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Kuthetha ukuthini ukunyamezela? An autoethnographic inquiry that uses Boal's concept of rituals and masks to explore how gender-based violence is intentionally or unintentionally perpetuated in intimate partner relationships

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2023
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Kuthetha ukuthini ukunyamezela? An autoethnographic inquiry that uses Boal's concept of Rituals and Masks to explore how gender-based violence is intentionally or unintentionally perpetuated in intimate partner relationships.

by

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15 January 2023

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MASTERS IN APPLIED DRAMA

In the

Wits School of Arts - Drama for Life

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this research report is my own original work and that it has not previously, whether in its entirety or in part, been submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand or any other for the purpose of a degree. I have used the author-date convention for citation and referencing. Each significant contribution to and quotation in this essay from the work or works of other people has been acknowledged through citation and reference. This reflection is my work. I have not allowed and will not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as their own work. I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unaided work or that I failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing. My ethics clearance number is WSOA20211009.

Name: Yonela Ngoni

Date: 18 April 2022

Signature: 

Table of Contents

Declaration……..……..2

List of Figures……...5

Section 1……...6

Research Title……...6

Background.……..6

Problem Statement……....8

Research Questions…….....13

Context and individual-specific inquiry….……...……..13

Theoretical Framework……15

Therapeutic potential of Boal's work…….……16

Toxic Masculinity in Women/Toxic Femininity……..…18

GBV in Intimate Partner Relationships……22

Battered Woman Syndrome…….24

Section 2……..…28

Research Method……..…28

Ethnographic Refusal……...29

Ethical Considerations……..……29

Rituals and Masks……....30

The process……..34

Preparing the Self……34

Background to Enabling GBV in an Intimate Partner Relationship…….34

Preparing the mind, body and space…….37

Ritual 1: traditional influences……..……....39

Ritual 2: economic influences……..40

Ritual 3: cultural influences…….…41

The ritual performance...……...…..…..42

Ritual 1 performance abstract: cultural influence……....43

Ritual 2 performance abstract: economic influence……43

Ritual 3 performance abstract: traditional influence……..….44

Disrupting the Ritual……...45

Section 3…….…….47

Findings…….…….…..47

Structural factors……..47

Reinforcement of Rituals and Masks through gender performativity……..48

Toxic masculinity…….49

Internalising toxic femininity……...50

Learned helplessness……51

Rituals and Masks as a reflexive platform……...52

Before the Performance……54

During the Performance……56

Post-Performance……..……59

Conclusion……....59

Limitations…….…...60

Recommendations……..61

Reference List……63

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1……41

Figure 2……47

Research Title

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Section 1

Background

I often hear stories from perpetrator's family members claiming that their son is too good a human, swearing he would never harm a fly. Oftentimes I see young girls and women refusing to leave abusive relationships, claiming that their man loves them, and violence is their means of communicating love and security for their female partners. I hear a lady gossiping in a taxi about overhearing her lady neighbour getting beaten up by their boyfriend or husband, but not considering reporting the atrocious act. I hear family elders complain about women who are vocal about gender-based violence (GBV), claiming that they have no place in marriage and will never find or keep a man as a wife. Contemporary wedding rituals glorify married women "educating" the bride about endurance towards an abusive spouse; yet according to my experience, no one bothers educating men about how women are not objects to be abused in marriages, or how to persevere should the wife become abusive towards them. As a black, female, heterosexual survivor of GBV who attempted laying charges against an abusive ex-boyfriend, I was met by a policewoman encouraging me to apply for a protection order against the former partner over filing a case against violence – as if a piece of paper ever stopped him from being violent again.

The Mail & Guardian (2020) states that,

> 51% of women in [South Africa] SA say they've experienced GBV, with 76% men saying they've perpetrated GBV at one stage in their lives. A similar study revealed that one in five women reported that they have experienced violence at the hands of a partner… Femicide is five times higher in South Africa than the global average… At the start of level 3 lockdown, [due to the Covid-19 pandemic], 21 women and children were murdered in two weeks, leading to the president to cite '…two devastating epidemics: Covid-19 and GBV' (Ramafoko, 2020: n.pn.).

Even with the alarming GBV rates against children and women in South Africa, few and ineffective legal measures have been adopted and put in place to ensure and guarantee the safety of women and children when cases of GBV are reported to the police (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2016). Looking at the statistics by M&G (2020) above, it is inevitable to consider the devastating effect that the Covid-19 pandemic has had in exacerbating GBV related cases against children and women. At least six of the 21 women were murdered by either their current or ex-lover (Mokobo, 2020). As a humanist, feminist, activist, and an individual with personal experience of surviving GBV, I noticed a rarely visited oversight in the fight against gender-based violence, which is the role played by black women from traditional, cultural, and economic perspectives in perpetuating GBV, specifically in intimate partner relationships. As such, I embarked on this autoethnographic inquiry to investigate how I, a black South African woman, possibly perpetuated and enabled GBV in a former intimate partner relationship.

Using autoethnography and Boal's Rituals and Masks, this inquiry aimed to explore how learned helplessness, resulting from the Battered Woman Syndrome (BWS) and structural factors, contributes towards a woman knowingly or unknowingly perpetuating GBV in her intimate partner relationship.

The practical steps taken towards fulfilling these aims included recalling battering experiences to use as prompts for the short scenes (rituals) that allowed for role (masks) exploration of the batterer and the battered persons. I created installations using Rituals and Masks to explore how the role played by the "battered" person enabled and perpetuated GBV due to structural factors; recorded and wrote journals to track thoughts and reflections of the experimental process; sat with self to listen to the body and mind; and consulted with a drama therapist to assist with processing and grounding whenever I deemed necessary.

This inquiry aimed to explore how structural (economic, traditional and cultural factors) can encourage a black South African woman to intentionally or unintentionally enable and perpetuate GBV in her intimate partner relationship. Using autoethnography and Boal's Rituals and Masks, I aimed to explore how learned helplessness, resulting from the battered woman syndrome and structural factors, contributes towards a woman knowingly or unknowingly perpetuating GBV in her intimate partner relationship.

The goal was to find out whether Rituals and Masks (Boal, 2008) could bring awareness to the victim-perpetuator about the duality of the role they may be playing in the events leading to them becoming victims of GBV in intimate partner relationships. I used Boal's (2008) technique of Rituals and Masks as a single-player and facilitator. Boal (2008) describes Rituals and Masks as a technique that is concerned about exposing "...the superstructures, the rituals which reify all human relationships, and the masks of behaviour that those rituals impose on each person according to the roles he plays in society and the rituals he must perform" (2008: 134). I used Rituals and Masks to experiment on several scenarios, which I drew from my own biographical experience. These scenarios all relate to situations where a GBV victim intentionally or unintentionally perpetuates violence in her intimate partner relationship. The intention was to disrupt these rituals – and masks - through initiating a change in victim-perpetuator actions and to interrogate the causality of the intentional/unintentional enabling of GBV in an intimate partner relationship.

Suffice to note that this autoethnographic inquiry speaks only on behalf of the researcher's personal experiences of GBV in her former intimate partner relationship. I made use of only my own personal experiences even when experimenting with Rituals and Masks. This research process does not speak for the collective of black South African women who are victims and survivors of GBV.

Although extensive research has been conducted from various fields of studies, this inquiry is not comprehensive in its coverage of the plethora of published literature and years of debates in this issue because existing literature lacks rigorous scrutiny of the duality of being either an intentional or unintentional victim-perpetuator/ victim-enabler of GBV in intimate partner relationships. This research, therefore, looked at how traditional, cultural, and economic factors influence the victim-enabler / victim-perpetuator role played by a black South African woman towards intentionally/unintentionally enabling GBV in her former intimate partner relationship.

Problem Statement

Sigsworth (2008) defines GBV as an act of violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm and suffering to women. The acts of violence can present themselves

as threats, “coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, where occurring in public or in private life” (Sigsworth, 2008: 5). The various acts of violence include “spousal battery; sexual abuse, including of female children; dowry-related violence; rape, including marital rape; female genital mutilation/cutting and other traditional practices harmful to women; non-spousal violence; sexual violence related to exploitation; sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in school and elsewhere; trafficking in women; and forced prostitution,” and can occur in family, community, public and private spaces (Sigsworth, 2008: 5-6).

Heise, Ellsberg and Gottmoeller (2002) report that researchers from various fields have used an ecological framework to study the relationship between personal, situational, and sociocultural factors that unite to cause abuse. This framework can be divided into four concentric circles:

> The innermost circle represents the biological and personal history that each individual brings to his or her behaviour in relationships. The second circle represents the immediate context in which abuse takes place: frequently the family or other intimate or acquaintance relationship. The third circle represents the institutions and social structures, both formal and informal, in which relationships are embedded in neighbourhoods, the workplace, social networks, and peer groups. The fourth, outermost circle is the economic and social environment, including cultural norms (Heise, et al., 2002: 7).

In this model, Heise, et al. (2002) report, violence against women results from the interaction of factors at different levels of the social environment. The drivers of GBV in the South African context include a culture of violence that has made male superiority a norm. This resulted in some men displaying entitlement towards having consented and unconsented sexual relations with women; a rather harsh reinforcing of roles and hierarchy; women with low social value, power, and influence; and an association of displaying and performing masculinity in a form of exerting power and control over women (Saferspaces, 2014).

Looking at the South African context, I have identified that violence against women intersects at cultural, economic, and traditional levels. A study of GBV in South Africa conducted by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2016) reports the influences of culture, tradition, and religion on GBV in SA, asserting that “culturally, males are often placed in powerful positions

in relation to women due to practices such as lobola[1], ukuthwala[2]" (2016:8). The study reveals that, culturally, it has become a norm for women to fundamentally hold a subservient position to men through socialization into conforming to cultural and religious practices, though some of the practices promote and tolerate GBV directly or indirectly (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2016). Furthermore, it is often difficult for women who are economically dependent on their partners to leave abusive relationships, due to a lack of resource security for basic needs. On the other hand, educated women entering labour markets represent a loss of power and authority exercised by men over women through the roles of household provider and protector, leading to a difficulty of men expressing and performing their 'complete' masculinity (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2016).

Although the South African government has passed various national and regional legal laws such as the 1998 Domestic Violence Act; the 1998 Maintenance Acts; the 2012 Criminal Law Amendment Act and the 2011 Protection from Harassment Act, to protect women and children against gendered violence, South African government agencies remain poor at implementing these laws to protect the livelihoods of victims of GBV (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2016). Personal narratives shared by GBV victims on #Unpacked with Relebogile Mabotja (an S3, formally SABC 3, and YouTube Channel reality talk show) reveal that they have received poor service delivery from police stations when opening cases against their abusive lovers (Mabotja, 2021), similar to the service I received when attempting to press charges against an abusive ex-boyfriend.

Various government and Non-Governmental Organisations have implemented interventions towards addressing GBV. Pedro (2019), reported on 18 studies with a total of 21 interventions aimed at reducing gender-based violence, with a total of 39,746 young people from areas with high statistics of HIV-positive individuals from Brazil, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

[1] Lobola – The cultural practice of paying a bride price.

