues, received about eight hundred views. My interest in Girl Chat conversations, therefore, is not on account of the success or impact of the channel on a substantive audience. My interest is in how the participants' discourse practices and patterns shift as their relationship oscillates between being a group of friends with individual goals and aspirations, sharing space and maintaining their relationship as friends, to a group of individuals working together on a project towards a common goal, involving a largely unknown and unpredictable audience.

The participants' relationship as co-founders and workers on Girl Chat and their relationship as friends constantly feed each other, but they're not reducible to each other. As a result, the nature of the discourse practices and the activities they are engaged in vary depending on which aspect of the relationship is being foregrounded. In Girl Chat conversations, friendship is secondary to the mission of sharing individual perspectives on the issues at stake, directed towards a common goal of changing the way African women view themselves and are viewed by others in a largely patriarchal, sexist and racialised world. There are, however, instances where the participants highlight our relationship outside Girl Chat by sharing stories or details about our friendship, if sharing these details contributes to the overall goal of the episode. Online Girl Chat conversations have three main distinguishing qualities from the private conversations, namely: Girl Chat conversations are staged, there is a presence of a largely unknown audience and different rules for sharing the conversational floor (turn taking) apply.

7.2.1. Online Girl Chat conversations are staged

Before each shoot, the group would take time to get well dressed and put on makeup, a process that usually took between two to three hours. During this time there would be a continuous stream of conversation (banter, stories, and/or play, see also figure 5.1 and 5.2) as we got ready. Sometimes we would use this time to fine tune the ideas we had about the conversation we were about to film. Once we were ready, the sitting room in Quinta's house would be transformed into a 'set'. The camera and lights would be set up and we would sit facing the camera in the same position for every video. Bella and I would usually sit in the middle of Thandi and Quinta because we were shorter. We always had some wine or champagne which we would sip throughout filming to create a casual or informal feel to our conversations. Everything about the physical setting for Girl Chat conversations was intentional and geared towards creating the most pleasing looking image. In our private conversations at home, little or no attention was given to the physical setting in which we were conversing, nor to our physical appearance. Participants were usually lying in bed or sitting in a relaxed manner somewhere in the room, browsing through their phones or computers while watching TV.

Although Girl Chat conversations were not scripted, they had agreed upon objectives. Each member had to do their own personal research on the chosen topic before filming day, although we preferred to speak from personal experience. Meanwhile, for the private conversations, there was no need for any preparation. There were no obvious or previously agreed upon goals to be achieved by the conversation. As such, Girl Chat conversations tended to remain within a specific topic area, and the stories and observations shared were often geared towards the agreed upon goal of the conversation. Stories and observations made in ongoing, mainly unmediated private conversations, on the other hand, had no specific direction or common theme, we just 'went with the flow'.

7.2.2. The unknown Girl Chat audience

Another key aspect of Girl Chat conversations is the presence of a largely unknown audience. The target audience of Girl Chat was young African women between the ages of eighteen and thirty five. Our goal was to empower other young black African women and to encourage them to

"question things that the society has conditioned them to see as normal" (from one of our introductory clips used to promote the channel in its early days) so as to create our own path in the world. This objective (and a sense of an ideal viewer) was the guiding principle of the work we did and it ultimately determined how topics were selected and the kinds of goals we set out to achieve with each YouTube episode or post on our other social media platforms.

Although the Girl Chat hosts identified the target audience, we had no control over who watched the videos. Some of the comments on the YouTube channel came from male viewers. On YouTube, one can see the number of times a video was watched, but there is no way of knowing who exactly watched unless the viewers left a comment. Even then, the Girl Chat team would not know the majority of their viewers personally. As such, we were often addressing an unknown audience. This resulted in a more cautious approach about what was said as well as how it was said. We had our own reputations to protect as well as the need to avoid certain topics (such as topics dealing with sexual orientations[15]) or saying things in ways that could upset their audience. For instance, we decided at some point that although we had no problem with swearing, some audience members might not appreciate that style of speaking, and so a decision was made to no longer swear in our YouTube conversations. The participants did not concern themselves with this type of censoring in our private conversations, as we have seen in the previous chapters where swearing seems to be a big part of our discourse styles.

Another noticeable effect of the audience on Girl Chat conversation is that the people we talked about in the online conversations (except celebrities) were kept anonymous. Characters were referred to in generic terms such as: "my ex", "a friend of mine" or "this guy". Although the Girl Chat hosts addressed a mostly unknown audience, the characters in their stories were usually of real people who might not appreciate their names being mentioned. In offline/private conversations, names were mentioned and sometimes nicknames were created for certain characters for the group's own amusement or convenience. For example, Bella was put in touch with a manager of a restaurant called The Dinning (pseudonym) and for a long time the group

[15] Three of the hosts are from West Africa where matters of sexual orientation are highly contested. Even in South Africa were the constitution allows for freedom of sexual expression, there is still a concerning attitude of homophobia. We decided that we would not directly address issues around sexual orientation in our videos. However, in some conversations, especially those that were related to sex or romantic relationships, we signalled that everyone was included in our conversations by making statements such as, "regardless of whether you are into men or women or both".

referred to him as “the dinning guy” because we did not know his name. When the conversation is being filmed for online use however, names are usually left out to protect the anonymity of the characters in their stories. The participants were more interested in sharing the lessons learnt from past experiences than in gossiping about the people with whom we shared the experiences.

7.2.3. Turn-taking in Girl Chat conversation

Lastly, each online conversation was ‘chaired’ by one of the hosts. This person was responsible for introducing the day's topic to the viewers (to the camera) and for making sure that the conversation stayed on track. She usually had a set of questions prepared (which the other members were not always unaware of) in case the conversation stalled along the way. She also had to ensure that each person had a chance to engage with the topic. As such, she would direct questions to specific members or call on someone to share their own views on questions that were already on the table. In addition, the length of individual turns in online conversations were typically longer than in regular private conversations. Whoever was sharing their perspectives would be given the space to see their thought process through and the others would only engage enough to show that they are listening with comments like “imagine!”, “are you for real?”, “yaas girl!” and so on.

Overlapping speech and interruptions are features of conversational discourse. However, there were fewer instances of these features in our online conversations when compared to our private conversations. Usually, this would happen towards the end of the participants' utterance, during the discussion of exciting points (both those they agreed and disagreed about) and when one tried to complete the other’s sentence as a sign of agreement or engagement. In our private conversations, there was a marked presence of instances in which one of the participants would start a parallel conversation unrelated to the conversation at hand, but linked to some other conversation they have had or ongoing activity. The participants would either suspend the ongoing conversation to address the interruption or some would carry on the main conversation while the others engaged in the parallel conversation. For instance, Bella might be asking me if I would like more food while Thandi was in the middle of a story or I could interrupt one conversation to enquire about an email we had been expecting from one of our collaborators. Such unrelated utterances did not feature in the online conversations as much, and when they did, there was also a shared understanding that it will be edited out of the final video.

I will be following this discussion of the main distinguishing features between the private conversations and those conversations that are designed for an online audience with an analysis of instances of playfulness in online conversations. I show how play is realised in online conversations, the functions it serves within these conversations, and the implication of these two aspects on the overall function of play in managing relationships in interaction between the participants.

7.3. Playfulness in online Girl Chat conversation

Although Girl Chat had serious goals about changing the way African women are viewed or view themselves and their place in the world, there are instances of conversational play in their youTube videos. Instances of play are also used to create a sense of casualness and informality. We did not want to sound too formal or intellectual, so we strived to maintain lightness and fun through play. We believed this would make our content more relatable and accessible to more people. The YouTube conversations, in terms of structure, have roughly three stages:

1. welcome and introduction,
2. the body or conversation proper and
3. the conclusion and goodbyes.

Play in online contexts served mainly to break the ice at the beginning of the conversation, to navigate uncomfortable questions or topics, especially those related to our sexual activities or other taboo subjects and to show (dis)alignment with a speaker's point during the conversation. At the end of the conversation, play may be used to finish the discussion on a lighthearted note. Overall, the participants favoured being informative over being playful or entertaining. Any discussion that was not directly contributing to the goals of the Girl Chat video, no matter how entertaining would be cut out during editing.

As mentioned in Chapter 5 (section 5.2), one of the two audio recordings used in this study includes private offline conversation as well as conversations that were being filmed for Girl Chat. The first extract of online conversation I analyse below comes from this recording. At this time, I was not participating in the filming of Girl Chat videos for some personal reasons, which is why only Bella, Thandi and Quinta are present in the extract. I had given Bella the audio recorder I was using for data collection so she could help me record their conversations in my absence. Bella did not know

that I was only interested in their private conversations at that time, so she recorded both the private conversations that happened before filming as well as the conversations they were filming to upload on YouTube. The two conversations for YouTube which were captured in the audio recording were part of a four-part series we were filming on the theme of self-love. The extract below was part of one of these online/public conversations that was looking specifically at how not to lose oneself in romantic relationships.

In this extract, play is used to manage the sharing of information that the participants consider sensitive. Using play to hedge the process of divulging sensitive information is most prominent when the participants discuss topics related to their sexual activities. Play becomes a strategy in managing one's own face needs while also trying to achieve the objectives of the specific episode. In the extract below, we see how participants use play to try and evade Quinta's question about the number of relationships they have each been involved in. This is sensitive information to share on YouTube for the participants, given that the number of relationships might also imply the number of people they have been sexually intimate with. So they playfully try to wiggle their way out of giving a direct answer in order to save face or to remain in face with their unknown audience with unknown moral stances towards the subject.

Extract 7.1 - Saved by the bell

1. Quinta: let me first find out from you guys what you guys like – first of all reflect how has your – how many relationships have you been in=
2. Thandi: =[Wow,
3. Bella: =[Wow Did you just ask me that=
4. Quinta: =I didn't ask how many times you fucked
5. Bella: [***Oh God woah*** (laughs) ***woah***
6. Thandi: [***Woo:: wow yoh***
7. Quinta: [I'm just (Laughs) how many relationships
8. Bella: [She's just, ***Quinta***]
9. Thandi: I have been - like I don't even know how to respond
10. Bella: Thandi are you watching this (Laughs)
11. Quinta: I - just answer the question because I must
12. Bella: Yah
13. Thandi: How many relat- yoh guys
14. Bella: [Uhm let me see; one, two
15. Thandi: [One, two. Wait One, what constitutes as a relationship
16. Quinta: (Laughs)
17. Bella: (Laughs)

18. Quinta: I love this you don't know
19. Thandi: Like what constitutes a relationship (laughs)
20. Quinta: A relationship is when you're in love with someone and you're dating the person over a period of time
21. Thandi: So both of us know that we're dating
22. Quinta: Yah
23. Bella: (Laughs)
24. Quinta: (Laughs)
25. Bella: (Doorbell rings) Yo

This extract is significantly longer than other playful interactions within the Girl Chat online conversations. I had hoped to be able to retrieve the final cut of the video that was posted on YouTube, but my efforts came up short as some of the videos have since been deleted. It would have been insightful to see how much of this interaction was kept in the final video. Usually the editor would cut down such extended playful interactions to get to the final answers quicker. Nonetheless, we see Bella and Thandi using a variety of playful and evasive strategies to navigate their way out of answering Quinta's question. Thandi is still negotiating with Quinta trying to figure out what constitutes a relationship, acting as if she does not know what Quinta is asking when in the nick of time the doorbell rings. Thandi and Bella are literally saved by the bell. Thandi's playful evasion tactics buys them some time to think about how they might want to answer the question in an entertaining way instead of thinking about their answer in silence. We can see how playfulness is used in this context to negotiate and delay responding to a question that makes the participants uneasy.

The participants live in a conservative society where many consider it immoral for women in particular to have multiple romantic partners (which also implies multiple sexual partners). This is possibly the reason why this question had to be managed delicately. Issues of reputation and respectability were at stake. Some of the audience members know the participants personally and those who do not might still form certain undesired impressions about them if their answers are not carefully hedged. The participants' reactions to Quinta's question show that they orient to it as a FTA: "did you just ask me that" (turn 3), "I don't even know how to respond" (turn 10). Quinta's question imposes on the participants' positive and negative face simultaneously. It puts them in a position to have to share information they would rather not share (negative face) because their answers could negatively impact how their audience perceives them (positive face). The playful delay tactics provide an entertaining way to manage the FTA in Quinta's questions without ruining

the lighthearted and friendly nature of the conversation.

Play is used in this extract to do face work in a way that we do not see in their private conversations. In Chapter 6, we saw Thandi tease Bella about her "vagina pictures" (Extract 6.1), Zinhle expressed interest in nude photography and in other instances (not presented in this thesis) participants make other explicit jokes and talk about their sexual and relationship adventures without the kinds of hesitations seen in this extract. The participants know about each other's relationship histories to some extent, they also know that they do not hold conservative moral stances that others might have on this issue of intimate relationships. Based on their shared feminist ideologies and from past conversations, they know that one's romantic (sexual) relationships are not enough ground on which to judge one's moral standing or respectability. As a result of these shared understandings, they are more comfortable sharing sensitive details about their (romantic) lives in private conversations.

Their online audience, on the other hand, does not have the same rich relational and interactional history with the participants and so the hosts have no way of knowing how each audience member might judge them based on their answers. This is why they revert to a playful strategy to avoid addressing Quinta's question. Although the participants aim to educate and empower their target audience by sharing as much as possible from their lives, there is also respectability politics at play which is not present in offline private conversations. This leads to the use of playful indirectness and evasion techniques to manage face needs. When the participants finally resume shooting, Quinta repeats the question, but there is none of the playful tactics as the element of surprise is gone. Quinta also does not repeat turn 4 in the extract above. Bella and Thandi provide vague or inexplicit answers to the question: "I've been in some relationships" and "I don't know if some of them were relationships" and Quinta does not probe any further, respecting their wish not to disclose this information.

Playful strategies are also used to negotiate instances where participants hold different views about a particular subject. Play is used in a way that shows difference or misalignment while protecting the face of the speaker. The extract below shows Bella and Thandi's playful performance after Quinta reveals that her longest relationship had lasted seven years, something the other participants have never experienced. The conversation following the filming of this video further highlights the face saving work the participants do for each other in their online conversations. The extract

comes from the same series of online conversation as Extract 7.1 which explore the theme of self-love. Somewhere along the conversation, Thandi asks about the length of each hosts' longest relationship and this leads to a playful interaction.

Extract 7.2 - "Almost married"

1. Thandi: [how h – like how have you – how long has your longest relationship been]
2. Quinta: thing is that ah sheesh guys, seven – seven years=
3. Thandi: =(***high pitched, loud screams***) [YOU WERE ALMOST MARRIED DAMN DAMN
4. Bella: =[WOW GIRL /girl can be so patient /
5. Thandi: NO NO (clapping) (high pitched, loud scream)
6. Quinta: (Laughing)
7. Bella: you're like – we're just thinking months weeks(laughs)
8. Thandi: I'm like [10 months, 3 years
9. Quinta: [what were you guys thinking
10. Bella: One year, two years it's just like
11. Thandi: *gyel* [*girl*]

This extract shows the playful performance of surprise at the fact that Quinta has been in a seven year long relationship. Bella and Thandi use volume, expressive phonology, the colloquial expression, "DAMN", laughter and clapping to playfully demonstrate their surprise and misalignment. This is something that the other interlocutors cannot relate to as they have never had such a long relationship. This is why Thandi goes as far as to compare the relationship to a marriage, implying that any relationship that lasts that long can be equated to a marriage, a more serious and institutionalised relationship. Bella and Thandi's surprise performance during filming was genuine because although they knew that Quinta had been in the relationship for long, they did not know exactly how long, since Quinta, to this day, prefers to keep most details about her romantic relationships private. Girl Chat conversations, as I mentioned, are not scripted even though each video has its own objectives which guide the conversation. This means that the hosts cannot always predict what will be said or what the reactions of their interlocutors will be. The pattern in the data is to revert to playfulness in these unanticipated scenarios. Once the surprise or discomfort has been dispelled through play, the participants must return to the 'serious' topic of discussion at hand. In this case, the playful reaction to Quinta's answer helps the hosts show that they have a different position from Quinta, but their playfulness makes it so that Quinta does not feel antagonised in this situation thus protecting her face needs.

As mentioned, I was not present for filming of Girl Chat conversations at this time, but I still had to be present for meetings and other tasks necessary for the running of Girl Chat. On this day, we were scheduled to have a Girl Chat meeting after Thandi, Bella and Quinta finished filming. I was the one who rang the doorbell which spared Thandi and Bella from answering Quinta's question in Extract 7.1 as I arrived earlier than expected for the meeting. Once they let me in, they continued to film the conversation while I sat quietly behind the camera listening. The audio recorder which had been recording also captured the conversation that followed the filming of the online Girl Chat conversation. In the private conversation following the filming session, all three of us complimented Quinta for some of the great advice she gave during the Girl Chat conversation. I then remarked that Quinta gave great relationship advice, but she did not always take her own advice and Thandi and Bella agreed with me. This observation was based on the fact that I knew that Quinta had wanted to leave that seven-year long relationship for several years but she had not been assertive enough to do it. The point I want to make by sharing what conspired after the camera was switched off is that the comment about Quinta's inability to take her own advice and the teasing that follows is discussed off camera as the friendship once again takes precedence over their relationship as Girl Chat hosts. On Girl Chat the participants would not reveal such details about each other. Only the person involved, in this case, Quinta, could decide how much she wanted to share on a public platform. But once the camera is turned off, the rules of rapport shift once again and participants may engage in acts that may be perceived as violations of each other's face wants without any ensuing trouble in the interaction and at the level of their friendship.

Based on the two extracts analysed above, traditional conceptualisation of face work (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Lakoff, 1973, 1989) seems more applicable to the participants' YouTube conversations where there are strangers involved than to our private conversations. In YouTube conversations, the participants seem to be more concerned about staying *in face* and protecting each other's face against an unpredictable audience that does not have all the contextual and historical background needed to judge their actions. The shared interactional history which neutralises face threatening acts (FTAs) in private conversation is not shared with their YouTube audience in online conversations, hence, the need to tread more carefully and to be more sensitive to each other's face needs. Even though engaging in what may be considered FTAs in private conversations signals friendliness and points to the strength of the bond between the participants, the reverse is true for online conversations. Knowing what to say and what not to say about each

other in online conversations shows that we have a good understanding of each other's face wants within different contexts. Of course, the friendship and the roles on Girl Chat feed each other. Our friendship allows for great chemistry on camera, while knowing what to say and what not to say on Girl Chat conversations strengthens our friendship off camera as it shows that we have a good understanding and are protective of each other's face wants. There were times when we did not get along offline because of disagreements that were usually, but not always related to Girl Chat. In these situations, we would put our differences aside for the duration of the video shoot where we tried to act as if nothing was wrong. We still talk about our ability to switch from being upset to *acting* happy and friendly when the camera was on, and then back to being upset once we were done. Unfortunately, I did not capture such instances in the recorded conversations. However, what this shows is that strategies used for face work or politeness are not given. They are negotiated and learned overtime and become intuitive practices between interlocutors. This leads to a situation in which participants know what will work in different contexts and also how to repair violations that may occur. It also means that they know how to enact these friendly practices even when they do not necessarily feel that way towards each other as they are well rehearsed at this point.

Playfulness in Girl Chat conversations may also be used to signal alignment. Instead of simply stating that one agrees with the other's point, they may choose a more playful approach to do so. In these cases, play serves to make the videos entertaining for the hosts, but more importantly for the people watching. It provides relief from the more serious aspects of their conversation thereby making it more engaging. To illustrate this point, I look at another short extract from the same conversation as the extract discussed above. Before Quinta's turn 1, the participants have been seriously expressing how they maintain a healthy sense of self in their romantic relationship. Thandi seems to appreciate the way Quinta articulates her point of view and proceeds to playfully and indirectly compliment Quinta to the amusement of all.

Extract 7.3 - "Maya Angelou bitches"

1. Quinta: I've been hurt a lot of times but I never lost myself in the pain because I love myself too much to allow the hurt to take something from me
2. Thandi: Shoo[oo (Finger snapping)
3. Bella: [Mmmmm]
4. Quinta: So – So it's like
5. Thandi: Maya Angelou bitches

6. Quinta: (Laughs)
7. Bella: (Laughs)
8. Thandi: [Oh God]

After Quinta's turn 1, a playful reaction from Bella and Thandi in relation to Quinta's statement ensues. Thandi compares what Quinta has said to Maya Angelou who is a well known black female poet and writer. This strategy is used in combination with other strategies that signal play in this context, e.g. snapping, cussing[16], expressive phonology and laughter. Play here is used to do face work by showing alignment. We can see Thandi and Bella aligning themselves positively towards Quinta's utterance, hence fulfilling Quinta's positive face needs. It is much more interpersonally and aesthetically rewarding to express alignment indirectly and playfully than to literally say what one means (Tannen, 1986). The high payoff of playfulness and indirectness seem to be true for both public and private conversations. The fact that the audience and hosts can understand what Thandi means with her comments makes all involved feel like they belong, hence developing rapport between the hosts and hopefully their audience. Comparing Quinta to a well established Black female author shows how much Thandi appreciates Quinta's point which further fulfils Quinta's positive face needs. Play in this context also works to highlight the conversational points that resonate and to keep the discussion of serious topics light and entertaining for all.

All in all, in Girl Chat online conversations, conversational play is used to manage the image we project to our audience, that is, face work. The strategies used in private conversations to signal closeness may not yield the same result online. The unknown audience complicates matters especially because the shared interactional histories which make the use of certain strategies in private conversational contexts rewarding are not equally shared with their audience. This requires that participants use play strategies in ways that may be different from how they are used in private conversation. Traditional models of politeness seem to be more applicable to online conversations involving strangers than to the private conversation among close friends. This analysis also highlights the notion that face work is context specific. The strategies used to effectively do face work vary from context to context. They are highly contingent on the nature of the relationship between those involved within specific communicative events. The strategies used even between

[16] Managing the dilemma between the desire to keep our content clean by censoring ourselves and the desire to stay true to ourselves was a challenge for the Girl Chat hosts. So we would go back and forth on whether swearing was allowed in our videos or not throughout the existence of Girl Chat.

the same interactants may shift as the nature and purpose of the interaction shift. Knowledge about which strategies will be most productive in different situations is a result of shared relational and interactional history between interlocutors, rather than an essential notion of politeness or face. Analysing storytelling events in Girl Chat conversations provide further insight into the ways in which relationships are managed across contexts. I now turn my attention to storytelling in online conversations.

7.4. Storytelling in Girl Chat online conversation

In analysing storytelling practices in the participants' private conversations, I argued that stories function as one of the main tools through which we sustain our relationship. I discussed the three important relational functions that storytelling plays in offline conversations. Through storytelling we: 1) update our shared stock of knowledge which forms the basis for future interactions, 2) create a dynamic space for critical (re)assessment of our sense of self, other, our relationship with each other and the world around us and 3) engage in relational risks (vulnerability) and in a narrative mode of care which facilitates the risk taking process. In online conversations, the principle role of storytelling was to provide evidence for the point the speaker was making, and a way of showing that we too had experienced some of the things we were talking about. Stories then functioned as a medium through which participants could share the methods and strategies we employed to manage these experiences and the lessons we learned from them without necessarily imposing our perspectives onto our audience. Stories also helped to make potentially abstract and impersonal conversations seem more personal and relatable, while avoiding the problem of presenting our points of view as the only correct ones. Stories in online storytelling do not work at the relational level as the stories in private conversations. The stories have an educational and evidentiary role in relation to the objectives of Girl Chat. This justifies the arguments made in chapter 5 in terms of the role of storytelling in the sustenance of friendship or friendliness given that in online conversations, their goal to educate takes precedence over managing their friendship.

The first two stories analysed below come from a series of conversations the Girl Chat team were having in women's month which takes place in August in South Africa. Unlike the extracts above that were from one of the two recordings captured by my audio recorder, the stories below come from conversations that were already uploaded onto Girl Chat's YouTube page. In keeping with women's month, the Girl Chat hosts are sharing their perspectives on the question "who is an ideal

woman?" Each member gives their definitions of the ideal woman which seem to coalesce around the point that an ideal woman is one who can choose for herself the kind of person she wants to be and the kind of life she wants to live. In other words, a woman who lives life on her own terms. In the first story, Bella shares that she did not see her mother as a successful person because her mother herself did not see all that she had accomplished as evidence of success simply because she was a single mother. Her story shows that it was only after Bella moved to South Africa that her perspective changed about what it means to be a complete, happy and successful person with agency. At this time, Thandi had travelled back to the Northern Cape to see her family, so those present in this YouTube conversation were Bella, Quinta and I.

Extract 7.4. The ideal woman

1. Bella: I remember () - like it it- I think when I came to South Africa that's when my perspective about you know you being happy and uh the choices in your life like
2. Ajoh: mhm
3. Bella: because back home I - my - to me right I didn't see my mother as a very successful person right because even though she has like a good like she's educated she has a good job she has a family which is us she even gave us a house and all that I didn't still see - because the - she too had this problem was like "I don't have a man make sure you get married at least to complete your life" and all that so I didn't see=
4. Quinta: =so you measured her success [(inaudible)
5. Bella: [yes Imagine
6. Quinta: that's [a lo::t
7. Bella: [but when I came here and people are like you know what you don't need to use - you don't need people by your side to qualify you as a complete person you as a person you are complete
8. Ajoh: mhm
9. Bella: so when I came back I'm just like "I wish my mom can understand how (.)
10. Ajoh: complete [she is
11. Bella: [how complete she is"
12. Quinta: I feel like now the people in Cameroon are gonna say that you are spoilt you've been corrupted by south African culture (Quinta and Ajoh laugh)
13. Bella: /?/ I was corrupted in a good way I don't care (.) because I can't imagine that someone who has given us so much life someone who has given us - you that woman has struggled even my grandmother like all of them were single they have struggled to make sure that [the kids that they brought into this world are
    (Ajoh: [Imagine)
    successful and they are successful then we're like this person is not (.) complete
    (Ajoh: Complete)
    this person is not I don't think I can qualify this person as an ideal woman because she doesn't have 'Mrs'
14. Quinta: and it's the most ridiculous thing ever that people will just sit down and and what is the word

nullify, should I use, your success [just because you are single

15. Bella: [Just because there's not 'Mrs'
16. Quinta: So everything that you have achieved in this world is reduced to nothing because you don't have a husband

Bella is giving her perspective on the notion of the ideal "woman" which includes the story above. Bella false starts with a typical narrative opener "I remember…" signalling that she is about to tell a story. But instead of launching directly into the story, she first states the point the story will make, which is the effect of her move to South Africa on her understanding of happiness and choice as a woman. In turn 3, she tells the story of how she used to think when she was back home and the reasons why she thought this way. She did not think her mother was successful (even though she had a job, she was educated and had built a house for her children), because her mother did not have a husband. This was a perspective her mom also shared hence her advice to her daughter: "make sure you get married at least to complete your life". In turn 7, she shares how different perspectives she encountered after moving to South Africa changed her previous beliefs: "...you don't need people by your side to qualify you as a complete person, you as a person you are complete". She rounds up the story in turns 9 and 11 by stating that she wishes her mom, whom I presume is still holding on to the idea of needing a husband to be complete, would learn the same lesson that she (Bella) has learned.