[2] Ukuthwala – The practice of a man kidnapping a young girl to force her into marriage with or without her parents' consent. Often referred to as bride kidnapping or wife abduction, ukuthwala is a traditional practice is parts of South Africa in which a girl is taken from her family and forces into marriage, typically without her consent (Moloi, 2017).

A different study was conducted to address the "representations, emotions, and male violence against women" where 35 health and social professionals were interviewed and textual materials analysed, revealed that "anti-violence centre operators tend to view female victims and being helpless and completely under their male partner's control" (Autiero et al., 2020: 8). Although the findings continue to report that some "female victims of gender violence can also exhibit collusive and manipulative behaviours" (Autiero et al., 2020: 7) through quoting a psychotherapist that was interviewed for this study, the study lacks a rigorous unpacking of how female victims of gendered violence can be intentional or unintentional instigators of the violence. The psychotherapist stated that,

> "*It is a phenomenon that affects the couple, [and] it has to do with collusion that exists within the couple. Why not? One thing that is little talked about is that there are aspects related to women who can also be [involuntary] instigators of violence that they have to deal with and talk about. It should not be taboo to talk about this too. I think there is a need for skills, you cannot improvise. I do not speak of expertise, I speak of competence*" (Autiero et al., 2020: 8).

In my opinion, merely insinuating that GBV victims can be intentional or unintentional enablers and perpetuators of GBV without investigating these observations thoroughly is insufficient, because it continues to create an unexplored gap in the GBV discourse. It further affects the development of possible interventions that can be designed and/or implemented towards addressing this gap in the fight against GBV.

"Women have been framed as both passive victims and resourceful, dynamic actors in the face of acute and gradual disasters" (Clissold, et al, 2020: 101). I consider this phenomenon true for the crisis of GBV in South Africa. Embedded in the intricate social, political, economic, cultural, and traditional structures of South Africa are women who have submitted to power dynamics that privilege men, even in the face of their own demise. I, therefore, see this as a kind of toxic femininity.

Toxic femininity arises from a history of male-on-female and male-on-male dominance, where it is normal for women to not have power and/or influence over men. This is evidenced by Butler's notion of gender performance that suggests that the gender performance script "…is always already determined within [a] regulatory frame, and the subject [gender performer] has a limited

number of ‘costumes’ from which to make a constrained choice of gender style” (Salih, 2006: 56). Butler’s suggestion proves gender to be a performance, “…that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (Salih, 2006: 56). Due to this, women adapted the retaliation approach against men, opting for more subtle approaches to get their way (Jones, 2019).

Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being competition for positions of favour. This aspect of toxic femininity is also evident in the ways boys and girls are raised. The perception that girls are delicate and fragile, while boys are macho and strong, encourages toxic femininity because girls are raised to compete for the male gaze. “We raise girls to see each other as competitors – not for jobs or accomplishments… - but for the attention of men” (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 2015: n.pn). This aspect of toxic femininity exists in the same vein as internalized misogyny or internalized patriarchy by women. With this understanding of how women can internalize patriarchal systems, I deduce that women can also internalize and carry out acts that perpetuate and enable violence against women, even in intimate partner relationships. The issue is an information gap in the scrutiny of GBV. Exploring it could assist women with identifying how these internalized toxic patriarchal traits may influence the roles they may be playing in perpetuating and enabling gendered violence against women. Therefore, this autoethnographic attempts to address this gap by examining only the researcher’s own experience of GBV.

The narratives of women intentionally or unintentionally perpetuating GBV in intimate partner relationships are left untold and unrecorded as conversations around GBV often dwell on women being passive victims, but never enablers of GBV. I believe these stories to be an essential puzzle piece in the fight against the GBV crisis in South Africa because they begin to address the role of women in enabling and perpetuating GBV. They also address the systemic and cultural power dynamics held by women in the fight against gender-based violence.

This phenomenon is something I have observed within myself, and assumed it has relevance within the bigger GBV discourse. I addressed it using Rituals and Masks. Rituals and Masks have not, in my knowledge, been used in an autoethnographic way to interrogate GBV. This inquiry, therefore, does not only address an oversight in the ongoing conversation about GBV. It also makes use of

the Applied Theatre tool of Rituals and Masks with autoethnography to address an avenue that has not yet been explored within the field of Applied Theatre.

Research Questions

Given the extensive problem with GBV in South Africa, coupled with my personal experience, I formulated my research question as follows:

To what extent do structural (economic, traditional, and cultural) factors encourage a black South African woman to become an enabler of GBV in an intimate partner relationship? In what ways can autoethnography coupled with Boals' concept of Rituals and Masks facilitate a reflexive platform for women displaying symptoms of the battered woman syndrome to disrupt and challenge the routine that ultimately leads to learned helplessness? In what ways does autoethnography and Rituals and Masks address structural factors to shift the experiences of women presenting battering symptoms? In what ways do Rituals and Masks allow for vulnerability and introspection for a feminist who displayed symptoms of the battered woman syndrome, therefore developing learned helplessness and perpetuating GBV in a former intimate partner relationship?

Context and individual-specific inquiry

I have known black females who have lived through experiences and continue to survive the nightmare of gender-based violence in relationships and abusive marriages due to a lack of income for self-sustenance, traditional and cultural practices. These factors include the bazothini abantu syndrome[3], the kuyabekezelwa emshadweni nasothandweni[4] phrases, the akang'thandi mengang'shayi[5], and due to the fear of being called umabuy'emendweni. "If a woman decides to abandon her marriage, she is heavily castigated and labelled through idioms such as *umabuyemendweni*[6] and *umayehlulwa ngumendo*[7], a state that is often seen as struggle and battle" for the woman (Ncube and Moyo, 2011: 132). These expressions, argue Ncube and Moyo (2011),

[3] Bazothini abantu – the fear of "What will people say?" when wanting to make a decision or pursue new life ventures.
[4] Kuyabekezelwa emshadweni nasothandweni – you [woman] should persevere and endure in marriage and in relationships, regardless of the circumstances.
[5] akang'thandi mengang'shayi – "He does not love me if he does not beat me" sayings.
[6] umabuy'emendweni – the one who could not keep her marriage / the one who got defeated by marriage.
[7] Umayehlulwa ngumendo – the one defeated by marriage

are insulting and carry negative connotations that guilt-trip women into staying in abusive marriages, persuading women to endure abusive marriages. In their study, Ncube and Moyo report how Ndebele proverbs and idioms like the ones above "mirror a particular culture and tradition that imbues a spirit of submissiveness, perseverance and domesticity in women" (2011: 126). Ncube and Moyo (2011) assert that the philosophy communicated by some of these idioms is that in particular instances marriage is considered a rehabilitation centre "for vocal and outspoken women, which brings them to their place," and in this domestication process, women are considered 'good' wives when they become obedient towards male authority and domination (Ncube and Moyo, 2011: 132). The derogatory proverbs and idiomatic expressions, according to Ncube and Moyo (2011), are expressed by the Ndebele society against women.

Because society constitutes both men and women, it is clear that both men and women in the Ndebele culture uphold cultural practices that promote acts of gendered roles and stereotypes that encourage violence against women in intimate partner relationships. Although this study was conducted for the Ndebele cultural contexts, similarities were drawn between the Ndebele and Xhosa cultures as both groups form part of the Bantu people and share similar cultural practices and beliefs (Rajend Mesthrie, 1995).

Mothers and aunts continue to teach their daughters about how enduring pain from abuse are attributes of a strong woman, implying that a black woman's strength is measured by how much nonsense she can stomach from a man she is intimately involved with. In the Xhosa culture, this is done through a marriage tradition called *ukuyalwa,* where the bride and grooms' family elders and close elderly family friends, come together to lecture the new bride about the dos and don'ts of her marriage journey ahead (Mbuyazi-Memani, 2017). I have seen women around me suffer from depression because they are scared to leave their relationships or marriages because they fear being called failures who could not keep a man. A study conducted by Mahlori, Byrne, and Mabude (2018) at the University of South Africa to determine perceptions of GBV among university staff reveals a significant increase in the rates of mild to severe depression among people who have been exposed to and victims of GBV. It is revealed in the investigation that victims of GBV were symptomatic of psychological effects such as depression, anxiety, lack of self-esteem, and posttraumatic stress symptoms (Mahlori et al., 2018).

Choi and Ting (2008: 838) argue towards the lack of reliable estimates of violence against women, however, "… strong empirical evidence has suggested that violence against women by intimate partners is widespread and serious in South Africa". Boonzaier (2005) concludes in his study that the issue and results of woman abuse in South Africa require vast and broad research to explore various outcomes, possibilities, and solutions in support of the fight against GBV. Furthermore, it is essential to investigate multiple context-specific contributing factors that exacerbate violence against women in a country whose legacy from apartheid is a "culture of violence" (Boonzaier, 2005: n.p.).

Sutherland (2013) advocates for "a post-conflict pedagogy which recognizes and can account for pain and trauma of both sides through the creation of sustained discursive spaces which can provide a safe site for the playing-out of a multiplicity of identities". She further asserts that applied theatre, "as a socially based art form which aims to construct meaning through performance processes, can therefore shape and contest some of the meanings acquired around important social issues" (Sutherland. 2013: 181). Applied theatre coupled with autoethnography permits researchers "to speak about what is left beneath the surface and not spoken about" (Sutherland, 2013: 181). Conducting this autoethnographic inquiry as an Applied Drama and Theatre (ADT) scholar permitted me to conduct a context and individual-specific inquiry of a subject matter that is often left unexplored, in support of Sutherland's (2013) call for a post-conflict critical pedagogy in the field of ADT.

These personal and theoretical motives informed the reason behind the use of rituals and masks for this inquiry. These tools offered me a better understanding of how constant exposure to repetitive abusive scenarios led to me displaying symptoms of a battered woman. By deeply interrogating my own experience, my habits, and the role I unintentionally played in enabling the violence, I was able to outline clearly how and why I perpetuated and enabled GBV in an intimate partner relationship.

Theoretical Framework

The three main theories forming this research are the Battered Woman Syndrome, toxic femininity, and Rituals and Masks; and this inquiry sat at the intersection between the three theories.

Therapeutic potential of Boal's work

Pioneered by Brazilian theatre practitioner, drama theorist and political activist Augusto Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed is an art method that "grew out of a determined battle to make socially engaged, life-affirming theatre in a climate of extreme repression" (Babbage, 2018: 2). Boal's development of the Cop-in-the-Head technique blurred the boundaries between theatre and therapy (Boal, 1990: 39).

> "Boal defines theatre as the first discovery of humankind. Theatre emerges at the moment in which the human being recognizes the s/he can see himself or herself; s/he recognizes who s/he is and is not; s/he imagines who s/he could become. For Boal, the therapeutic effects lie within the dynamic of seeing and being seen, in the recognition of the self and the other, and in the subsequent expressions of desire for change in everyday life" (Feldhendler, 1994: 93-94).

Feldhendler, (1994: 87) writing about Boal's keynote speech given at a convention by the International Association of Group Psychotherapy themed *Encounter or Alienation?: The Importance of the Group in Modern Society*, asserts that "Boal described dramaturgy as the origin of human action and drama as the place where deep psychological processes are expressed". Inspired by the convention, Boal wrote a book titled *Méthode Boal de théâtre et de thérapie: l'arc-en-ciel du desir,* recounting the differences of working with Latin American participants to working with people from western Europe (Feldhendler, 1994). Boal's work with Latin Americans, at the time, focused predominantly on systemic issues, while western Europeans "… were not exposed to immediate external violence [,] they had, nonetheless, internalized an oppressive 'cop' into their own heads. He adopted his techniques to find out how these 'cops' had gotten into their heads and to develop approaches to get them out again" (Feldhendler, 1994: 88). As Boal's practice expanded, his focus shifted from being product-oriented to becoming process-oriented, moving into terrain where theatre and therapy overlap (Feldhendler, 1994).

Boal's work has been compared to the work of Jacob Levy Moreno, creator of psychodrama and group psychotherapy: "forum theatre, for instance, can be seen as a form of sociodrama in which 'the true subject… is the group and not the different individuals'" [(Moreno, 1974: 91) in

(Feldhendler, 1994: 89)]. Jonathan Fox, a psychodramatist and founder of Playback Theatre in the USA asserts that,

> … sociodrama is based upon the tacit assumption that the group formed by the audience is already organized by the social and cultural roles which in some degree all the carriers of the culture share…It is therefore incidental who the individuals are, or of whom the group is composed, or how large their number is. It is the group as a whole which has to be put upon the stage to work out its problem, because the group in sociodrama corresponds to the individual in psychodrama (Fox, 1987: 18).

A technique coined by Boal, named Cop-in-the-Head is also comparable to a psychodramatic method in a sense that,

> When setting a scene or situation, for instance, Boal now demands that the attribution of the roles be done by the protagonist of the forum scene, a standard procedure in a psychodrama. Participants of a Boal workshop in Giessen in January 1991, remarked that the techniques of Cop-in-the-Head had to do with 'freeing spontaneity'; for Moreno, the fundamental stance of psychodrama is based on the development of 'creative spontaneity' (Feldhendler, 1994: 89).

I mention this report because it outlines how Boal's work developed to become process oriented. Taking cognizance of how his techniques can have therapeutic goals – his work differs from traditional therapy where a clear client-therapist relationship is apparent with specified and targeted therapeutic goals given a timeline within which the goal should be achieved. Taking into cognizance "the necessity to consider psychic realities and to integrate them into the work process" – as per Boal's suggestion (Feldhendler, 1994: 88), this inquiry enabled me to gain awareness of the ways in which I intentionally and unintentionally enabled and perpetuated GBV in an intimate partner relationship due to cultural, traditional and economic influences that positioned me to become a victim-enabler of GBV in an intimate partner relationship.

Boal's work comprises multiple tools developed for the purpose of conscientizing oppressed individuals in various contexts, and to attempt to dismantle systems that upkeep the oppression. Central to his work is the role of the joker (Boal, 2008). In summary, Schutzman (2006) describes the joker as a facilitator who challenges and maximizes "possibilities for the articulation (and

rearticulation) of uncommon beliefs, working towards a vision of community that thrives on constant reformulation [ideologies]" (2006: 143). As the sole participant in this inquiry, I played the roles of the joker and the performer of the ritual. The roles of the joker/facilitator and the role of the performer co-existed in a state of metaxis. Boal (1995) outlines metaxis as:

> [T]he state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of the reality and the reality of the image. The participant shared and belongs to these two autonomous worlds; their reality and the image of their reality, which she herself has created (Boal, 1995: 43).

The use of the concept of metaxis in the performance of Rituals and Masks outlined my dual awareness of being present in the performance as it unfolded, while simultaneously playing the role of the joker to facilitate the interplay between performing the ritual, witnessing and observing myself, and taking note of the data coming from the performance. The joker in Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed mediates between

> …the worlds of performance space and beyond it, and the workshop world and the external world. [T]he state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of the reality and the reality of the image. The participant shares and belongs to these two autonomous worlds; their reality and the image of their reality, which she herself has created. Boal, 1995: 43).

The role of the joker was significant for this inquiry because it oversaw the facilitation of the performance. I expand further on how I played the duality of the roles of the oppressed and oppressor in Rituals and Masks, alongside the role of the joker in section 3.

Toxic Masculinity in Women / Toxic Femininity

I deem it necessary to unpack the concept of toxic masculinity before expanding on toxic femininity. Unpacking toxic masculinity reveals how patriarchal systems maintain cyclic behaviour that is internalised and upheld by both men and women, creating rituals that effect masks of internalised patriarchy. Toxic masculinity made its appearance in the 1990s to encapsulate "destructive behaviours adapted by men in trying to achieve notions of successful manhood"

(McCann, 2020: 2). Kupers) defines toxic masculinity as "…the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence" (2005: 714). The term *hegemonic masculinities* – referring to "the way men's power is systematically institutionalized, a dominance bolstered by men themselves" – predates the term *toxic masculinity* (McCann, 2020: 2). Connell, (1987) in an attempt to outline the systematic domination of men over women – as patriarchy theory suggests – and over men – over subordinate masculinities, suggests that "the public face of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily what powerful men are, but what sustains their power and what large numbers of men are motivated to support" (1987: 185). McCann and Connell's theorization supplements Butler's (1981) theorisation of gender performance and Boal's (1990) notion of structural systems operating in ways that socialise people into the masks of identity; because toxic patriarchal systems are upheld by an internalisation and performance of toxic masculinities by men and women, therefore initiating the creation of toxic femininity.

Although hegemonic masculinity is still evident within institutions, social culture and in masculinity studies, toxic masculinity is continuing to grab attention rapidly. It is

> often used in a way that echoes the intent of hegemonic masculinity, to understand how gender norms also harm some men [and women] … Popular media abounds with examples of how toxic masculinity explains men's violence, the misogyny… men's risk-taking behaviour and more (McCann, 2020: 4).

Contemporary scholars such as bell hooks, Emma Watson, and Terry Kupers have played a prominent role in advancing the discourse on toxic masculinity and femininity, as well as its impact on both individuals and society at large (hooks, 2004; Watson, 2014; Kupers, 2019). Hooks (2004), in particular, has emphasized the need for a comprehensive examination of the ways in which patriarchal norms and expectations are internalized and reinforced by both men and women, and the importance of actively working to disrupt and dismantle these systems of oppression. Watson (2014) has also been vocal about the role of toxic masculinity in perpetuating gender inequality, and has called for a shift in societal attitudes towards a more inclusive and equal definition of masculinity. Similarly, Kupers (2019) has focused on the ways in which toxic masculinity can contribute to the development of mental health issues and trauma among men and how addressing these issues is crucial in order to promote gender equality.

Kimmel and Katz, both scholars of masculinity studies, have greatly contributed to the understanding of the negative effects of toxic masculinity, with Kimmel's work emphasizing the ways in which societal expectations of masculinity contribute to discrimination and violence against marginalized groups (Kimmel, 1996; Katz, 2004). Similarly, Katz (2004) has highlighted the link between toxic masculinity and issues such as sexual assault and domestic violence, while also underscoring the responsibility of men in working to challenge and disrupt these harmful patterns. Both Kimmel and Katz have also emphasized the importance of fostering a more inclusive and equitable definition of masculinity, that is not harmful to individuals and society. Furthermore, their works have extensively stressed on the power dynamics at play in the society and how toxic masculinity contributes to the maintenance of patriarchy and marginalization of marginalized groups.

In the case of the intimate-partner relationship recounted in this inquiry, the perpetrator of the GBV on me is also a product of hegemonic masculinity that instilled both positive and negative aspects of masculinity. Being raised in a similar community to the one I grew up in, it is apparent that he witnessed, learned, and absorbed prescribed performances and expressions of his gender identity through the lens of an autocratic male figure, with an expectation of exercising the dominance of his masculinity on a docile and submissive young woman. This observation, however, does not excuse, justify, or condone the violent acts carried out by the man. Without nullifying various underlying factors I believe to have contributed towards him becoming abusive, this point of view merely demonstrates how he too was partially influenced by the context-specific structural factors that influenced the identity formation and articulation of his masculinity and manhood, as suggested by Butler's (1994) analysis of how people are socialised into taking on gender roles that are prescribed to them as some form of blueprint around which gender identity and performance is framed and created from.

Toxic femininity, the equivalent of toxic masculinity, according to McCann (2020) sits on the spectrum of mainstream discussions about toxic masculinity. It can be seen as "… a jumping-off point from which to theorise attachments that reinforce the gendered [masculine] power structure" (McCann, 2020: 2). The term toxic femininity, according to McCann, (2020), can be viewed and used in three perspectives:

1. Toxic femininity can be employed for an anti-feminist perspective as a reaction to the use of the term 'toxic-masculinity,' suggesting that women also possess inherent toxic traits like those of toxic men.
2. The term is used within the Men's Rights Activist (MRA) discourse to counteract understandings of power as gendered with anti-feminist intentions.
3. The third use of toxic femininity, which is not as reactive as the first two uses, is slowly being taken seriously by feminists to begin to question female behaviour that is adherent to traditional gender roles and stereotypes instilling notions of subservience to women (McCann, 2020).

"In the limited scholarly references to toxic femininity currently in circulation, the term is also used to reflect the internalization and reification of patriarchal ideas and norms" (McCann, 2020: 9).

Contemporary scholars like Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), hooks (1981) and others have explored the concept of intersectionality as it pertains to toxic masculinity and toxic femininity. Intersectionality is a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the ways in which harmful stereotypes and expectations associated with these constructs intersect with other systems of oppression, such as race, class, and sexual orientation (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1981). This conceptualization posits that individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups may experience a compounded form of discrimination and harm, which is not adequately captured by examining toxic masculinity or toxic femininity in isolation. This perspective highlights the need for a comprehensive examination of the intersections of various forms of oppression, in order to fully grasp the complexity of individual experiences and to address the harm caused by toxic masculinity and toxic femininity (Bowleg, 2008; Weber, 2018).

In support of this view, hooks (1981) emphasised the importance of considering intersectionality in understanding the experiences of marginalized groups. hooks (1981) has also provided a theoretical framework for intersectionality by highlighting the need for considering the interplay of various forms of oppression, including, class, race, and gender, in order to fully understand the experiences of marginalized individuals.