This narrative structure of first stating the point, providing the story as evidence for that point, then returning to the point after the story is an example of what Eggins and Slade (1997) have referred to as an *exemplum*. This is a story shared not for its own sake, but for the point it justifies. This type of story is the most common type found in Girl Chat conversations where narratives are not told for their own sake, but as evidence for the point the speaker is making towards the conversational goal. In casual conversation, we may find this type of story as well but they are not as common as stories of something that happened in the recent past (just now, earlier that day or the other day), stories that are triggered by something within or outside their ongoing conversation (e.g a previous utterance, something the participants are watching on TV, a text message, a social media post etc), and stories that have no obvious goal or point. Thus, the stories told in Girl Chat conversations, although they serve to build rapport between the participants and potentially between the participants and their audience, their primary purpose is to help the speaker make a point which is tied to the overall goal of the Girl Chat conversation.

Aside from the story itself, the turn taking pattern may also highlight the point that storytelling in the participants' casual private conversations serve different relationship building functions than the stories told in Girl Chat conversations. Generally speaking, storytellers tend to be given the floor to finish telling their story and so they have longer turns than the average conversational turn (De Fina, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 1994; Norrick, 2007). In Girl Chat conversations, where there are specific goals for each conversation and each member needs to be able to share their position or perspective towards that goal to an unknown audience, turns may also be longer even if they do not include a story. In this case, Bella shared her perspective on the issue of the ideal woman which also happens to include a story. Throughout Bella's turns, I only say enough to show that I'm listening through backchanneling cues such as, "mhm" and "imagine". When Bella pauses to find her words, I volunteer suggestions: "complete she is" (turn 10) and "complete" (turn 13). Quinta participates more than I do in turns 4, 12, 14 and 16. However, her contributions are directly related to Bella's point and they extend what Bella is saying. Nonetheless, Bella's turns are significantly longer as Quinta and I recognize that she has the floor and we only engage as much as we can without taking the floor over from Bella.

In the casual conversations analysed in the previous chapters, it is often hard to say who the teller of the story is or who has the conversational floor simply by looking at the length of the turns. Tellers are constantly interrupted by comments and questions from their interlocutors either so as to gain clarity, to show alignment or to derail the telling entirely. Sometimes there is parallel unrelated conversation taking place while someone is in the middle of their story. These patterns may serve the relational needs of the participants within offline conversational contexts, but they are considered disruptive in Girl Chat conversations. The questions and comments in Girl Chat stories are also usually connected to what the speaker is sharing, instead of adding a new point or sharing an unrelated perspective and there is usually no parallel conversation taking place while they are busy filming an episode for their channel. During filming, we are aware that our conversation is aimed to serve an absent audience that needs to be able to follow along with as much ease as possible. We are also aware that this audience is interested in each host's views. As a result, comments and questions are limited, allowing the host who has the floor to fully express herself.

The differences in participant involvement in Girl Chat conversations and our casual conversations at home thus reinforce the arguments made about the multiple functions that storytelling events play in our casual offline conversations for friendship maintenance. In private conversations, the fact that stories unfold in the middle of ongoing activities, that the storyteller's motives can be questioned, that unrelated conversation can take place without upsetting the teller and that the audience can completely derail the storytelling without causing trouble all work together to realise the sense of closeness and understanding of their relational practices. In Girl Chat conversations where the friendship between the hosts is secondary to the mission of educating and empowering other women, we observe a difference in the types of stories told as well as the storytelling dynamics. There is less competition for the conversational floor in the YouTube interactions since each participant gets a chance to express her point of view. There are also few instances of critical engagement with each other's stories as there's a shared understanding that each person's (woman's) 'truth' is valid and may be relevant for someone out there.

In addition, story rounds (Sacks, 1972) or interlaced stories (Norrick, 2005, 2007), which have been identified as a significant quality of conversational storytelling, happen more frequently in Girl Chat conversations than in their casual, private conversations. Given that everything that is shared in Girl Chat conversations is working towards a particular goal and stories are the main form of legitimating evidence for the lessons they aim to teach, the telling of one story might trigger the telling of more stories as added evidence to support the point which is being made. Story rounds further drive home the point that we are speaking from firsthand, or at least, second hand experience of the specific topic and adds credibility to the ideas we are teaching instead of speaking from a disconnected or merely theoretical position. Bella's story in extract 7.4 above was followed by Quinta's story in the next extract which supports Bella's point by showing how Quinta herself has experienced something similar. In Quinta's story she talks about a time in her life when she had to juggle many jobs just to make ends meet and the idea that one day the fruits of all her efforts might be attributed to the man she will eventually marry.

Extract 7.5 - "He's not even here"

1. Quinta: This was something that was pissing me off the other day in my mind the other day there was a time when my life was like (2) I ca - can't swear so (all laugh)
2. Bella: (inaudible because of the laughter)
3. Quinta: my life was like all over the place

4. Ajoh: mhm
5. Quinta: and I was getting less sleep like less than three hours of sleep
6. Bella: mhm
7. Quinta: I was running up and down holding down all these jobs plus school right
8. Ajoh: mhm
9. Quinta: and then I'm sitting in my bed one day and I'm like all this struggle
10. Ajoh: I'm [telling you
11. Bella: [I'm telling you!
12. Quinta: (laughs) tomorrow someone will think [I'm
13. Ajoh: [yoh
14. Quinta: and even even worse when I then get married someone would like credit the nigga for
15. Ajoh and Bella: your success
16. Quinta: and he's not even here=
17. Bella: =he's not here\

Throughout Quinta's story, Bella and I keep our engagement minimal, saying just enough to show that we are following: "mhm", "I'm telling you" and helping to complete Quinta's turn 14. Her story extends Bella's point. She adds that people will not only think a woman's life is incomplete without a man, despite any other achievements, but they will actually credit any success she has acquired to a man when there's finally one in the picture, even if he was not there to help. Topics that explicitly address our lives as (black/African) women are not common in our everyday conversations as we have seen in the previous chapters. This may be because the focus of our everyday lives is more on our pragmatic or immediate needs (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Sacks, 1972, 1992). Even if issues of gender and race are usually working in the background, and social understandings of these issues are drawn on to make sense of their interactions, they are not the most salient aspect of their relationship. Instead, they form part of the taken-for-granted and implicitly negotiated aspects of our interpersonal relations. The Girl Chat platform, which is specifically designed to educate other women about alternative ways of being an African woman that may not always fit the stereotypes, creates opportunities for these experiences to come to light as stories of our experiences as women become more relevant.

As previously mentioned, our relationship as Girl Chat hosts and as friends constantly feed each other. Thus, while the main aim of stories told online is to provide evidence, they also work to ground additional information into their shared pool of knowledge. Some of the stories told on Girl Chat are already known by the hosts, in this case, different perspectives of the story are shared, and sometimes new stories are told. Whatever the case, the stories and ideas they share online

become part of the shared stock of knowledge used to make sense of interactions that take place in offline situations. Be this as it may, the stories told on Girl Chat have less of a relational function than those told in private conversations as the goal on Girl Chat is to educate and not to engage in relationship sustaining practices.

7.5. The mediatisation of social relationships

In this chapter, I have explored the nature of play and storytelling in Girl Chat conversations to see how these practices in this context offer more insight into the role they play in managing the relationship between the participants. In keeping with the theme of mediated conversations, I would like to explore the role of media technologies in maintaining our social relationships. One of the arguments I highlighted in Chapter 4 (section 4.3) about the nature of friendship is the idea that they are contingent on time and space and embedded into the specific sociocultural and historical contexts in which they form. One of the major developments in our world today has been the rise and pervasive use of digital technologies. These technologies have had a profound influence on most aspects of our human lives. The way we do business or politics, the way we make and sell music and books or access information among many other aspects of our social lives have been affected by digital technologies (Madianou & Miller, 2013; K. Davis, 2013; Georgakopoulou & Spillioti, 2016). The transformational effects of innovation in media technologies has been the focus of researchers who are interested in mediatisation processes. Mediatisation may be defined as "the transforming potential of media communication upon culture and society" (Lundby, 2014: 12). The discussion below aims to contribute to the field of mediatisation by looking at the way in which communication technologies are transforming the nature of our personal relationships in material and symbolic ways.

The data for this study were collected from a group of people who work on social media spaces and who use digital technologies to manage different aspect of our lives such as: making and editing videos for YouTube, creating content for Instagram and Facebook and for keeping in contact with family and friends in Cape Town and around the word via WhatsApp. Indeed, some of the playback interviews for this study were conducted via Googlemeets and recorded on a smartphone. It is therefore not so surprising that in the recorded conversations and in the playback interviews, several instances emerged in which participants reflected on the ways in which media technologies were implicated in how they perceived and managed their personal relationships.

In this final section therefore, I look at the ways in which participants view and maintain their relationships with each other and with others. I draw on the notion of *domestication* (Silverston, 1993; Silverston and Haddon, 1996); the idea that individuals incorporate communication technologies in their lives to serve their own needs. This aims to add to work that contests the notion of technological determinacy. I argue that individuals are not passive consumers of new technologies, rather they actively determine the role of these devices in their lives. I look at strategic ways in which the participants assigned symbolic value to communication technologies and the implications of this valuing systems for their social relationships.

In addition, I look at how the participants' relationships have evolved now that they no longer have in person interactions with each other as they did during the time of Girl Chat. Girl Chat had stopped producing content in 2020 as the lockdown regulations, aimed at managing the spread of the COVID 19 pandemic, became stricter in South Africa. These government imposed lockdowns seriously constrained face to face (in person) interactions. Thandi and Zinhle had moved out of Cape Town before the pandemic, as our lives took us in different directions. The rest of the Girl Chat members (Bella, Quinta and I) went from seeing each other every week to seeing each other only once in a while. The playback interviews, which were conducted in 2021, created the opportunity for us to reflect on how our different life trajectories and the pandemic affected our relationships and the role of media technologies in this phase of our relationships. The data to illustrate the arguments in this section are from their offline private conversations and the playback interviews.

7.5.1. Establishing interpersonal boundaries with digital devices

Drawing from media domestication theory proposed by Silverstone (1993, 2006), the presence of technological devices in the home does not always mean the use of these devices in the same way by all those who possess them. Silverstone (1993: 227) speaks of the ways in which "technologies and services, unfamiliar, exciting but also threatening, are brought (or not) under control by domestic users". Digital technologies have made us more accessible to others. For instance, we can receive calls instantly from people that are far away, and we can be added to WhatsApp groups without our consent as long as the person adding us has our phone number. However, individuals make use of inbuilt elements of these platforms, such as muting, as well as other creative strategies, such as one-word answers, to manage accessibility and essentially domesticate these technologies.

In the extract below we see Bella defining what is acceptable and unacceptable use of WhatsApp group chats, and how she deals with people who do not follow the same guidelines. This extracts from the private conversations recorded in R1.

The conversation that the participants are having before this extract is not related to the story that Bella eventually tells. The participants were commenting on an advertisement that aired on TV and as the commentary starts to die out Bella receives the message on her phone from a WhatsApp group. The conversation that follows is one in which Bella reflects on why she loves this WhatsApp group and how it is different from other WhatsApp groups. This conversation took place around the time when there was the South African fashion week in Cape Town in 2017. The members of Girl Chat were commissioned to help one of the fashion brands coming in from Ghana called Africvibes (pseudonym). The WhatsApp group was created to facilitate the activities that had to happen leading up to the show.

Extract 7.6 WhatsApp group etiquette

1. Bella: I love this group this er fashion er [Ada's thing
2. Thandi: [Africvibes
3. Bella: Africvibes the people talk only when it's necessary (laughs)
4. Thandi: (chuckles) what is happening now
5. Bella: (still laughing) no:: because I just saw - I just saw er Ada - no she sent a message about - okay she sent this thing
6. Thandi: mhm
7. Bella: so I'm asking has the date and venue been confirmed even though they can put the date but have they confirmed with her like she's like "yes" and no other person come - came on the group and was like "so what are we" - no that was - like I love this (laughs)
8. Eve: wait what happened I didn't hear
9. Bella: she sent the picture of uhm you know it's going to be held here at [Salt River thing
10. Eve: [mhm
11. Bella: so I asked her if uhm this venue has been confirmed because she - in this previous message she said she had to call them [to confirm so I asked her she was like “yes” and that was it like no other (makes noises to mimic unnecessary talking) I don't like group that people talk a lot first I don't like people who talk a lot then people just like to create groups for shit now this girl wants to make her birthday party she's creating a group
12. Eve: mhm mhm
13. Thandi: oh God
14. Bella: The birthday party is on the 22nd you're creating the group now like what the fuck
15. Thandi: what are we talking about
16. Bella: no it's this girl one of my friends
17. Thandi: yeah that's what I'm saying what are we talking about in the group [with the birthday only on the

twenty what what

18. Bella: I don't even know because I just mute the group (laughs) immediately I saw myself in (laughs) I just went and muted the group I was like I'm gonna put this on mute till (.3) I don't like

Bella's comments about loving the fact that people on the Africvibes WhatsApp group only talked when necessary needs more clarification which is why Thandi wants to know what happened (turn 3). On the day of the fashion show, strong winds blew through Cape Town and destroyed some of the facilities that were being used for the Fashion Week. As a result, a new date and a new venue had to be picked and all the designers would be informed about these changes. Bella's story is about what had happened in the group after she asked if the new date and venue had been confirmed. Ada (the fashion designer and group leader) had replied "yes". Her reply was straight to the point, and no one said anything else on the group chat after that. I ask Bella to repeat what she said because I did not hear her (turn 8) and Bella does. This time she includes Ada's previous message in which Ada had said she needed to call the organiser of the event to confirm the new date (turn 11). She once again states that Ada's response was straight to the point, "'yes', and that was it", but she also adds that she does not like groups in which people talk a lot and people that talk a lot in general. She also does not like the fact that people create group chats for things that, in her opinion, do not need them. She then proceeds to talk about what she does when she finds herself in such a group - "I just mute the group".

What is of interest in this interaction is the way in which Bella manages relationships on WhatsApp. She has certain ways in which she prefers to use the platform, and anyone who does not act accordingly is at risk of being blocked or muted. She uses the inbuilt affordances of the platform to tailor how it will be used at her convenience. This is in line with research on the domestication of technologies. This research developed as a critique of technological determinism which contends that technological change is the leading cause of (usually negative) social and cultural change, assigning only a passive role to users or consumers of the technologies (Young, 1990, Silverstone & Haddon, 1996; Madianou & Miller, 2012). Proponents of the domestication theory look at the dialectics between consumer habits and innovation in technologies. They argue that consumers are active participants in the way in which technology evolves. Domestication looks at "how various information communications technologies (ICTs), broadly defined to include a range of more traditional and new media, entered and found a place in people's lives" (Haddon, 2017: 1). In the extract above, Bella is showing the ways in which she manages

WhatsApp group chats especially if the members of the group do not act in ways that she deems appropriate for the platform, thereby managing interaction with those in the group chat and domesticating the platform to serve her needs in her own way.

Bella's story and reflection above further highlights the way in which the mobile phone is both an object as well as a medium through which information reaches her. The messages sent or received create opportunities for conversation between the participants in the here and now that would otherwise be impossible. The activities happening in Bella's WhatsApp create opportunities for the participants to jointly reflect on appropriate WhatsApp group etiquette and by extension appropriate interpersonal behaviour on these platforms. It also highlights the way in which the same technology that is used to connect and share important information is also used to keep information that is deemed unnecessary out (e.g. by muting, blocking unwanted groups/people). This interaction thus highlights the active, rather than passive ways in which individuals engage with technology in their lives and the discursive ways in which the presence of ICTs at home blur the lines between the material and virtual world.

7.5.2. Showing support and managing conflict online

In addition to the incorporation of technologies, the value of relationships and the identities of participants are linked to their use of digital technologies. These technologies may also be used as a measure of how close we are to other people or to judge how much of a friend someone is to us. In addition to spending time together, taking part in joint activities or sharing affection for each other, the dimension of mutual support and appreciation has been extended to how people relate to us online. For instance, liking, commenting or sharing a friend's post may be considered one way of signalling friendship. We may not consider everyone who engages with our online content a friend, but we tend to expect our friends who are active on the social media platforms we use to engage with the content we post. In the case of the participants in this study who have a YouTube channel, they especially rely on their social circle to help them reach a wider audience. As more people subscribe to their channel, like, comment on or share their posts, this communicates to the platform's algorithm that people are interested in this channel/post, and so it will recommend the channel/post to more people. This should lead to the growth of the channel and increase the possibilities for monetisation. It thus follows that, if one considers themselves to be friends to any one of the Girl Chat hosts, then one would actively engage with their content as a sign of support.

In the extract I analyse below, Quinta tells a story about someone she no longer considers a friend because she did not watch or share Girl Chat content even though she had the means to do so. I also look at how Quinta uses the affordances and constraints of WhatsApp to manage the process of putting distance between herself and said friend. This extract comes from the conversation recorded in R2 which took place at Quinta's house during their Girl Chat content creation activities. The conversation is between Quinta, Thandi and Bella. Before this extract, they are discussing the idea that one cannot rely on family and friends support when trying to grow a business or an online platform like the one they want to build. They simply need to keep putting in the work and help will come from unexpected places. It is within this conversational context that Quinta tells the story of how she got upset when a friend of hers did not watch Girl Chat videos even though she had time and data to watch.

Extract 7.7 "Forty gigs of data"

1. Quinta: you know the funniest thing is that that girl that I told you guys about that told me she had 40gigs data and hasn't watched our videos (all laugh) I stopped - I stopped talking to her she's been bothering my life [for the last few days
2. Thandi: [wow
3. Quinta: "what's going on Quinta I am tired of this your one-word answers" cuz maybe if she comments on my thing I just say "okay" and I don't [like hit her up
4. Bella: [as you - who said? I need to filter people like (laughs)
5. Thandi: uhm uhm
6. Bella: guys let's do this thing I think that thing [has charged enough
7. Thandi: [/?/
8. Bella: I need to filter people
9. Thandi: because how can you open your mouth and say to your friend "listen I have 40gigs of data but I can't watch your videos"
10. Quinta: I swear I was so upset she's like "I have 40gigs of data and I don't [know what to do with it"
11. Bella: [I don't know what to do
12. Quinta: I'm like "have you watched my videos why don't you go watch Girl Chat videos since you don't know" because she said the data was gonna expire (Bella laughs) she was worried that the 40gigs was gonna expire like "why dont you go see Girl Chat videos and when last did you watch our videos?" she's like "ooh I haven't seen you guys video in a long time" I'm like "so even with the links I send to you [/?/
13. Bella: [but people have courage eh and they tell you
14. Quinta: and then I was like "you know what" I was so upset and I'm like "listen I think I'm not even going to send your this links" and I actually removed her from the list=
15. Thandi: =wow
16. Quinta: of people that I send it to I'm like I'm not gonna bother with this [(inaudible)

17. Bella: [I don't do it again eh I have come to that like
18. Quinta: I was like this is the last time

Quinta starts off with a marker of what Georgakopoulou (2008) calls a *reference story* (a one liner, told to jog the audience's memory about a shared story): "you know the funniest thing is that that girl that I told you guys about that told me she had 40 gigs data and hasn't watched our videos". She then proceeds to add new information. First she stopped talking to her and then in turns 3 and 5 she explains that she was so upset that she now only gives one-word answers when the girl messages her. Bella then provides what could count as a coda for Quinta's story, which is to filter out unsupportive people out of their lives (this conversation is happening in the middle of a video shoot in which they had to pause because their camera battery died. Bella's turn 6 is a reminder that they still need to finish shooting). Then the storytelling event continues with Bella and Thandi reinforcing the idea that Quinta's friend was insensitive and such people need to be filtered out. Instead of this being the end of the narration, Quinta picks it up again, going back to what happened before she finally stopped talking to the girl. She reports the dialogue she and her friend had (turns 12 and 14), to re-emphasise just how unsupportive this friend was. Bella agrees as she does not understand how people have the courage to be so insensitive. Quinta then rounds up the discussion by stating that she removed the girl from her broadcast list and decided not to bother sending her friend links to the YouTube video on WhatsApp which Bella supports because she too has stopped sending links to contacts that do not respond.

In this storytelling event, we see how YouTube and other social media platforms like WhatsApp are viewed and used in symbolic ways. They are not simply mediums used to share information; they also carry a symbolic quality. These platforms are viewed as mediums through which the world can be changed (hence the objectives of the Girl Chat YouTube channel), it can lead to (at least career and social) success for Quinta and the other Girl Chat members, it can be used to maintain relationships, show support to friends or to signal trouble in relationships. This could explain why Quinta prefers to discontinue the friendship, given that YouTube and the videos they post there mean a lot more to the participants than a technical medium through which they share information just for the sake of sharing. Furthermore, Quinta's friend notices that something is wrong when Quinta does not initiate chats and only gives one-word answers. In other words,

Quinta is not engaging with her friend on the media platforms as a friend should and in this way, she signals to her friend that something is wrong without explicitly having to say so.

We can see the ways in which people in the participant's life engage with them online have implications for the nature of the overall relationship due to the symbolic meanings they have attached to their online activities. We can also see the way in which media technologies go beyond simply broadcasting messages to also fulfilling the symbolic role of organising the participants' relationships. Quinta does not tell her friend that she is upset or why, instead, she does not initiate chats and she gives one-word replies when she gets a message. These strategies as well as other popular ones such as blocking, muting, unfollowing among others are used to manage different kinds of problems in different relationships and contexts. How the people in the participants' circle engage with them online has relational implications as their engagements determine which friends are worth having and which ones need to be 'filtered out'. These dynamics point to the ways in which digital technologies go beyond simply sending messages to being intricately implicated in the processes of managing relationships, in other words, the mediatisation of social relationships.

In the analysis above, I have looked at the way digital technologies are implicated in boundary setting activities and in interpreting acts of support and conflict. The dynamics of domestication observed may be particularly salient here because of the fact that the participants were still active content creators who hoped to monetise their online content. In the last section I show how the relational dynamics changed once Girl Chat was no longer producing content mainly due to the pandemic and the fact that some of the participants moved to other cities which limited in person interactions. I also look at the role of digital communication technology in managing these relational changes.

7.5.3. Friendship commitments during a pandemic

One of the most common assumptions made by scholars of interpersonal relationships is that the lack of face-to-face, in person contact leads to more fragile bonds and sometimes to the termination of relationships (Fehr, 1999). As the COVID 19 pandemic ravaged the world, leading to the implementation of strict lockdown regulations, researchers hypothesised that the loss of in person interactions would negatively affect the quality of personal relationships, specifically friendships (Foley, et al., 2022; Boeker, et al., 2021). Research on friendships since 2020 have yielded mixed

results with some research showing that the size and quality of people's personal communities have been negatively impacted by the pandemic (McCoy, 2001; Scott, et al., 2022; Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2020) and others showing an increase in the quality of relationships as a result of the pandemic. Many factors contribute to the mixed results, such as the levels of commitments that already existed in the relationships under investigation prior to the pandemic, the age group of research participants, and whether or not relationships were already being managed using digital communications prior to the pandemic amongst other variables (Foley, et al., 2022).

Friendships that already enjoyed high commitment levels were able to continue serving the individuals involved even with limited in person interactions (Foley, et al., 2022; Juvonen, et al., 2021), while those with weaker commitment levels were more susceptible to deterioration and even termination (Fehr, 1999; Johnson, et al., 2009). Young people who already managed their relationships through both in person interactions and through digital communications reported little to no change in the level of relationship satisfaction, while those whose relationships were highly dependent on in person interactions reported a decrease in the quality of those relationships. Furthermore, young adults, who are most active users of digital communication technologies reported that their relationships were less affected by the lockdown than older people who are not active users of digital communication technologies (Foley, et al., 2002).

Most of the research on the relationship between the pandemic and friendship has focused on adolescents and young adults between the ages of twenty and twenty four. The focus has also been on relationships between people who already lived in the same geographic location, without taking into account research that looked at long distance relationships (Johnson et al., 2009); Johnson, et al., 2004; Rohlfing, 1995), such as those between migrants and their families back home and long distance friendships before the pandemic. At the time of the play back interviews, the participants in this study were between the ages of twenty nine and thirty two. In addition, their relationships had already been undergoing changes that could not be attributed to the pandemic, such as Thandi and Zinhle moving out of Cape Town. This study thus allows for the exploration of relational dynamics in a different age category and the exploration of whether or not the changes in relationships, if any, could be attributed solely to the pandemic. It also sheds light on the role of communication technologies in managing these changes in relationships.

In the playback interview with Quinta, she stated that most of her friends, even before the pandemic, were not based in South Africa and so she already had limited in person interaction with these friends. In responding to my question on the effect of the limited in person interaction with the remaining Girl Chat members (Bella and I) whom she also considered her friends (see Chapter 4) as a result of the pandemic, Quinta reflected as follows:

Extract 7.8

> I mean technology has really helped I mean I cannot imagine what how many years ago was when you had to send a letter and wait for it to come back (laughs) and have pen pals and shit (laughs) technology has really helped now we can video calls and talk to people and it still feels like even though I have like I said most of my friends are not even in South Africa so I still maintain those friendships because there's mobile phones to talk to people with you know so yeah uhm but then again personally I hate social media, maybe it's related to the fact that I'm getting older (laughs) and I have a lot of things to do in my life I just don't get enough time to stay on social media but when there is a need to talk and call it happens and yeah technology has helped..