Although these theorists do not directly and necessarily expand on toxic masculinity and femininity as per this report's interest, it is worth acknowledging that because I, as the researcher-

subject of this inquiry, by virtue of being classified as a black woman by birth right, belong to one of the most marginalised groups globally. Suffice to acknowledge that the question of determining the most oppressed group globally is a multifaceted and nuanced one, as the manifestations of oppression are varied and may affect different individuals and communities in distinct ways (Crenshaw, 1991). Furthermore, the intersectionality of identities may exacerbate experiences of oppression, making it challenging to make definitive comparative statements (hooks, 1981). However, the academic literature extensively documents the disproportionately high levels of discrimination and marginalization that Black women, particularly in the Global South, experience on the basis of their race and gender (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1981). For instance, research has established that Black women are disproportionately impacted by poverty, restricted access to education and healthcare, and are at a heightened risk of gender-based violence, among other forms of systemic oppression (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1981).

The oppressive intersectionalities that are relevant for this inquiry are, therefore, expanded on in the unpacking of the structural factors that contribute towards the becoming a victim-enabler of GBV in an intimate partner relationship. Furthermore, the framing of this research, as far as toxic femininity is concerned, made use of the third viewpoint of the application of toxic femininity stated above. This viewpoint shares similar sentiments with this inquiry in relation to understanding how internalized toxic masculinity traits that develop toxic femininity can contribute towards a woman perpetuating and enabling GBV in intimate partner relationships.

GBV in intimate partner relationships

Feminists have used multiple terms to articulate gendered violence, including "battered women, violence against women, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, family violence, and gender-based violence" (Hall, 2014: 3). I will expand on IPV to contextualize the definition of GBV for this inquiry.

> How one defines IPV determines how one measures it, which in turn affects what conclusions can be drawn about the prevalence, patterns, gender differences, and health consequences of IPV… the definition of IPV is largely driven by one's own conceptualization of the problem,

> which, in turn, is dependent on one's background, training, experience, research methodology, and political agenda (Nicolaidis & Paranjape, 2009: 20).

Nicolaidis and Paranjape (2009) report that advocate researchers define IPV as continuous behavioural patterns where one of the main practices for a batterer to exert and exercise power and dominance over their intimate partner is through violence, regardless of the batterer and victim's gender identities and whether the batterer and the victim are in a heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual relationship. This IPV definition's archetype "… is that of a controlling, jealous man progressively taking away his female partner's self-esteem, independence, resources, social support network, sense of safety, and health" (Nicolaidis & Paranjape: 2009: 21).

Public health utilizes a system they have in place, whose goal is to enumerate, supervise, and mitigate factors risking the health of populations, including emotional abuse – particularly if it affects the wellbeing of an individual. This system influences public health's perspective on IPV, focusing especially on "… victimization and its health consequences, and less on the complexities that exist within individual relationships" (Nicolaidis & Paranjape: 2009: 21). Many healthcare provider training program see IPV as a repetition of coercive acts whose goals are to dominate and exert power over a partner while screening procedures in healthcare require limited information with little emphasis detailing the presence of patterned coercive behaviour (Nicolaidis & Paranjape: 2009). Furthermore, the definition of IPV and its screening process varies across various healthcare specialties. There will be no expansions made on the adapted definitions across medical specialties because they do not constitute or assist the purpose of the context of the phenomenon at hand.

Influenced by the work of Murray Straus and colleagues, family conflict researchers on college students and general populations understand IPV as violence inflicted as "… a response to intermittent conflicts and is perpetrated by both men and women in similar rates. Here, the focus is on specific behaviours perpetrated by either partner" (Nicolaidis & Paranjape: 2009: 21). Contrary to this definition, feminist researchers, according to Nicolaidis & Paranjape (2009: 20), comprehend IPV as "a pattern of coercive behaviours meant to establish power and control" by males using physical and emotional abuse over and against their female partners.

To frame a context-specific definition for this inquiry, I coupled the 1993 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women's definition of GBV as:

> "Any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life," (Health and Human Rights Info, 2013: n.pn),

with my definition of IPV, which is:

> an act of violence – physical and emotional – whether cyclical or once-off, that is performed by a person on their spouse, lover, or partner.

Together, these definitions define what gender-based violence in intimate partner relationships is for the purpose of this study, focusing particularly on black South African males carrying out the violent act, and black South African women being the receiving victims.

Battered woman syndrome (BWS)

Suffice to note that BWS is a clinical diagnosis term with extensive research, and in this inquiry, BWS is not applied pathologically and diagnostically towards GBV survivors and victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).

Being cognizant of the researcher's scope of practice as an applied drama and theatre researcher, BWS was used as an approach to demonstrate how structural factors (economic, traditional and cultural) operate and foster a platform whereby IPV victims may exhibit symptoms outlined by BWS theorists.

Defining Battered Woman Syndrome (BWS):

Pioneered by Lenore Walker in the late 1970s and early 1980s, BWS is defined by Savage as:

> … battering relationship as a 'cycle of violence' that consists of three stages. The first stage is a 'tension building phase,' in which the woman experiences a minimal amount of physical and verbal attacks by her spouse/ lover (Walker 1981 in Savage, 2006: 762).

Savage (2006) expands on how the woman normally minimises the severity of the attacks while appeasing her attacker during this phase. Stage two, the 'battering phase' happens when the batterer becomes incredibly violent to the woman, making this stage "the acute battering incident"

(Savage, 2006: 762). Walker (1981) suggests that it is the clear 'lack of control and its major destructiveness' that distinguishes this incident from the ones that occur in phase one (Walker 1981 in Savage 2006). This is followed by the third stage, the 'honeymoon phase', which is characterised by the batterer showing remorse and 'contract loving behaviour' where they beg for forgiveness, convincing the woman that he will not hurt her again through actions showing his determination to change (Savage, 2006).

Walker (1981) asserts that a woman who experiences repeated cycles of violence may develop learned helplessness, which is a psychological state of mind

> "... first introduced by the psychologist Martin Seligman, that serves as one explanation for why the women do not leave their abusers. According to Walker (1981), the women believe that they lack all control over their abusive situation and feel it is impossible to escape, even when escape is in fact a possibility. Feeling she has no way out of the situation, the woman becomes increasingly passive, and her motivation and the will to get out of the relationship diminish" (Walker, 1981 in Savage, 2006: 762).

Walker (1981) outlines that the origins of spousal violence in Western communities stem from how law and religion permitted husbands to use assault on their wives as disciplinary measures because husbands would be held responsible for their wives' actions if those actions were deemed unlawful or blasphemous. This demonstrates how wife-beating was an acceptable norm historically as long as it did not result in physical injuries (Walker, 1981). The normalizing of males assaulting their spouses in western communities is synonymous with the normalization of IPV embedded in the black South African cultural context.

Having been victims of intimate abuse over a prolonged period, battered women have been reported to display provocative behaviour towards their abusers, the batterers as though they are asking to be abused (Walker, 1981). MacDonald (1971) offers a victim-precipitation theory to justify the battered women's attempts to manipulate their batterers into inflicting physical violence on them as a means to gain power and control over their own lives, however, these attempts are generally unfruitful. These manipulations succeed in prolonging the lives of the battered women and in influencing the time and place in which the violence ensues, though they are powerless at preventing the beating. As a result, the victims may be accused as the cause of the violence, leading

to an increased negative impact of the psychological effects this experience may have on the women (Walker, 1981).

Scholars who critically examined the theory of BWS have had extensive debates about the psychological symptoms that constitute BWS, arguing that not all battered women experience the same violence patterns as outlined by Walker's cycle of violence (Easteal and Stubbs, 1992). Another noteworthy problem area of BWS is that it does "…not confront the larger question of what might be considered to be reasonable, but rather constructs a different standard of behaviour against which a (reasonable) battered woman is to be measured" (Easteal and Stubbs, 1992: 360). This is a problem area because it risks benefiting only the women who fit the stereotype of the kind of battered woman outlined by Walker (1981), while other battered women whose symptoms are not captured in the one-size-fits-all symptomology of BWS could be greatly disadvantaged due to not meeting the criteria of a reasonable battered woman.

As Easteal and Stubbs (1992) succinctly put it, "the danger lies not in using BWS as descriptive of the experiences of some battered women, but as prescriptive of what are reasonable responses for battered women" (1992: 360). The third issue about BWS is that it focuses largely on the psychological characteristics of a subset of women who fit the reasonable symptomology of BWS to justify their behaviour, without paying much attention to various social and structural factors that limit women's options, making it difficult and in some cases impossible for them to leave violent relationships. "Rather the woman's actions are interpreted in the context of her psychological (dys)functioning" (Easteal and Stubbs, 1992: 360).

Easteal and Stubbs (1992) argue that the lack of rigorous scrutiny of the cultural and systemic influences in the creation of battered women tend to lean toward an unhelpful "apparent gender neutrality of the term learned helplessness" (1992: 360). They continue to substantiate the argument by asserting that,

> "The issue is not whether learned helplessness is gendered, but rather that in being invoked in the context of battered women it reinforces extant stereotypes about women's passivity. More importantly, the validity of the concept itself has been questioned within the psychological literature, and the illogicality of explaining a purposive action – killing – by resort to helplessness has been highlighted" (1992: 360).

Lathan (n.d.), in agreement with the criticism of BWS, argues that although Walker's (1981) Cycle of Abuse theory aims to reduce IPV victim-blaming by enunciating the psychological factors preventing victims from leaving abusive relationships, the theory oftentimes promotes victim-blaming, insinuating that victims can and should help prevent the violence. "BWS is often blamed for keeping alive the question *'Why do women stay?'* which continues to rest responsibility for ongoing abusive relationship on the victim, who may also be constrained by children, economics, optimism, and even, feelings of love, care, or concern for their partner" (Lathan, n.d.: 4).

In more recent years, contemporary scholars such as Stark and Lyon have expanded upon the concept of BWS, critiquing its limitations and highlighting the importance of considering the broader socio-political and structural context of IPV (Stark, 2007; Lyon, 2015). Stark (2007), for example, notes that the concept of BWS tends to pathologize victims of domestic violence and places undue emphasis on the behaviours of the victim, rather than the perpetrator of the abuse. Additionally, Lyon (2015) has argued that the BWS concept primarily focuses on women and does not take into account the experiences of men and children who are also victims of IPV. As a result, these scholars have supported the use of 'intimate partner violence' to encompass both men and women as victims and to shift the focus on the perpetrator (Stark, 2007; Lyon, 2015). They also stress on the fact that BWS should not be used as a legal strategy in the criminal justice system and that it may not be the best way to understand the complexities of domestic violence and that it could be used to justify lenient sentences for the offender.

In keeping with contemporary scholarship on the BWS research, this study employed Walker's (1981) theoretical framework in its examination of the phenomenon under investigation, given its particular conceptualization of BWS aligns closely with the experiences of the research subject, aims, and objectives.

Section 2: Research Method

I used autoethnography, which is "research, writing, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" (Ellis, 2004: xix). The tool used to explore this methodology is Rituals and Masks, whose aim is to disrupt social masks and rituals that operate to keep oppressive systems in place (Boal, 2002).