In 2021, Quinta had been living in Cape Town for eleven years, with only yearly, or bi-annual visits back to Nigeria. In addition, some of her friends were in other parts of the world such as the USA and Europe. Therefore, with little to no in person contact, she was able to maintain high levels of commitment to her friends, even more so than with those she interacted with regularly such as Thandi and those she referred to as acquaintances (see Extract 4.12) who are based in Cape Town. This throws into question research that has attributed the high commitment levels in friendships to regular in person interaction or geographical proximity. Moreover, even though she highlights the role of digital technologies such as mobile phones in maintaining the relationships, they only form part of the reason why these relationships have retained high commitment levels since interaction does not happen frequently. Zinhle echoes Quinta's sentiments when she states that,

Extract 7.9

> uhm well for me it's a thing of I'm not really a fan of talking on the phone like phone calls and I can handle video calls and voice calls but I don't really uhm it's

not really my thing so uhm communicating uhm with you guys uhm has been that but whenever I think of you guys tho I would send you a message

In these interviews, I would paraphrase what the participant had just said to make sure that I understood what they were saying, and hopefully stir further discussion of the issue. In this particular case, I paraphrased Zinhle's comment above as follows:

Me: so basically from what you said earlier, nothing has happened or nothing changed between how you - we engage with each other to make you redraw
Zinhle: yeah
Me: but you also don't feel the need because it's not your own style to keep actively in touch so in the mind and when you think about us it's like "yeah these are my people"
Zinhle: yeah
Me: but you don't necessarily actively engage in the phone call or text or this or that
Zinhle: yeah

My comments here, which Zinhle agrees with, help to make the point that commitment to friendships, to a certain extent, precedes interaction. As established in Chapter 4, we need to engage in joint activity with each other for a friendship and the initial commitment to a long term relationship to form. However, once this commitment is formed, it becomes the main driving force towards the sustenance of the relationship, regardless of frequency of interactions or geographical proximity. Research on friendships in long distance situations and through the pandemic has attributed the endurance of these ties mainly to the presence of new digital technologies that make communication possible (Foley, et al., 2022; Juvonen, et al., 2022). The new mediums of communication facilitate communication across distance and the availability of video calling platforms bring some aspects of in person communication, such as body language to virtual communication. These technologies, at least in the case of the participants in this study, are not the main variable at play in the maintenance of friendship bonds over time and distance. Bella states that:

Extract 7.8

> That's how my friendship with Bongi its evolv - has evolved and then it's evolving because right now we don't live in the same place…but we still have a relationship that we are responsible for and we actually need to maintain the relationship and - now - that time we were living together I could just you know sit and then we talk now how do we maintain the relationship? *we go call sometime* [*we will call sometimes*] *you know you go buy this one something* [*you will buy this one something*] *or you know you go tell her something wey iy really dey inside* [*or you know you will tell her things that's really inside you*]*or you go ask for help and all that* [*or you will ask for help and all that*]

Bella's observations here highlight the fact that there is a level of commitment that precedes and grounds interactions between friends. The commitment to doing the "work" needed to maintain a friendship drives the need for interaction. Once this commitment is in place, the frequency of interaction or ease with which communication can occur and physical proximity form secondary modes of sustenance for the friendship. The data is therefore in line with research that highlights the relationship between commitment levels and the sustenance of personal ties in the pandemic and across distance. My data shows that friendships with high levels of commitment continue to serve the individuals involved even if the pandemic and events in an individual's life course (such as travel) may limit opportunities for joint activities. In other words, relationships with high commitment levels may experience a fixed trajectory (e.g. Thandi and Bella) where its quality is maintained, or it may enjoy a positive progressive trajectory (e.g. Quinta and Bella), despite the absence of face-to-face interaction. Whereas friendships that already had low levels of commitment, like those between Thandi and Quinta, and Quinta and Zinhle, may eventually dissolve (negative progressive trajectory) without the opportunities for in person interaction. In high level commitment friendships, therefore, the choice to remain committed to the friendship and the willingness to continue to invest into the relationship in other ways, such as being a confidant allows the friendship to overcome external circumstances that limit the frequency of in person interactions. Although communications are useful for maintaining contact or keeping in touch, the data in this study shows that these technologies only serve to maintain relationships if commitments between the individuals have already been established.

This argument may only apply to friendships that formed in person, before travel or the pandemic caused limited in person interaction. Friendships that formed and have manifested only in virtual spaces may reveal different relationships between commitment and interaction using digital technologies. The fact that the participants in this study do not interact as much as expected using digital technologies, but still maintain high levels of commitment to their friendships seems to contradict popular understandings of the role of digital technologies in maintaining friendships during the pandemic and across distance. Thus, empirical research on other friendships may reveal even more enlightening ideas about the extent to which these technologies contribute to the maintenance of social relationships across time and distance.

7.6. Chapter summary

This chapter analysed the participants' storytelling and playful practices in conversations that are filmed for their online platform called Girl Chat. I showed how understanding the multidimensional aspects of the participants' relationship shape the ways in which discourse practices may be instrumentalised in different contexts. I outlined the main differences between their private conversations and their public conversations and analysed the ways in which story and play emerge in their public discourse. These differences include the presence of the unknown audience as well as the goal orientedness of the conversations on Girl Chat. The analyses revealed that stories in Girl Chat conversations worked mainly to provide evidence to support the speaker's point, while play works to manage face needs in the discussion of taboo or sensitive topics and to maintain a general lightheartedness throughout the conversations.

This analysis supports the arguments in chapters 5 and 6 about the role of discourse practices in sustaining the friendships between the participants as once the friendship is overshadowed by their relationship as hosts, the dynamics of these practices change. I have shown that Brown and Levinson's (1978) conceptualisation of politeness is much more productive in analysing the participants' online conversations where the objectives of the conversations and the unknown audience lead to different relational and conversational stakes. This showed that the relational face needs of individuals change depending on the context of interaction so much so that discourse practices and the face and relational work they do may vary even between the same individuals.

In this chapter I also looked at the mediatisation of social relationships which was a recurring theme in the data worth commenting on. I analysed the participants' stories and presented extracts

from the playback interviews which illustrate the role of digital technologies in the sustenance of relationships today. I showed how although the participants are active social media users, they use the same technologies to build boundaries around the use of the technologies. In this case I show how the participants use the mute button and one word replies to messages to manage accessibility and the interference of unwanted information into their private space. I also argued that digital technologies are not simply mediums of communication, they also hold symbolic value, so that how one's friends interact with them online has serious implications for the overall state of the relationship.

Finally, I examined the role digital communication plays in maintaining personal relationships during the pandemic and in long distance friendships. The literature and my data suggest that there are no clear cut answers as many variables influence how individuals use the technologies within their friendships. For my participants, commitment to the friendship motivated interaction and even without frequent interactions (in person or virtually), the participants felt the nature of their relationships with each other had been more or less maintained. This analysis brings into question popular understandings regarding the role of frequent in person interaction and the maintenance of friendship ties and calls for the study of friendship in different contexts to gain deeper insight into these issues. In the next chapter, I conclude this thesis by summing up the main arguments made and the ways in which this study contributes to knowledge on the relationship between discourse practices and friendship sustenance.

CHAPTER 8 – CONCLUSION

"…there's a thing, a chemistry that I feel with people and once it's there it grows naturally…"

The goal of this project is to contribute to research that explores our understanding of the relationship between discourse practices and the sustenance of personal relationships, specifically friendships. To do so, I collected and analysed the private casual conversations and the online YouTube conversations of a group of five friends to uncover how their discourse practices function as constitutive and maintaining mechanisms for their friendships. The specific questions I set out to answer were:

1. What are the storytelling and play patterns observed in the private offline conversations? What insights can the study of the turn-by-turn unfolding of play and story in these conversations provide into the mechanisms by which the friendship between the participants is discursively sustained?
2. How are the patterns of conversational play and storytelling in online public YouTube conversations different from or similar to those in the offline private conversations? What further insights about the maintaining mechanisms of their dynamic and multifaceted relationship can be gleaned from analysing storytelling and play patterns in their public conversations alongside the private ones?
3. What are the macro narratives and processes influencing the way the participants view themselves and their relationship with each other? How are these larger social discourses and patterns exploited to serve interactional and relational goals in everyday meaning making processes?
4. How has the COVID 19 pandemic and other major life changes (such as friends moving to other cities) affected the nature of the relationship between the participants? And what can be learnt about the processes that sustain friendship from looking at the evolution of the participants' friendships over time and periods of change and uncertainty?

To answer these questions, I selected theoretical and analytical frameworks that allow for the analysis of discourse to explicate social phenomena. These frameworks include the community of practice approach (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Eckert & McConnel, 1992), various

strands of narrative analysis (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008, De Fina, 2008; Sacks, 1992, 1972), politeness theory (Brown and Levinson, 1978; Watts, 2003; Locher & Watts, 2005) and interactional sociolinguistics (Tannen, 1984, 1986, 2021). These were reviewed in terms of how they have been conceptualised and used elsewhere, and how they have been adapted for this study. I looked specifically at how these frameworks have been applied to the study of interpersonal relationships and what they have revealed about the relationship between discourse practices and social ties. These theoretical frameworks informed the way in which my data were analysed.

Before the discussion on storytelling and playfulness and the ways in which these practices were important aspects of the relationship maintaining apparatus in the data, I examine the notion of friendship, broadly discussing the way in which it has been conceptualised in research in western, eastern and African societies and the way the participants in this study themselves define friendship and their relationship with each other. I look specifically at three key issues which have concerned researchers on friendship namely: choice, *affection/joint activity* and *(moral) commitment*. My discussion of these friendship matters shows that although the participants are African women based in an African city, their relationships with each other resists categorisation as 'African' since they display qualities that have been identified in friendship studies within western, eastern and African societies. The contribution that I make to research that aims to understand the nature and functions of friendships within society is to highlight the problems involved in viewing certain friendship patterns or qualities as essentially western or African as seen in existing literature on the subject.

I argue that even though there are several sociocultural, political and economic differences between different societies at a macro level that influence how friendships can form, the reality at a micro, day to day experience of friendship is much more nuanced. In an increasingly globalised world in which information is more easily accessible and in which we can learn about and from different cultures with relative ease (thanks to the internet and its accompanying technologies), the boundaries between what is African, western or eastern have become even more blurry. Therefore, although it is necessary to acknowledge the society in which the friendship(s) being studied is situated, we must pay close attention to the unique situation of the individuals involved within that society as well. I argue that such a nuanced approach to the study of friendships (and other types of social relationships) and the roles they play in the lives of those who share them should be more

productive if we seek to understand the ways in which social relationships (and thus the social fabric of the world) are being (re)constituted today.

Furthermore, I analyse the participants' private conversations in order to understand the role of their storytelling practices in managing and sustaining their relationship as friends. It is widely acknowledged in research on narrative that storytelling can be found in most social interactions, especially among those with whom we have close relationships, such as close friends, family and romantic partners. My analysis of storytelling in the participants' private conversations extends this knowledge by showing that the practice of storytelling is not simply an activity that people in a relationship share, it is indeed part of the mechanism through which the relationship is realised and deepened or enriched over time. I identify three levels at which the constituting and maintaining function of storytelling is discursively and simultaneously achieved in the data.

The first role includes the function of *keeping the shared stock of knowledge* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), *or the conversational and relational common ground* (Kashima, 2014) *between participants up to date*. I propose that shared information that is up to date is a core asset of a community of practice (CoP) upon which future interaction and other relational activities depend. I argue that storytelling in the participants' private conversations provides a format through which the participants relay mainly mundane events that happen in their lives in the absence of some or all other members. Although updates can take a non-narrative format, the co-construction of stories in conversation allows multiple levels of meaning and information to be grounded into the existing stock of knowledge shared by participants. Apart from the actual events being narrated, other information, such as the interpretive frames used by the teller to make sense of the events narrated, the teller's construction of 'tale world' and 'interactional world' identities, the audience reactions and group and individual ideologies that emerge from the telling are updated. It is based on this pool of updated information and layers of meanings that accurate or relevant inferences needed for successful future communication are made.

Secondly, through storytelling, *established and new knowledge about the participants, such as their individual and group ideologies, values, aspirations and beliefs as well as their relational positions towards each other become open for (re)assessment*. The process of updating the shared pool of knowledge through storytelling is neither a systematic process nor is it one without contestation. Through the co-construction of the events being narrated, participants may accept,

contest or all together reject the interpretive frames being used by the teller to make sense of the narrated events. They may challenge how the storyteller constructs the characters in their stories, the conclusions drawn from the events and the way the telling constructs the teller in the interaction. Interpretive frames and the ideological positions they point to are usually related to larger sociocultural narratives. In this way, several, sometimes competing macro narratives are put to work in micro contexts to serve a variety of interactional and interpersonal needs. I therefore argue that this process of critical engagement through narrative and other discourse genres is necessary for the management and sustenance of the relationship between participants. It allows them to gain a nuanced perception of how similar or different interlocutors' positions are in relation to the variety of issues occasioned by their stories. This recurring process allows participants to sharpen or deepen their knowledge of each other and of how to engage with each other in ways that would be appreciated.