Autoethnography is a qualitative research and writing approach that systematically (graphy) investigates one's personal experience (auto) to comprehend cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, 2004; Jones, 2008). This method challenges the conventional and traditional approaches of conducting research and the way people are represented through searching for "…more transparent, reflexive, and creative ways" to conduct and report their research findings (Spry, 2001; Adams, Jones, Ellis, 2015: 21). Autoethnography sees research as "a political, socially-just and socially conscious act" which does not detach the research from the researcher; and the "…personal from the relational, cultural, and political [–] qualitative researchers embrace methods that [recognize] and [use] personal-cultural entanglements" (Ellis et al., 2011: 1; Adams, et al., 2015: 21).

Conducting autoethnographic research requires the researcher to transcribe their past experiences "retroactively and selectively" (Ellis, et al., 2011: 2). Apart from their personal experiences, the researcher could conduct interviews with other people, consult with various text and information sources such as journals, photographs, video and voice recordings, artworks, artifacts, and self-observational data to assist with recalling or the researching process that an auto ethnographer undergoes (Ellis, et al, 2011). Conducting autoethnography

> "…offers nuanced, complex, and specific knowledge about particular lives, experiences, and relationships rather than general information about large groups of people. Qualitative research focuses on human intentions, motivations, emotions and actions, rather than generating demographic information and general descriptions of interaction" (Adams et al., 2015: 21).

Ethnographic Refusal

Ethnographic refusal "is a method whereby researchers and research participants together decide not to make particular information available for use within the academy. It is intended to redirect academic analysis away from harmful pain-based narratives that obscure slow violence and towards the structures, institutions, and practices that engender those narratives" (Zahara, 2016: n.p.n.). Zahara (2016) reports that the concept of refusal has been criticized and dismissed by anthropologists, claiming that it produces "incomplete depictions of marginalized groups". Contrary to this notion, indigenous theorists reframed the concept of refusal as a decolonizing research approach because it considers and attends to the ethical implications of conducting research for participants and their communities (Zahara, 2016). Practicing refusal, for indigenous theorists, "…necessitates community collaboration and control over research projects… the method is centrally concerned with a community's right to self-representation" (Zahara, 2016: n.p.n.).

As the researcher and subject for this inquiry, I used ethnographic refusal to grant myself permission to refuse to disclose certain information about the battering experience I am investigating, the Rituals and Masks performance exploration process, my reflections and findings from the entire experience wherever I deem it necessary to refuse disclosing this information. Refusal, for this inquiry, is an act of granting myself agency to what I choose to subject myself to, opt-out of, or have information reported back or kept out of the academic document.

Ethical Considerations

As the subject and researcher for this inquiry, I practiced beneficence to ensure my safety and wellbeing. I did this by intentionally allowing myself to not go to certain personal, psychological, and emotional places to protect myself from the anticipated resulting psychological and emotional harm and trauma. I exercised autonomy through being careful and pedantic with the personal narratives I chose to share and omit to the degree of my comfortability. I thought it unnecessary to use pseudonyms because this is an autoethnographic study, making it apparent to any reader that the inquiry is based on the researcher's past experiences. Instead, I opted to not include sensitive information I am uncomfortable disclosing. It was and still is imperative that I practice autonomy throughout this practice because not taking agency would be inflicting and perpetuating emotional and psychological harm onto myself - the very act I am arguing against.

Rituals and Masks

Rituals and Masks is a technique

> [consisting] precisely in revealing the superstructures, the rituals which reify all human relationships, and the masks of behaviour that those rituals impose on each person according to the roles he plays in society and the rituals he must perform (Boal, 2008: 134).

Rituals and Masks were created by Augusto Boal as one of the approaches of showcasing and exploring oppression in the Forum Theatre model, in an effort to disrupt the one-sidedness of an oppressive monologue to disrupt the monologue through creating an exploratory dialogue between the oppressed and the oppressor (Boal, 2002). It is a tool that scrutinizes everyday mundane masks put on by people as an adherence to the prescriptions of their social status or occupation, stating that, "whether trader, labourer, student, actor or whatever, all specialists end up assuming the mask of their specialty" (Boal, 2002: 201). Boal (1979: 133) states that "this particular technique of a people's theatre ('Rituals and Masks') consists precisely in revealing the superstructures, the rituals which reify all human relationships, and the masks of behaviour that those rituals impose on each person according to the role he plays in society and the rituals he must perform".

To further the understanding of how practitioners can employ this tool, Boal (1979: 134) gives an example of the same scene staged by two actors four times:

> First scene: the priest and the parishioner are landlords;
>
> Second scene: the priest is a landlord and the parishioner is a peasant;
>
> Third scene: the priest is a peasant and the parishioner is a landlord;
>
> Fourth scene: the priest and the parishioner are peasants.

The actors play out the same ritual in each instance. However, the social masks worn by the actors will cause each scene to differ. This tool can be adapted into multiple variants where people perform "the same ritual changing masks; the same ritual performed by people of one social class, and later by people of another class; exchange of masks within the same ritual; etc." (Boal, 1979: 134).

Contemporary scholars have criticized Boal's tools and their effectiveness in today's political climate because "Boal developed his seminal theories in the context of an oppressive military regime in which distinctions between oppressor and oppressed were, as he [Boal] puts it, 'concrete and visible'" (Snyder-Young, 2011: 31). Contrary to Boalian times, South Africa's current political systems are riddled with ambiguous oppressors and oppression is more slippery. Snyder-Young (2011), expands on the challenging nature of identifying the oppressed and oppressor in the Northern American, Western European contexts and other late capitalistic democratic contexts such as South Africa, arguing that,

> It can be challenging for participants and jokers alike to fix stable lines between oppressor and oppressed as all are intertwined in capitalism's complex web and united by the consumption of mass media. As Bruce McConachie puts it, 'politicians and pundits encourage middle class Americans to see themselves frequently as victims and to misperceive the genuine oppression of others (McConachie, 2002: 254 in Snyder-Young, 2011: 32). The same is true in reverse, as myths of meritocracy and hard work leading to individual upward mobility blame the oppressed for not working hard enough to overcome oppression, making structural inequalities appear invisible. Within this complex landscape, who decides how the lines between oppressor and oppressed are drawn? What happens when one community of spect-actors define their own 'liberation' in ways or pressing another? (2011: 32).

The questions posed by Snyder-Young (2011) were essential in the way this inquiry highlighted the dyadic dynamic of the GBV victim-survivor, the perceived oppressed and simultaneous enabler of the oppression. This inquiry, therefore, drew from Snyder-Young's (2011) provocation of scrutinizing the duality of the role of the victim-perpetuator that enabled GBV in her intimate partner relationship.

The ritual in Rituals and Masks, in this inquiry, refers to a frequent action or occurrence that is normalised, therefore becoming a ritual – as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "an act or series of acts regularly repeated in a set precise manner" (*Merriam-Webster* 2022, ritual entry). This definition supplements Boal's (2002) perspective of the rituals being repeated occurrences that are causes and perpetuators of oppression. This perspective of rituals intersects with the rituals that create battered women because, as outlined above in the description of BWS, the victim

becomes exposed to a cycle of abuse that eventually batters her (Walker, 1981). Another intersectionality of this viewpoint on ritual is emphasised in Butler's (1994) description of the performance of gender, asserting that gender is a process, "…a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame" (Salih, 2007: 56). This is supported by Clissold's (2020) claim of women being "…both passive victims and resourceful, dynamic actors in the face of acute and gradual disasters" (Clissold, et al, 2020: 101).

All these actions, these rituals that occur frequently, determine their mask (Boal, 2002) because people performing prescribed actions upkeep rituals wearing the specific masks required by the ritual they perform. An understanding of the intersectionalities between these concepts influenced how I prepared the ritual installations.

Extensive literature has been written about mask work from multiple perspectives and contexts. "One unifying theme within this literature is that the mask comes from a ritualistic heritage, impacting on the way it is used in its various contexts" (Hockey, 2008: 5). Shepherd (1990) reports the lack of a universal agreement amongst theorists about when and where masks were first used, though mask work dates back approximately nine thousand years in Mexican, Balinese, Japanese, Egyptian, African, and various indigenous cultures. Apart from indigenous and cultural use, masks were a dominant feature of theatre in Ancient Greece to enhance actors' features to accommodate audiences housed at the back of a huge Greek amphitheatre auditorium (Shepherd, 1990).

Contrary to the notion of the theatrical use of masks for enhancing actors' features on stage, Boal (2008) asserts that masks are beyond a visual artifact that actors wear, rather they influence the ecosystem with structural factors within which people live. "The relations of production (infrastructure) determine the culture of a society (superstructure). Sometimes the infrastructure changes but the superstructure for a while remains the same" (Boal, 2008: 133). To expand on this assertion, Boal (2008) gives an example of how peasants in Brazil were prohibited from making eye contact when interacting with their landlords. They would murmur, "yes, sir; yes, sir" while staring at the ground. This behaviour remained the same even after the government decreed an agrarian reform before 1964 declaring that peasants could become landowners. The peasants stared the ground and murmured, "yes, friend; yes, friend" (Boal, 2008).

Boal's (2008) example of how the operation of Brazil's political and economic systems created masks of docility for the peasants, so much that they could not alter their behavioural masks even after being legally declared equals to their former masters is instructive. This is synonymous with how South African economic, traditional, and cultural structures operated in ways that positioned me to become an unintentional victim-enabler of GBV in an intimate partner relationship. This was a result of the economic, cultural, and social masks of submission I was socialised into adopting as a part of my identity and a black, Xhosa, South African woman. The specific exercise used to explore the phenomenon found in Augusto Boal's *Games for Actors and non*-actors is called *Making the mask all-encompassing* (Boal, 2002: 155). In this exercise Boal (2002) emphasises that,

> The mask superimposes itself on the human being, but under the mask life goes on. This exercise consists of making the mask invade the whole of the human being, to the point of eliminating all other signs of life. The 'human component of the worker is not adequate for the mechanical work he has to achieve; thus, the less human the worker, the more efficient he is and the more he turns into an automation. The actor makes his body do movements which the worker normally does, the mask gradually gains the upper hand, till the worker 'dies' (2002: 155).

Suffice to note that Boal's application of Rituals and Masks is usually conducted in a group context. I have adapted the technique to be a self-reflexive process. Below I explain how I set up the rituals to explore how I perpetuated GBV unknowingly.

The process

Preparing the self

In order to use Rituals and Masks as a method, I needed to set up certain personal rituals. Before I was able to set up the rituals, I needed to write the background to my story as part of my autoethnographic process. This was an important step because it helped through bridging me into the physically explorative mode of the phenomenon, something I could not do because I experienced resistance due to a fear of unpleasant triggers that were likely to result from the exploration of Rituals and Masks. This is an abstract of my reflective journal as part of preparing the self.