Thirdly, the two narrative functions highlighted above are only possible if the participants are *willing to take the risk of sharing their stories*. I argue that there is always some risk involved in sharing one's experiences, even with close friends, which puts the teller in a vulnerable position. The risk lies in the potential challenge or rejection of one's story, individual perspectives and ideological positions on various issues. However, because of the interactional and relational histories shared by participants, a safe space has been created in which the risks of storytelling have been mitigated. This safe space is created and maintained through the practice of actively listening and engaging with another's story. *Creating the space for hearing and being sensitive to others' experiences which include mainly mundane or unremarkable events, I argue, is an interactional act of care*. If one's attempts to share information that one considers meaningful or important for whatever reason are constantly ignored, or met with insensitive antagonism, one might consider the space hostile. This may lead one to avoid sharing information or communicating openly which will stifle the growth of the relationship or even lead to its termination. Thus, I contend that the co-creation of a space where members feel their views can be shared and engaged with sensitively is fundamental for the sustenance of friendship over time. It is based on my analysis of the multifaceted role of storytelling in the data that I propose that storytelling as a key component of the mechanism through which the participants' friendship is constituted and sustained. It provides the *fuel*, that is, the necessary information and meanings that are foundational and without which the growth of the relationship will be stunted.

With regards to conversational play in the private conversations, my analysis shows that far from being a trivial activity which serves only to entertain, conversational play within friendship discourse plays an important role in sustaining friendliness between the interlocutors. The opportunistic and creative nature of conversational play, the fact that any given utterance may be framed as play between interlocutors and the fact that what is considered play may vary from one community of practice to the next, means that conversational play can take multiple forms and serve several functions for interlocutors. I identified three main forms of conversational play in my data, namely: *teasing, deviating from societal, group and individual norms and repurposing previous interactions for humorous effects*. Unlike teasing, the two other types of play in my data have not been identified in the literature on conversational play as far as I know. This may be because most occurrences of spontaneous conversational play depend on situational coincidences, the participants' sense of humour, and their willingness to exploit these coincidences for humorous purposes. Thus, while these specific forms have not been identified in the literature, they may be examples of what is usually referred to generically as 'banter' (Tarone, 2000).

Teasing is a form of spontaneous conversational play that has received some research attention as a type of conversational play (Drew, 1987; Waring, 2013). Teasing is also the most common type of playful interaction in my data. As such, I draw from available literature and from the recurring patterns in my data to come up with four features which make up teasing interactions in my data including: (1) *opportunity*, (2) *taking a playful jibe at one or more interlocutors,* (3)*the response/reaction to the jibe and* (4) *repair and/or decommitment (if necessary).* I also identify *sufficient interactional history* as a necessary condition for successful accomplishment of teasing (and most forms of conversational play). Although each teasing situation has its own unique characteristics, the five aspects identified are useful when attempting to categorise texts as instances of teasing. Furthermore, by identifying these features, I provide a vocabulary and a frame from which teasing interactions and their relational implications can be analysed.

In terms of the interpersonal implications of conversational play in the participants' private conversations, my analysis of the three types of play in the data showed that conversational play is one practice through which participants test how well they know each other and how well they get along. I contend that the successful engagement in these playful activities entails the intuitive ability to correctly anticipate what the interlocutors' reactions might be. It also involves possessing knowledge about how to repair potential problems in instances where the desired reaction is not

obtained, without undoing the friendly disposition they have taken towards each other or disrupting the flow of ongoing interaction. In this way, successful engagement in playful activities provide high rapport or relational payoff for the participants by reinforcing the idea that they know each other well or well enough. Research on conversational play that looks beyond its entertainment value has predominantly focused on the role of play in facilitating learning in language learning contexts among children (Cook, 1997, 2000; Peck, 1997; Waring, 2013). It has also focused on play as one of the "most individualistic aspects of a person's [conversational] style" (Tannen, 2005; 187). My analysis therefore extends what is known about the significance of conversational play as I uncover its relational and interactional significance and shift the focus from individual styles to the interactional accomplishment of conversational humour.

Furthermore, the playful interactions between the participants typically involves some form of what one might consider impoliteness or face threatening acts (FTAs) (Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987) such as, ridicule, challenge, imposition and/or disapproval. However, these playful activities are not always oriented to as 'threatening acts' by the participants. Instead, they seem to form part of the group's ways of engaging with each other that align with shared values, such as being honest or 'keeping it real'. My analysis shows that the rules of politeness (Lakoff 1973) and politeness strategies aimed at serving interlocutors' face needs (Brown and Levinson, 1987) are negotiated in, rather than prior to the interaction and relational experience. I argued that instead of working towards protecting an individualistic concept of face (e.g. 'do not impose on *me'*, or 'like *me* for this reason'), individuals tend to prioritise the values that give their community of practice a sense of identity (e.g. "this is how *we* speak").

In addition, sufficient interactional common ground and shared historical knowledge about each other's beliefs, values, temperament and ideological positions among other relational variables are the basis on which the participants negotiate what is face saving or face threatening in interaction. It is through their rich interactional history that ways of speaking and relating with each other are honed and grounded into what Thandi referred to as a "friendship contract". The implication of this argument is the understanding that no act is essentially face threatening or face saving. Instead, FTAs are context specific and actively negotiated in interaction by the individuals in the relationship. As a result, what may be considered an FTA for some (even within the same sociocultural contexts), may not be such for others. In this study, the realisation of play through strategies that could be considered impolite forms part of the learned *appropriate* rather than *polite*

ways of speaking for this specific community of practice. The success of these interactions heightens the sense of closeness and intimacy between participants, thus (re)producing their shared sense of being friends or friendly. These arguments call for a reworking of the theoretical assumptions upon which popular understandings of politeness are based. In this thesis, I argue that a bottom-up approach to research on politeness, which takes into account how the participants orient to different speech acts in interaction, instead of the popular top-down approach in which the analyst predicts what is polite or impolite prior to interaction will significantly enrich our understandings of appropriate ways of speaking in different sociocultural contexts.

Analysing the discourse practices of storytelling and playfulness in the participants' public/online Girl Chat conversations enriched the arguments made above. The different dynamics observed in storytelling and play practices in online conversation is attributed to the fact that their friendship takes on a secondary position whereas the relationship as co-workers on Girl Chat becomes the primary relationship. I argue that although their friendship and their work on Girl Chat constantly feed each other, the goal of Girl Chat conversations to educate and empower other black/African women to live their lives on their own terms supersedes the need to manage their relationship as friends. This explains the different dynamics observed in online Girl Chat conversations. My analysis reveals that stories in Girl Chat conversations work mainly to provide evidence to support the speaker's point. As the conversations aim to teach through lived experiences, stories become the main medium through which lessons, tips, coping strategies learnt from their experiences are passed on to the viewer in ways that are relatable, personal (rather than abstract and impersonal scientific facts and statistics) and in ways that communicate the idea that 'I've been there too and this is what worked for me'.

Similarly, the goal orientedness of Girl Chat conversations and most significantly, the unknown online audience influence the playful interactions they engage in and the functions of play in the online conversations. I argue that Brown and Levinson's (1987) conceptualisation of face saving and face threatening strategies in interaction and Lakoff's (1973, 2005) rules of politeness are much more productive in analysing the participants' online conversations, where the unknown audience becomes a significant factor. I demonstrate that the lack of contextual and interactional history between the hosts and their audience and the resulting uncertainties around issues of morality and respectability within a conservative and patriarchal society leads to a more delicate handling of conversation. The Girl Chat hosts use playfulness in online conversations as a strategy

of indirectness for handling conversations that are risky, especially those that deal with taboo subject, such as sex. Play strategies are thus used to manage uneasy conversations and evade difficult questions in an entertaining way, while trying to meet the educational purposes of the online conversation.

In comparing their online and private conversations, especially the private conversations that follow the filming of Girl Chat videos, I am able to show that the participants are more sensitive to face needs as conceptualised by Brown and Levinson (1987) online. Playfulness in this context, I argue, works to straddle the opposing need to be free and unconstrained, their objective to educate others about how to be free and unconstrained, while also remaining respectable in a conservative and patriarchal society. In other words, it enables them to straddle the need to be independent and uninhibited and the need for association or involvement. These differences in storytelling and play practices in public online versus private conversation further highlight the argument that the face needs of individuals change depending on the context of interaction so much so that discourse practices and the face and relational work they do may vary even between the same individuals in different contexts. This reinforces the point I made above about the productiveness of a bottom-up approach which allows politeness strategies, or more accurately, appropriate ways of speaking to emerge from the data. This creates room for a more complex and discursive engagement with the interactional and relational processes through which (im)politeness and non-polite or appropriate ways of speaking are negotiated within specific communities of practice.

Finally, I diverge somewhat from my focus on the relationship between discourse practices and the management and sustenance of friendship ties between the participants to look at the notion of mediatisation as it pertains to personal relationships. I discuss the ways in which digital technologies are symbolically and materially implicated in the ways in which we view and manage relationships today. I draw on the theory of domestication to show how the participants appropriate and incorporate digital technologies to manage accessibility or establish personal boundaries, show friendship support, manage conflict and sustain relationships through the pandemic and over long distances. My analysis shows that although digital technologies have made communication easier and made us more accessible to others, individuals use options that are built into the technological devices (e.g. muting, blocking, unfollowing) to manage accessibility and establish boundaries with people who make up their personal community.

In addition, showing support in friendship now includes the way in which one's friends interact with them online. While not everyone who engages with us online is a friend, the data shows that there is an expectation that friends (at least those who are active in online spaces) should engage with us online by liking, commenting or sharing our content. This is particularly relevant when a person is trying to build a career online as the Girl Chat hosts had aimed to do. The algorithms on online platforms rely on the quantity and quality of engagement to share user's content with a larger audience. The more views, likes, comments and shares a post gets, the more likely it is to be shown to a larger audience outside one's immediate network. The engagement one gets from friends online is thus crucial for growth on social media platforms especially at the initial stages. As a result, the participants in this study consider any engagement from their friends as a symbolic act of support and a type of investment not just in their friendship, but also in the participants' dreams and aspirations. When they do not receive this support from friends, they also rely on communication platforms like WhatsApp to manage conflict. This is achieved by using some of the inbuilt options such as muting, blocking or unfollowing as well as other creative means such as replying to messages with one-word answers or refraining from initiating conversations via text or phone calls. The analysis thus shows the symbolic and material ways in which digital technologies are implicated in managing friendships today.

Furthermore, I looked at the ways in which the participants in this study managed their friendship during the COVID 19 pandemic which limited the amount of time they spent together, as well as how they manage their long distance friendships since they no longer live in the same city. This discussion brought into question research that assumes that once friends lose physical proximity and in person interactions, the friendship would automatically deteriorate or end. I argue that once commitment has been established, friendships can continue to serve the individuals involved even in unprecedented conditions, such as the COVID 19 pandemic, and other major events in the lives of individuals, such as moving to another city or country. Research on friendship during the pandemic attributes the successful sustenance of friendship to the availability of communication technologies which facilitate communication. Although this is true for my participants, what is evident in the data is the fact that the commitment to friendship, more than the presence of digital technologies, is a key factor in maintaining relationships through times of change. Commitment determined whether participants engaged in communication during COVID as well as in long distance friendships. In both cases, the participants report that the quality of their friendships have

not changed, only the frequency of interaction has. This shows that while digital technologies are necessary for maintaining relationships, there are other factors, such as commitment based on shared interactional histories which determine the sustenance of friendship over time and space.

I want to end with final reflections on the meaning of friendship. How has the work in this dissertation helped me to answer the question "what is friendship?". Friendship, as evidenced throughout this dissertation, represents a multifaceted social phenomenon, embodying an amalgamation of emotional bonding, reciprocity, shared experiences, and mutual respect. It extends beyond a simple social relationship to constitute a deeper form of human relationships, rooted in the acceptance of an individual's distinct identity and the affirmation of their intrinsic worth. This relational bond, existing outside the strictures of biological kinship or legal obligation, is predicated on the voluntary exchange of socio-emotional resources and benefits, reinforcing the essence of interpersonal connections within diverse sociocultural contexts.

The complex nature of friendship presents an expansive continuum that varies across individual interactions and cultural paradigms. Characterised by varying degrees of intimacy, frequency of interaction, and the nature of shared activities, friendships range from peripheral social bonds to central, intimate connections. Importantly, these bonds are not static, but dynamically evolve, reflecting shifting individual needs, life stages, and personal growth. The endurance of friendships, despite rapid technological and societal shifts, underscores their pivotal role within human social structures, serving as a fundamental avenue for social support, mutual understanding, and personal development.

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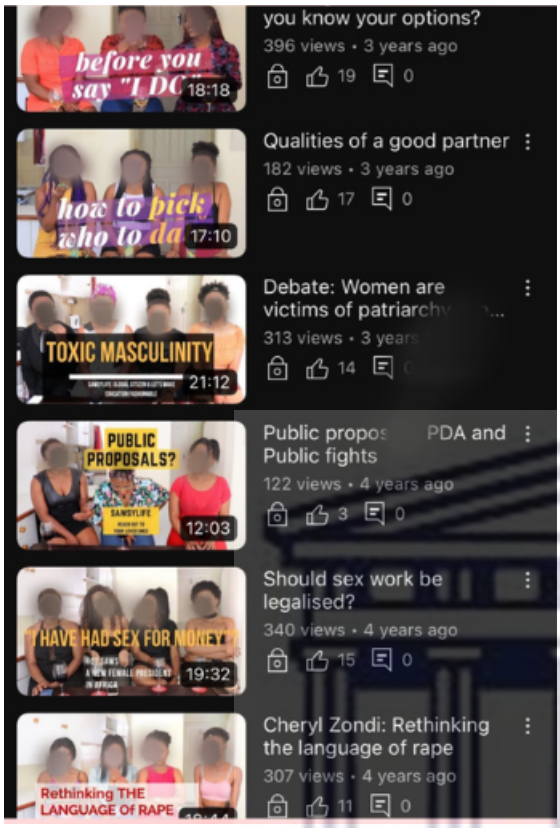
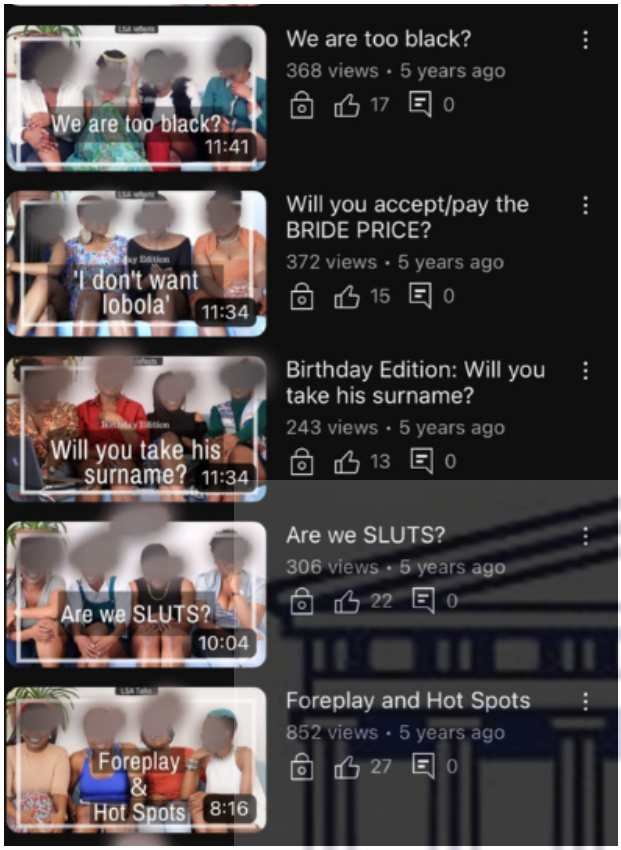
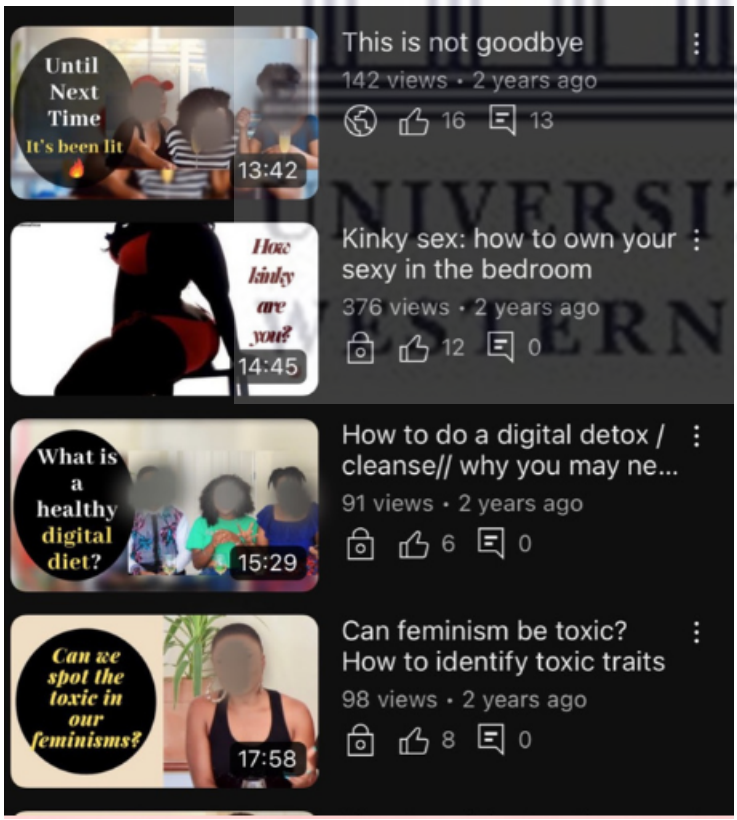
Appendix 1: Transcription key

=	latching
-	false starts, hesitations
/?/	inaudible utterances
/text/	guesses on unclear or inaudible utterances
Text [aligned at the point of overlap [text	overlapping speech
(text)	nonverbal aspects, researcher's comments
(.), (.2)	noticeable pause, duration of a pause in seconds
:	prolonged sound (0.5seconds per column)
CAPS	higher volume than surrounding talk
Underlined words	emphasis
'text'	made up words, colloquial expressions or slang
"text"	Reported speech
?	raised intonation at the end of an utterance
[*italicized texts in square brackets*]	translation
Bold italics	High pitch and/or sing song voice
↑**syll**able (upward arrow next to specific syllable in bold)	Rising intonation
syllable↓ (downward arrow next to specific syllable)	Falling intonation

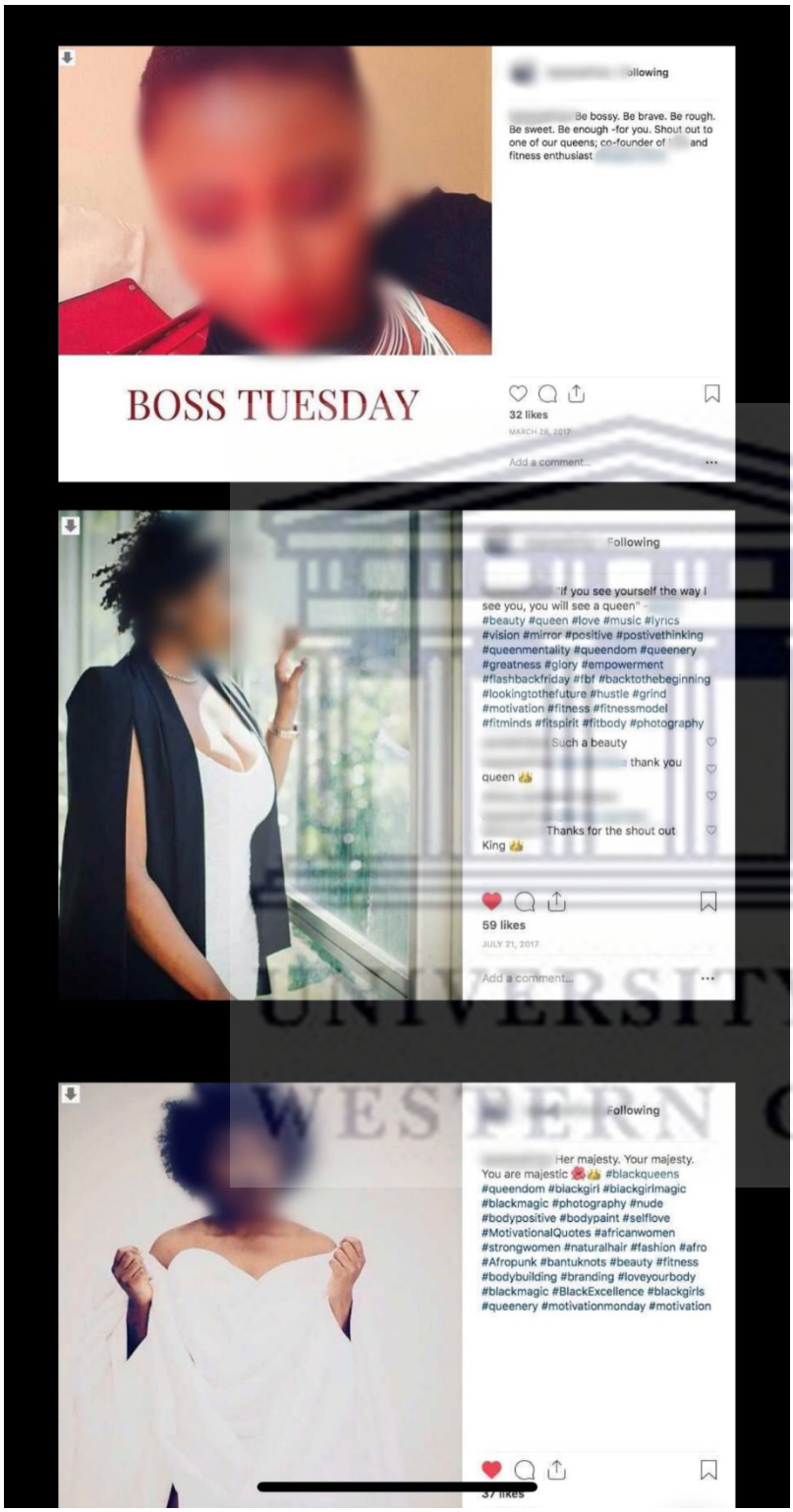
Appendix 2 – Girl Chat set and sample topics



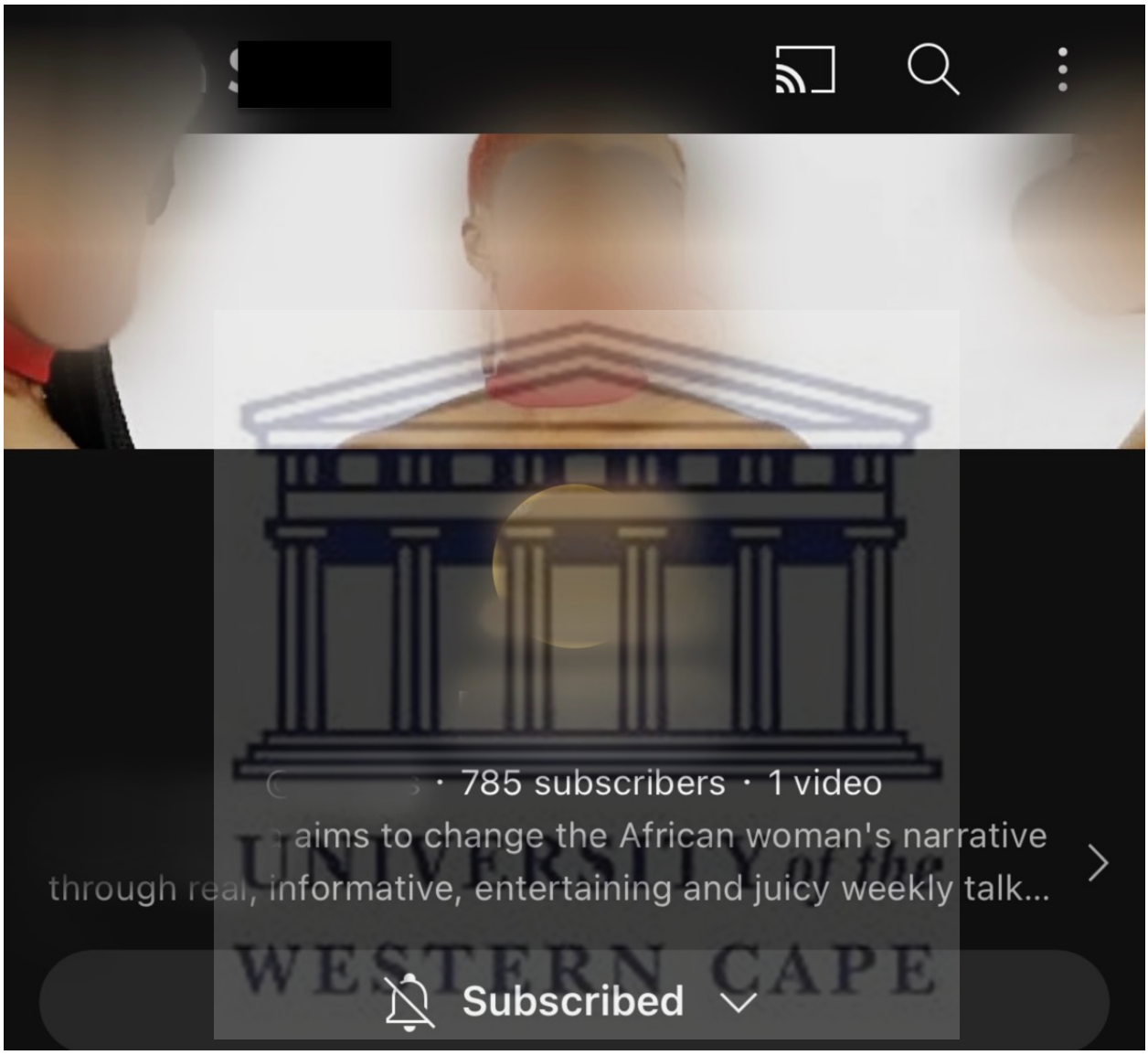




Appendix 3: Girl Chat's Instagram posts (last picture from Bella's 'nude' photoshoot)



Appendix 4 –Girl Chat goals and mission statement



Minutes of 28 September [redacted] meeting

Agenda:

- To re-conceptualise [redacted] ([redacted]) (Mission and vision).
- To think strategically and specifically on how to realise our goals and objectives (Structure).
- To take on roles and promise our commitment to these roles and [redacted] (roles and responsibility

Mission and Vision

The nam[redacted]e means African soup or the African soup. It is a metaphor for diversity.