Background to how I enabled GBV in the intimate partner relationship

I had just turned 19 and decided to leave the apartment I shared with two friends to go take a walk along the beach at SunCoast Casino in Durban, South Africa. It was around 7pm and I decided to go back to the apartment. On my way to the exit to catch a taxi back home, I was stopped by this good-looking and fresh-scented young man. He politely asked for my contact details, promising to celebrate my birthday with me the following day. I had spent the day alone at the apartment. I wanted to do something for myself but all I had was R50.00 to transport myself to and from campus for the remainder of the week. I agreed to meet the following day and we celebrated my birthday, as he had promised. He was kind and accommodating throughout the time we spent together. He was eager to hear more of my stories and to find out about my love. There was a comforting quality in the way he spoke to me – it made me feel important and heard. A few weeks later I could not make rent and was facing possible eviction because it had not been the first or second time, I was late with my rental payment. I could not contact my father because he was unemployed and barely keeping financially afloat at the time. I could not ask my mother either. Asking her for anything felt draining for me at the time because I was aware of the numerous financial responsibilities she had to fulfil on her own, including my university fees, my younger sister's school fees, and her and my grandmother's needs. It had been a few years after my parents divorced for reasons they never wanted to explain to me because they thought I was too young to understand. Ironically, my parents expected me to facilitate their communication of my financial needs to my unemployed

father because I was assigned his financial responsibility during the legal settlement of their divorce.

So, I was almost homeless in a city extremely far away from home. My relationship with the man had progressed by then and he politely offered that I move in with him to reduce the financial strain I was experiencing. I moved in with him because I had no long-term place to stay and was tired of alternating between friends' places who offered me shelter for a night or two. The relationship progressed even further after I moved in with the man. I realized that he treated and appreciated me in a way that I wanted my father to love, acknowledge and treat me, yet he was not playing the role of a father figure in my life. He was addressing a childhood insecurity I grew up with and because of that, I allowed my dependency on him to grow beyond being a temporary fix to my accommodation issues.

He took on the characteristics of the man I wanted, some form of a father figure that validated my yearn for fatherly love. He kept making remarks about how good I was to him and that stroked my ego because I knew I was good at modelling what is traditionally perceived as a good woman because I was socialized into becoming the good woman majority of my life. After a while, his behaviour started changing. He started giving mean and uninterested responses and his interest and attentiveness to my needs faded slowly. When I expressed this observation to him, he smothered me with all the attention I could ask for and I believed that things were back to normal. How amazing it felt to be the centre of his world again because I had performed my womanhood right and it won him over. This cycle of coldness and excessive warmth repeated and with each coldness came a harsher word, a firmer fist, and a harder shove onto the ground. I pushed my friends away each time this cycle happened because I was engulfed by the fear of admitting that I felt like I had failed and was being punished for my inability to be a sufficient woman that can make him happy. I was trying to figure myself out and I let the exploration of the woman I was becoming revolve around a man who made me feel good about everything once upon a time. I got tired of making up lies that I needed to remember the next time a different friend asks about what happened and so I pushed them even further away. It was the abusive, irregular man and me against the world.

I remember the first time he beat me to a pulp. My reaction to this incident reiterates Walker's (1981) assertion of stage 1 of a battering relation, stating that a woman "…tends to minimise the

significance of the events and [mollifying] her attacker" (Walker 1981 in Savage, 2006: 762). Instead of worrying about my wellbeing and trying to heal from the abuse at the time, I was concerned about his mental wellbeing, convincing myself that his childhood trauma was informing his behaviour. He had told me at the beginning of our relationship that he was orphaned at a young age. He grew up feeling ostracized by his family members and their children and so he had to learn to fend for himself from quite a young age. He had managed to put himself through half of his primary schooling, high school, and tertiary. I managed to talk him into taking the offer of free therapy sessions that were paid for by the company he worked for at the time. The smothering began again, and he had started seeing a professional to help him process the traumas I believed were haunting him. He apologised and promised to change and never hurt me again. I was happy again. I convinced myself that I had not failed the man. All he needed was a few therapy sessions to help him realise that he acted out of character, help him process his feelings and things would be back to normal. Again, this sudden change was a textbook definition of a batterer, verifying Walker's (1981) notion of the batterer taking action to show that he will change as he convinces the woman that he will never hurt her again. In hindsight, I realised that I was trauma bonded to the man at this point in the relationship.

As the relationship progressed, I lost more of my friends and gradually started interacting with a small portion of his friendship circle. He and his friends would recount their experiences of stories that demonstrated their comfortability of violating women's autonomy. One of the stories shared was that of a woman who visited one of his friends. When the woman refused to engage in sexual intercourse with the friend, the friend got angry, told her he was doing her a favour by wanting to be with him, and kicked her out in the middle of the night. He didn't care about her safety and how she would travel back home, although he had promised to drive her home the following day. He continued to say how he had enough money to lure any girl he wants and how stupid that woman had been for not seizing the opportunity. I laughed at the story because I knew how good it felt to have my financial needs catered for by a man who only expects you to be a good woman. His actions were partly justified in my eyes, he performed his prescribed male role, and she was not a good woman to him. My comprehension of autonomy and consent were blurred by the yearning of wanting to be a good enough woman. If that meant violating my autonomy, so be it. I demonstrated to the man I was with that night that I was willing to allow my boundaries of autonomy and consent for being a good woman; I was unintentionally willing to enable abusive

behaviour towards myself and other women because I thought it justified and he took advantage of that revelation. I was not aware at the time that my behaviour was enabling GBV.

I remember a time when I came back from a long, sunny, and tiring day around 22:00. I had lectures from 08:00 till 14:00 and various drama productions rehearsals from 14:00 to 21:30. I felt sticky from sweat and all I wanted to do was to take a shower and sleep when I got home. But I did not. I could not take a shower because I knew that when he came back, he would open my legs whether I had cleaned myself up after I got home. I could not shower because he had somehow made me believe it was my fault that he was insecure and possessive of me and that the only way for him to know that I had not had sexual engagements when I was not at the apartment was for him to inspect my crotch when I came back. His behaviour had developed into the degradation stage of the rape culture pyramid (11th Principle: Consent!, 2015). He coerced, manipulated, blamed, and shamed me for cleaning myself up in his absence because me cleaning myself up was not reassuring for his insecurities. There would be occasional threats of kicking me out if I dared to question his behaviour. He would gloat about my no longer having friends to go to – because I had pushed everyone away to make him comfortable. It was at this point that I started experiencing learned helplessness because I believed I lost all control over how the relationship turned out. It felt impossible to escape the situation because I had alienated the people who were in my life. This was yet again, a textbook explanation of the concept of learned helplessness (Walker, 1981) that is described in the battered woman section above.

All these encounters were cyclical. The financial dependency on an abusive man, the traditional indoctrinations of what it meant to be a good Xhosa woman who can keep a man, and the normalised rape culture enabling behaviour that occurred around me, all operated in ways that socialised me into feeling and acting like a battered woman, adopting a mask that made me perpetuate and enable GBV in an intimate partner relationship unintentionally.

Preparing the mind, body, and space

Preparing myself for experimenting in the rituals began in October 2021 when I was nearing the proposal submission of this inquiry. I started attending drama therapy sessions because I anticipated an emotional and psychological unease, especially because my research prompted me to revisit past battering experiences. I was both nervous and excited about this journey – excited

because this inquiry is me holding myself accountable publicly, in hopes that another woman going through a similar experience could have the courage to hold themselves accountable for a part they may be playing knowingly or unknowingly in perpetuating GBV in their intimate partner relationships. I was nervous because I soon realised that I started to remember some battering experiences I had suppressed through compartmentalising what I could and could not deal with and process alone back when the battering occurred. I continued with the therapy session because I needed grounding and support to unpack these memories that I suddenly remembered. The therapeutic relationship is currently ongoing and will continue until I complete this report.

Fast forward to preparation for experimenting within the ritual. I intuitively developed a pre-ritual, where I changed into black comfortable clothes in silence. The initial impulse behind this was informed by wanting to get out of my usual routine, to bridge myself into the world of performing the ritual where the experiment is meant to take place. I soon realised that changing into black allowed me to mourn the battered woman because I never got to mourn her properly. Revisiting who she used to be, a woman who operated in a battered sphere made me realise that she conquered that part of her life, and it was never mourned. And so, mourning her is paying homage to her through referencing the Xhosa traditional ritual of mourning loved ones wearing black. The practice of mourning while wearing black is a common practice among Xhosa people, as cited by Potelwa (2016) in a study about Xhosa burials. The black becomes a state of mourning, not for a departed formally battered woman, but for a survivor who learned from the battering experiences.

After preparing myself, I then had to prepare the space where the ritual took place. I used white sheets to create a circle on the floor. The ritual took place inside the demarcated space – the circle. Because preparing the self became a state of mourning, laying the white sheets out ritualistically and visually presented itself synonymously to a ritual performed during umbuyiso[8]. The purpose of the ceremony of ukubuyisa[9] normally performed a year or two after the deceased's passing is "… to call and welcome the deceased back into the family in order that he can be able to take care of the family" (Yawa, 2010: 91) and to celebrate the life they lived. The pre-ritual ritual of laying white sheets onto the ground to demarcate the performance space symbolically became a

[8] Umbuyiso – an unveiling ceremony performed in the Xhosa culture.
[9] Ukubuyisa – the verb of the noun umbuyiso, translated to "to bring back home"

welcoming back of myself to take care of me during the performance of the ritual. The laying of the white sheets also became a celebration of a woman who, once upon a time, felt stifled and incapacitated by the battering experience, who is currently opening parts of her vulnerability up for academic and public scrutiny as she continues her healing journey. This also became a celebration of the battered woman and the lessons she took from the battering experience that inform who she has become – to a certain degree.

After demarcating the space, I placed a blue character mask that covers only the eye area on the right, and a pink eye-character mask on the left with a black doek. I wore the blue masks when playing the oppressor (the batterer); the pink mask and headscarf to play the oppressed (the battered) protagonist; and I had no mask to wear when playing the joker. The antagonist, the oppressor and the oppressed had an encounter within the demarcated space while the joker operated from outside the demarcated space because the joker assumed a neutral role of facilitating the interaction between the antagonist and the protagonist.

The disruption of the ritual that enables and perpetuates GBV in an intimate partner relationship was explored under three themes: the traditional, economic, and cultural influences that informed my perpetuating and enabling of GBV in a former intimate partner relationship:

Ritual 1: Traditional influences

I grew up in Qumbu, a small town in the Eastern Cape under the patriarchal upbringing of Xhosa men and women. My upbringing was riddled with my girl cousins, and I, being taught to fulfil all domestic duties in the homestead, to become good wives that will be worth many cows when receiving dowry. We were taught to sit with closed legs, to look down when being addressed by elders, male elders in particular, and to know that our place is in the kitchen. We were taught to never question or contest decisions that were made by elders or my boy cousins that I grew up with. I witnessed marriages where men dictated, and women submitted. These actions were also present in brother-sister relationships, where the brother's opinion weighed more than the sister's opinion regardless of the sister's opinion being more logical and practical. As a child, I absorbed these behavioural patterns, thinking that is how adulthood is, without realising that all my family and community members were adhering to prescribed and stereotypical gendered behaviour, as outlined by Butler's (1994) theory of gender performance. I was not aware that the rituals of

socialisation I was exposed to over time created an identification mask of a woman who performed her gender the only way I knew.