- It symbolises diversity among the Ladies of [redacted]e themselves. We are 4 women from South Africa, Nigeria and Cameroon. Although we have a lot in common we are also unique in our own way and together we form part of the mix of ingredients that make the soup good.
- It also symbolises the diversity in the issues we are interested in engaging. The problems that the African woman faces are just as diverse as the things that need to be celebrated about her.
- [redacted] also represents the richness of the African continent. It represents how the diverse mix of cultures and languages all blended together create soup that is not only delicious but super spicy.
- Soup in the more literal sense is also food. Food is something associated with African women but beyond that, food is a source of comfort for many. It is a basic ingredient in the sustenance of our bodies and minds. However soup doesn't make itself, and to get it right we must put ingredients that work together not against each other. What we want to do with [redacted] therefore is to play our part in getting the ingredients right for the piece of the world that surrounds us.

(Feel free to add communicate anything I might have left out so it can be added)

Why [redacted]

- To create change
- Empowerment of self and others
- Empowerment of the African woman
- Generative dialogue
- Developing ideas
- Realizing dreams

How

- Create platforms for generative dialogue/solution oriented dialogue
- Creating opportunities for ourselves and others/project development aimed at encouraging social entrepreneurship.
- Creating awareness
- Developing content for educational and business purposes.

Names have been changed or censored, but all other information is presented as in the original documents produced in Girl Chat planning meetings.

Some of the details changed as the channel evolved, but we maintained the core of our mission throughout. This was to provide empowering, informative and entertaining conversations.

Appendix 5 – Transcript including omitted turns

Complete extracts – Highlighted text are the turns that were omitted in the analysis section

Extract 5.1. Robbery at Pulse

1. Thandi: what kind of job is this that you have to like (.) set off and set bombs like yoh you can die any minute
(.17)
2. Thandi: imagine if you were in a real life situation like that
3. Zinhle: like guns and shit
4. Thandi: YO::H guys so I went to ((Hami's)) (.)and then he tells me about Ganesh - about what happened at [Ganesh]
5. Zinhle: [was he there]
6. Thandi: *No*:: a customer came and then the customer was so depressed lost everything they came with seven guns! seven whole guns seven men all having guns (.1) seven (*chuckles then claps*) how the fuck is that a reality like
(.1.5)
7. Ajoh: Buhle said they entered they ordered two castle lights they ordered wings they sat they ate and then they went and they came back for their friend (.) they hit her in the head twice with the gun
8. Zinhle: and they were - sorry I can't [hear] yo::h
9. Thandi: [Did she fall - did she faint
10. Ajoh: I don't know they hit her in the head [with a gun
11. Zinhle: [who
12. Ajoh: Buhle the woman who (.) [was there] she's like her head was
13. Thandi: [*yoh guys* what does she /look/
14. Ajoh: she's actually going to therapy
15. Thandi: hu::: is she fine
16. Ajoh: yeah
17. Zinhle: which one the one who owns /?/ place there
(Bella pulls out her new work jacket)
18. Thandi: *Bella* (.) wo:::[w
19. Zinhle: [*WHAT A WO::W (.1)* [/**why didn't you tell me to sow**/
20. Bella: [/?/
21. Thandi: [how much is one twenty rand
22. Bella: one is thirty rand
23. Thandi: thirty rand
24. Zinhle: [/*why didn't you tell me to sow it*/
25. Thandi: [/oh they're very nice/
26. Zinhle: /?/ *WOO::H* AMEN
27. Thandi: alright
28. Zinhle: alright
29. Thandi: is this your manager jacket =
30. Bella: =yes i don't play [games
31. Zinhle: [right (*Thandi chuckles*)
32. Bella: sit there be wearing your pants the oth - the wrong side

33. Thandi: yoh [it's so deep
34. Zinhle: [**Yo:h** mana[ger
35. Thandi: [yoh Buhle fuck man (.1) yoh hai
36. Ajoh: but they say they have footage they boys came without any masks nothing nothing so their faces are [very visible] they're gonna get arrested
37. Thandi: [they're so stupid]
38. Ajoh: I don't think they'd - they had thought that Ganesh would have cameras [because] it's so like
39. Thandi: [mhm] (.1) Ganesh=
40. Ajoh: =[Ganesh]
41. Zinhle: [vibey]
42. Ajoh: yeah
43. Zinhle: and hippy YOH [but they hit her in the head
44. Ajoh: [everybody's phone everybody's ph - everything they hit her on the head when she was trying to give them the money she was like they had a a gun to her head(.5)
45. Thandi: yoh
second story - robbery at Spar
46. Zinhle: trau::ms you know this one time uhm when I was still in high school they robbed Spar (.) they actually robbed uhm you know those /utility/fidelity/ trucks
47. Ajoh: mhm
48. Zinhle: and it was coming into Spar so they shot the security guard standing in front of the car the /fertility/fidelity truck/
49. Ajoh: mhm
50. Zinhle: they took everything out and obviously they had money that was going into Spar
51. Ajoh: mhm
52. Zinhle: so they held up [Spar
[(Thandi rolls lips)
53. Zinhle: people were going into the bakery [section
54. Bella: [are you still on this (inaudible) (*laughs*)
55. Zinhle: hiding into the stoves (.) and like [/?/
56. Thandi: *WOAH* that man had a gun to Buhle's bruh=
57. Bella: =I'm telling you [that was like for real yoh]
58. Thandi: [sorry Zinhle I'm still stuck
59. Bella: that was like for real
60. Thandi: (*squeals*) (.1) *yuh gu::ys that is so deep*
61. Bella: Ajoh are you still drinking
62. Ajoh: no not for now
63. Bella: Bu[hle] there was a gun on her head imagine
64. Thandi: [wo::w] yoh yoh yoh yoh yoh yoh yoh yoh yoh yoh I'm sure she [cant sleep]
65. Zinhle: [I don't know what I would have done hey]
(*Thandi inhales loudly*)
66. Bella: No but she's fine

67. Thandi: yoh [she's strong] hey [she went back to work]
68. Ajoh: [she's strong]
69. Bella: [she's fine]
70. Bella: yeah - even - I think=
71. Ajoh: =she said the next day she /was
72. Bella: yeah and then she said [yoh]
73. Ajoh: [she's like] the Saturday was empty Saturday business was as if it never [/?/
74. Bella: [/it never happened?/ she says everything is fine the people are coming
75. Zinhle: that's good though that people are still going at least they they're not losing business

(.5)

76. Thandi: *shu*:: (*sucks teeth*) *hai man* what is wrong with people human beings are so fucked up
77. Bella: she says they might (.1)they might find the people because they have (.)
78. Thandi: the footage
79. Bella: they had - they had the footage
80. Thandi: mhm Ajoh said YO::::::::H

(.3.5 conversation switches to commentary on movie)

Extract 5.4. "His business is my business"

1. Bella: so on a Friday this is what you can watch at this time
2. Thandi: I'm not going to be watching music videos right now fuck you bitches
3. Bella: so there's not like a movie that we can watch
4. Thandi: the thing is I haven't watched TV over how many days so=
5. Bella: =how is that my [problem (chuckles)
6. Thandi: [so now I must get in all that time that [I've lost
7. Bella: [how is that my problem
8. Thandi: (hiss) how is it not your problem fuck that
9. Bella: are you not enjoying free wifi
10. Thandi: everybody gets equal share of electricity so give me equal share
11. Bella: who
12. Thandi: eh
13. Bella: are you not Enjoying wifi
14. Thandi: and so?
15. Bella: don't you get to see all this
16. Thandi: what so like say for instance this is like a weird example to use but anyway say for instance if you - if you have a husband right .
17. Bella: uhm
18. Thandi: and your husband has like a side bae right (Zinhle and Thandi chuckle) I just wanna understand if your husband is getting some extra things outside of - you know - outside of you and then also getting some things with you like how is it your business like the outside (all three laugh) it's not your business (.1) like you guys are here you're together

19. Bella: [I'm so
20. Zinhle: [you were right that is a weird example
21. Bella: I am so happy that you said it that it - if - if my husband (laughs) is that what you said (.) you should learn to choose your words you said my husband so like his business is my business
22. Thandi: listen (.) no his (all three laugh) yoh people people
23. Zinhle: yoh Bella you just turned that around hey (Bella laughs)
24. Thandi: okay let's say if you - is your husband's business your business
25. Bella: yeah
26. Zinhle: use your words
27. Thandi: okay let's not say husband
28. Bella: choose your words nicely
29. Thandi: is Bryan's business your business I mean is is your business Bryan's business
30. Bella: what now now
31. Zinhle: Bryan Bryan
32. Thandi: Bryan (sexy voice)
33. Bella: which Bryan
34. Thandi: your Bryan
35. Bella: like his business is my business
36. Thandi: is your business his business
37. Bella: yea - my business no (Thandi squeals) my business is my business his business is my business
38. Thandi: ehein
39. Zinhle: YO::H YOH
40. Thandi: that's exactly what I am saying
41. Bella: his business is my business my business is my business
42. Thandi: wow you're fucked up (Bella laughs) but your marriage will work
43. Zinhle: Bella is fucked up (all three laugh) I concur (Bella still laugh) I agree fully comrade (Zinhle laughs) I support you (whole utterance spoken in a smiley voice)

Extract 5.6. Zinhle's promotion

1. Ajoh: Zinhle did you hear "it's a trap" (chuckles)
2. Zinhle: what's a trap
3. Ajoh: I don't know but they (on tv) said it's a trap and you like to say it's a trap (chuckles)
4. Zinhle: yep
(4.0)
5. Zinhle: YO:H guys
6. Thandi: what?
7. Ajoh: you guys have not tasted this rice but tell us tell us what (.) so are these your dreads that are in like [in
8. Zinhle: [yeah /?/ so if (.)untie it it's dreads
9. Thandi: [mhm
10. Ajoh: ye::s

11. Zinhle: but they still spiky
12. Ajoh: mmm
13. Zinhle: I'm actually going to untie it and leave them spiky
14. Thandi: that'll be cool (.) anyway you were saying?
15. Ajoh: mhm
16. Bella: its hot
17. Zinhle: SO: (.) this guy right (.) at work (.) he goes on leave (.) right (.) and then they like "Zinhle"
18. Thandi: "fill in"
19. Zinhle: "fill in?"=
20. Thandi: =oh God what happened
21. Zinhle: and then the guy comes back
22. Thandi: Yo:h Zinhle
23. Zinhle: and then they're like (.) "guy move away because Zinhle has been [/doing a good job/"
24. Thandi: [YO:::::H ***well*** (6 claps) ***do::ne*** so they like (.) [is the guy fired now] what t'fuck?
25. Ajoh: [are you serious?]
26. Zinhle: No: but he is gonna work
27. Thandi: so he got demoted (.) [and you go promoted] ***yu::h*** these things happen in real life to people I know
28. Zinhle: [basically] (laughs)
29. Ajoh: Yo:h (.) I hope he doesn't bring bad energy your way though=
30. Thandi =into your life
31. Zinhle: No:: that's the thing he's like um cuz they've been complaining about him a lot [before [he left right
32. Ajoh: [mmm
33. Thandi: [mhm
34. Zinhle: but it's not like it's his fault cuz
35. Bella: =abeg o that knife (*to Ajoh*)

(*please pass me that knife*)

36. Zinhle: him and the other [branch manager (.) [don't get along
37. (omitted turns: Bella and Ajoh parallel conversation)
38. Ajoh: [wusai iy dey]

(*where is it*)

39. Bella: [knife]
40. Ajoh: mmm
41. Zinhle: so he does things by the book and then the other manager wants to do his things on the side uhm and then he's like no he can't
39. Thandi: so what are you gonna do now
40. Zinhle: hey=
41. Thandi: =since you know the other manager is shady

(.3)

42. Zinhle: I::
43. Thandi: you jus gon' shut your mouth and let shady happen?
44. Bella: =you dun chop ya own [avo right] 75

(*you have had some avo right?*)

45. Zinhle: no I won't
46. Ajoh: mmm (*to Bella*)
47. Zinhle: but like

(omitted turn: Ajoh and Bella parallel conversation)

48. Zinhle: I haven't decided yet
49. Thandi: mmm
50. Zinhle: cuz like (.) the guy now has to work in front and I'm gonna work [(.1)] in the office
51. Thandi: [wow]
52. Zinhle: and I feel shitty hey
53. Thandi: ***why***
54. Zinhle: because like I was only trying to help and then now (.)
55. Thandi: [you helped your way into a /job/]
56. Zinhle: [obviously he's going to get] paid (.) for someone who works in front and I'll get paid [for] someone who works in the office =
57. Thandi: [his salary] (0.1) =at least you know how much you are getting paid so you can [take me /out/ (chuckles)]
58. Zinhle: [well I'm not yet] because (.1.5) the owner had a meeting with him right? (.) and then (.1) he came and told me the story so apparently we gonna have a meeting all of us but then (.1) she was basically like you not in charge of distribution anymore (.1) like (.) uh:m we gonna work on the floor what not what not like he he didn't have a choice in the whole thing
59. Thandi: yoh (.1) well ***congratulations*** (5 claps)
60. Zinhle: thank you
61. Thandi: [you got yourself a [promotion girl
62. Ajoh: [Well done]
63. Bella: [congratul]ations for your [promotion
64. Thandi: [Moving up in life (.1) now you got more money so that means you (chuckles) you gon' buy me something (chuckles) it's gon' be my birthday soon in like five months (styling: black american accent)