Ritual 2: Economic influences

Ubuhle bendoda zinkomo zayo. This is a common saying among Nguni tribes (Matyila, 2015) that is directly translated into the beauty of a man lies in the number of his cows. I grew up being taught that cows are a man's currency to prove his wealth, with teachings of aspiring to become the best in performing domestic duties and becoming a well-behaved girl to attract a wealthy man to take care of me and the home I was supposed to build. There were no conversations about the income generated by women because it is believed to be a man's responsibility to cater to all household financial responsibilities while the woman tends to the babies and other domestic duties that need completion. I witnessed female relatives and neighbours who stayed in unhappy and abusive marriages because they had no financial resources to support themselves and their children. They too were performers of prescribed gendered expectations who wore the socialised masks that made them submissive while men performed the prescribed macho figures who governed subservient women and poor men who did not own livestock.

Ritual 3: Cultural influence



Figure 1 Rape Culture Pyramid (11th Principle: Consent!, 2015).

This rape culture pyramid was created by an organisation named 11th Principle: Consent! aimed at promoting conversations on various social media platforms about normalised cyclic behaviour that leads to the normalisation of rape culture (11th Principle: Consent!, 2015). I have witnessed and have been a recipient of the behaviours outlined in the normalisation phase of the pyramid. Catcalling, rape jokes, unwanted non-sexual touch, sexist attitudes, and locker room banter were all – and still are – a part of normal everyday life in the various communities I have been a part of since childhood.

During my tweenage (between younger and teenage) years, there were local boys who hung out in corners, waiting to ukushela[10] igqiyazana[11]. When a girl showed the slightest disinterest at their catcalling, the young would throw demeaning remarks and rape jokes at us. I remember a particular

[10] Ukushela – to mack on, to hit on, flirt with or seduce a female using verbal and physical means of persuasion.
[11] Igqiyazana – a young girl.

incident that happened when I was 12 years old. My body started developing into a woman earlier than my peers, and so I had small pointy breasts sprouting from my chest. This one boy attempted macking on me, and upon my refusal, he said he would not fuck me and pointy breasts anyway because they'd poke him, while attempting to touch my body without my consent. I remember another incident where there was a nice young boy I really liked from around my neighbourhood. My boy cousins forbade me from seeing him because, "he is dirty," they said. I did not understand what they meant by that and upon many of my failed attempts to let me see him, they told me that he liked saying dirty things about girls, saying it was okay and funny that he was doing such, but they would not allow someone to act in the same manner towards their sister. My boy cousins partook in locker room banter, and they knew it was immoral, which is why they did not want their friends to do what they all did to me and my girl cousins.

Access to technology and the development of its messaging systems has made it easier to carry out violating acts of sending revenge porn and non-consensual photos and videos, as reported by Mbude (2020) on the illegalisation of revenge porn in South Africa.

Growing up seeing how youngsters adopted behaviours performed by black, Xhosa elderly men and women made me believe that was the right and the only way of treating people, although it led to me partaking in acts that escalated the abuse I was experiencing. And so, when I got into an abusive relationship where the actions I was socialised into accepting as normal growing up happened. Although I knew I did not like and enjoy what I was experiencing, I still thought it was normal. I even made excuses for the abuser when my friends would ask about the bruises on my body. I was socialised into a mask of docility that did not make me question why I did not stand up for myself and take the help I was offered by my friends.

The ritual performance

I will note three scenarios that display how I enabled and perpetuated GBV in the intimate partner relationship from the traditional, cultural, and economic perspectives. The scenarios are based on the experiences I went through during the battering relationship and have been adapted from the original Nguni language that was spoken to the past, and to the present tense to allow for exploration using Rituals and Masks.

Ritual 1 performance abstract: Cultural influence

It is late at night. I just came from performing in a theatre production. I am tired and getting ready for bed.

He: Come here.

Her: Not tonight, I'm tired.

He: That's strange because you just allowed that boy from the play to be intimate with you in front of other people, in front of strangers.

Her: You know that's not how it was. That was a rehearsed production and there were no feelings involved.

He: So, you can be a slut for him, not me?

Her: That's not how it is.

He touches Her sensually. Her moves away from the touch.

He: (impatient) You're denying me access, yet you allowed another boy to touch you?

Her: Listen, I'm tired and I want to sleep. Can we do this another time?

He: So, you enjoyed it when he (other boy) touched you. You were having fun, giggling at him while strangers watched you. If you love me… if you don't want me to leave you and kick you out, you will show me that you want to make us work. You will do this for me, for us.

Her does not want to do this but leans in to kiss He. End scene.

Ritual 2 performance abstract: Economic influence

It is a cold winter evening. Her sits in the department's scriptwriting lecture room with Her male classmate. They're both working on their scripts to be examined the following day. He arrives to pick Her up to go home.

He: Who is he (classmate)? Why're you alone with him in this room?

Her: he is my classmate. Everyone left not so long ago because they finished working on their scripts.

Silence.

Her: Give me a moment to finish this dialogue, then I'll pack my things and we'll go.

Silence.

He: You're lying to me. You planned to spend time with him alone.

He approaches classmate angrily, attempting to start a fight. Classmate defends himself while Her tries to stop the fight that is about to ensue.

Her: Okay, then. Beat me. Beat me up. I set this up.

He: I know you did. We'll sort this out at home.

He and Her leave. End scene.

Ritual 3 performance abstract: Traditional influence

It is a hot, humid summer afternoon. Her is watching TV from bed. He just came back from work.

He: You're back early today.

Her: Rehearsals got cancelled.

He: You showered?

Her: Yes, I was hot and sticky.

He: Or you were hiding something.

Her: What would I possibly hide by taking a shower?

He: Another man's scent and semen.

Her: You're impossible!

He: How am I supposed to know that you didn't do anything? What if you lied about rehearsals the other days to go get fucked? I wouldn't know because you washed him off.

Her: What do you want?

He: I want you to prove that you didn't fuck then wash someone off you while I was at work.

Her: And how would I do that?

He: You must show me.

Her: How?

He: You know how.

Her: Do I really have to do that, though?

He: Are YOU questioning me?

Her lies on er back, opens her legs and exposes her crotch for He to inspect. End scene.

The selection of these specific scenarios to explore was informed by Boal's (2002) suggestion of disrupting the ritual that oppresses the oppressed. It made sense for the ritual, the enabling cycle to be disrupted, not the mask; disrupting my masks would imply that I would have had to change

myself abruptly without interrogating the action that made me like that because "the habit makes the monk!" (Boal, 2002: 201). Disrupting the ritual that performs and reveals the oppressions became a rehearsal toward the revolution of the ability to identify the specific moments of the enabling and how to address those moments to limit the enabling of gender-based violence in the intimate partner relationship. Boal (2002) does caution, after all, that, "very often the ritual contains elements which are actual causes of the oppression being treated, and frequently, liberation from the oppression of necessity involves the rupture of its rituals" (2002: 200).

Disrupting the ritual

As stated above under the description of the method section, the specific exercise I used to explore and disrupt the ritual is *Making the mask all-encompassing*.

I explored each of the three rituals scripted above separately. I read each ritual out loud at least five times. I then walked within the perimeters of the demarcated spaces to physicalise first the role of the oppressor, exploring the oppressor's mask and finding and embodying suitable mannerisms displaying a like for exercising power unnecessarily for the oppressor. I went on to mutter, the articulate ideal sounds, words, and phrases that the oppressor often says when about to inflict violence to the oppressed. I proceeded to do the same for the oppressed, exploring her masks, her headscarf costume, finding and embodying submissive mannerisms, and muttering and vocalising sounds, words, and phrases that the oppressed often says to submit to, perpetuate and enable GBV in her intimate partner relationship.

After establishing how the two roles interact with the space individually, I proceeded to alternate between the two masks and their mannerisms at varying speeds to explore how they interact with each other within the demarcated space; first silently, then with their sounds, words and phrases. As the interaction progressed, I read the scene being explored again twice. After reading the scene, alternating between the characters, I allowed whatever response came from the characters to continue the exploration of the scene. After allowing the roles to have a spontaneous interaction, I read the ritual out loud one more time and allowed the oppressed to disrupt the ritual by changing her response at oppression points, where it felt necessary to disrupt. This took a few tries for each ritual for the oppressed to be bold enough to disrupt the mundane ritual.

After the exploration of each scene, I engaged in a ritual where I walked around the circle as my neutral self, not assuming any characteristics of either the oppressed or the oppressor. I took the masks and costume off as I walked around the space, chanting, "I am a researcher in my bedroom, not an abused victim," to bridge myself out of the embodiment of the roles I was embodying. When I felt the impulse to stop because I felt sufficiently bridged out of the roles, I stepped out of the circle and free-wrote to reflect on how the experience felt and what I observed myself doing during the experience for 5 minutes for each ritual.

After the reflective free-writing, I dismantled the demarcated space, packed the sheets, headscarf, and masks away. I sat in silence to mourn the battered woman once more, then I changed from the black clothes I wore for Rituals and Masks to what I wore before bridging myself into the explorative world. I free-wrote to reflect on the entire process without timing myself. The end of the free-writing reflection marked the end of the exploration of Rituals and Masks.

Section 3: Findings

Addressing the first of four questions: To what extent do structural (economic, traditional and cultural) factors encourage a black South African woman to become an enabler of GBV in an intimate partner relationship? As proven by the theoretical discussions accompanied by my personal experience above, the operation of structural factors played a huge role in encouraging a black, South African, Xhosa woman's enabling and perpetuating of GBV in an intimate partner relationship. Drawing from the discussions above, this is how I looked at how the operation cycles of structural factors encouraged a black, South African, Xhosa woman to perpetuate and enable GBV in an intimate partner relationship:

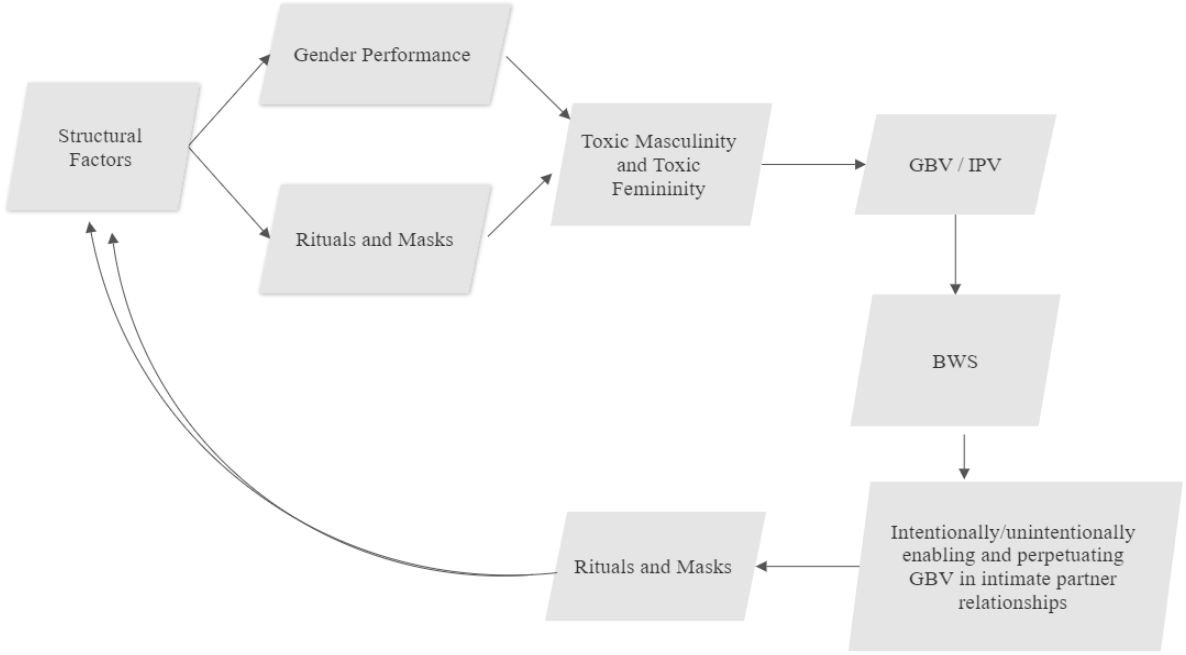


Figure 2 Structural factors leading to the perpetuation of GBV in intimate partner relationships

Structural Factors

The *International Organization for Migration* states that "structural factors refer to the broader political, economic, social, and environmental conditions and institutions at national, regional or international levels that either increase or decrease an individual's likelihood of experiencing violence, exploitation or abuse…" (International Organization for Migration, 2020). Furthermore,

each community has and provides its unique structural context to "...understand and interpret the individual and household/family factors" (International Organization for Migration, 2020). In support of this definition of structural factors, Yumbe (2010) asserts that there are non-structural factors of societies that favour or impede the success or failure of the specific structural factors that directly or indirectly influence the governing of the community.

The specific structural factors that influenced me to become an unintentional enabler and perpetuator of GBV in an intimate partner relationship operated cyclically. This transitioned into normalising and excusing GBV, socializing docility, and tolerance of abuse as traditional and cultural obedience. This was and is still being done through practices such as ukuthwala[12]. The socializing and normalising of submission and docility was done for men to not feel economically emasculated by women. This specific operation of structural factors led to gender performance, where the Xhosa men around me took on the roles of the provider and dominator, while the women were further socialised into submission and docility of dogma that masked itself as obedience. The Xhosa men and women in my community do gender, they perform their gender identities as they are purported to be, as Salih (2006) suggests.

Reinforcement of Rituals and Masks through gender performativity

While the performativity of gender stabilised its construction through socialisation, rituals and masks were being simultaneously created, because "rituals determine their masks: *the habit makes the monk*!" (Boal, 2002: 201). The continuous acts of autocratic domination by men and meek submission by women created the ritual through performing an existing narrative multiple for years without questioning or disrupting the monotonous narrative. Abiding to this prescribed gender performance by the Xhosa men and women around me, evolved into a continuation of taking on pre-existing masks thoroughly detailing the expectations of behavioural patterns of the Xhosa men and women around me. The continuous taking on of these masks officiated and reinforced the same narratives riddled with gender performance and Rituals and Masks.

[12] Ukuthwala - A form of abduction involving kidnapping a girl or young woman by a man and his peers with the intention of compelling the girl or young woman's family to endorse marriage negotiations.

Toxic Masculinity

The simultaneous reinforcing of gender performance and Rituals and Masks developed into toxic masculinity. This was evident through witnessing men saying phrases such as "ukuba akandimameli, uzomamela lentonga," loosely translated into "if she doesn't listen to me, she will listen to this beating." Another popular and acceptable practice in my Xhosa community that reinforces gender performance and Rituals and Masks into the development of toxic masculinity in boys and men from young ages is inkciyo[13], a virginity testing ceremony for young girls performed by elderly community women (Mhlana, 2011). It is not the practice itself that initiates toxic masculinity traits in young boys and men, in my opinion; rather the attitudes I witnessed develop around the concept and practice of inkciyo.

The testing of a young girls' virginity to determine her worth and purity as a becoming-woman is problematic, in my view, because I remember one girl from the community who had been molested by her uncle, and she was labelled impure because she had been penetrated already, regardless of how her engagement in unconsented sexual activities came about. Contrary to this practice, boys and young men from my village go to initiation school yearly and no one educates or shames them should any of them not be a virgin by the time they go to initiation school. They are rather praised for having courted and been sexually active with multiple female partners because "induku iyasebenza[14]," and the conversation about consent is not quick to be entertained.

I remember these promiscuous boys and young men would become popular and the girls in my community preferred being courted by them instead, for some reason I do not know. However, I can guess that the girls had, like me, internalised the toxic traits that were a result of how gender performance instilled the performance of Rituals and Masks that determined the cultural, traditional and economic structures that governed the ecosystem of my community. I witnessed this create a standard of acceptance and respect in my community because the girls who remained virgins for longer are considered pure and receive all the praise, glory, and respect from their homes and the community.

[13] Inkciyo - Virginity testing on young girls usually performed by old community women.
[14] Induku iyasebenza - his rod (penis) works.

While the girls who are no longer virgins, willingly or unwillingly, are called derogatory terms insinuating that they are loose and can therefore be penetrated easily by whoever pleases. Because of this, young boys from my community speak to and touch these girls and young women in sexually suggestive manners, without the girls' consent, because they think they have the right to access the bodies of the impure. The girls considered impure are unfortunately shamed by their peers and community elders, claiming that they are bad influences on their children because they will teach their children impure actions. I am citing this specific practice of how toxic masculinity is normalised in my community to demonstrate how the immediate cultural practice associated with the purity of girls can operate in ways that enable young women and girls from my community to enable GBV outside of intimate partner relationships. This realisation happened during the exploration of the ritual that explores cultural influences leading to me unintentionally enabling GBV in an intimate partner relationship. The line from the dialogue: '*That's strange because you just allowed that boy from the play to be intimate with you in front of other people, in front of strangers*' became a demonstration of how the oppressor felt entitled to access my body whenever and however he pleased because he had witnessed someone else access my body. His choice of disregarding the context within which he witnessed this, which was a live theatre performance, not reality, shows how he may have viewed me as impure and loose because I had allowed a male figure I was performing with to touch me before an audience.

Internalising toxic femininity

I witnessed this behaviour carried onto intimate partner relationships where the girl debases herself for this and other reasons that make her deem her intrinsic value of a low status. These behaviours then became internalised by the young girls, young and old women who became adherent to traditional gender roles and the development of the culture of boys and men claiming access over females' bodies without consent, as McCann (2020) outlines in the theoretical discussion of toxic femininity above. I realised that I, unfortunately, became one of the girls who internalised toxic masculinity traits, although I labelled myself a feminist, and was influenced by such structural factors to debase myself and unintentionally enable and perpetuate GBV in an intimate partner relationship. This realization came when I could not allow the oppressor role a voice to counter whatever the oppressed said, did, and brought to the exploratory space. The epiphany of how much

I had internalised from childhood indoctrinations made me want to prioritise and privilege the victim's voice. I wanted to rewrite these internalised indoctrinations to ones that empower the victim to take an active stance against docility and not submit to leadership founded on poor cyclical principles and practices that create structural factors that are oppressive towards women.

The internalisation of such toxic traits, whether labelled masculine or feminine, led to the normalisation of GBV and IPV in my community. This is evident in the way men and husbands treat their wives and girl children - referencing the examples above about the normalising of violence because, "if she doesn't listen to me, she should listen to my beating;" and the contrast in the attitudes towards inkciyo and ulwaluko[15]. These violent acts carried out by boys, young and old men on girls, young and old women result in physical, sexual and psychological harm and suffering to women. The acts of violence are also taken into intimate partner relationships that can be once-off or cyclical (Health and Human Rights Info, 2013), as evidenced by my recounting of the battering relationship I was in.

Learned helplessness

The cyclical exposure to various kinds of GBV and IPV, according to my experience, developed into my exuding of BWS symptoms, specifically learned helplessness, as described by Walker (1981) and Savage (2006) above. I felt like there was no way out of the abusive relationship and maybe I deserved the violence. Everything I had learned and absorbed as a young girl about the toxic aspects of being a submissive woman was coming true and it did not feel right. But I stayed because that was the best way I knew to perform my womanhood. I became a victim-perpetuator of the violence, as suggested by Walker (1981).

By default, as a victim-perpetuator, I enabled the violence through debasing myself, submitting to violence, and making excuses for the abuse or finding ways of convincing myself that I was the reason for being subjected to the violence. The continuous exposure to the violence then morphed itself into gender performance and Rituals and Masks whose context and performance were specific to the battering relationship I was in. This development concretised unequal gender and

[15] Ulwaluko - initiation school for boys where boys and young men are initiated into manhood.

economic dynamics, therefore creating relationship (context) specific structural factors that governed the battering relationship. The cycle continued in no particular order from here on. It is clear from the breakdown of the diagram above that those structural factors played a major and active role in enabling a black Xhosa to unintentionally enable and perpetuate GBV in an intimate partner relationship.

Rituals and Masks as a reflexive platform

Addressing the following question: In what ways can autoethnography, coupled with Boal's' concept of Rituals and Masks, facilitate a reflexive platform for a woman displaying symptoms of BWS in order to disrupt and challenge the routine that ultimately leads to learned helplessness? The answer to this question is specific to my experience and how I used autoethnography and Rituals and Masks to facilitate an exploration and reflection platform for myself to challenge and disrupt the routines based on my experience that led to learned helplessness.

Autoethnography allowed me to retroactively and selectively interrogate my past experiences using only myself as the source of the personal experiences recounted throughout this report. This methodology allowed me to interact with material that was once unbearable to narrate to someone, else without significant emotional and psychological triggers from feeling like I was reliving the traumatic moments. Employing autoethnography and ethnographic refusal provided a safety net for me to thoroughly examine the experience without getting tangled in the painful emotional and psychological nuances that I previously experienced when talking about my possibility of having been a victim-enabler/ victim-perpetuator.

This is because I had to allow academic scrutiny in the process, to not only look at and label myself as a surviving victor of the experiences. I was able to see some of the experience as rich data from which I analysed the structural factors that governed the identity formation of my becoming-woman from a distanced and critical lens. The freedom and allowance I was offered by ethnographic refusal also became a safety net of how far I can stretch myself to allow and refrain information and experiences from constituting a part of the academic process. I, therefore, did not recount and reflect on everything that unfolded during the process of this inquiry because I wanted to keep parts of this journey to and for myself only.

Rituals and Masks assisted with drawing my attention to the small occurrences where I enabled and perpetuated GBV in the intimate partner relationship, and how these minor allowances of violence made the bigger and more grotesque violent acts acceptable. I realised that my boundaries of tolerance for GBV in intimate partner relationships were tested on small, medium and large scales through the application of Rituals and Masks. I realised that a ritual evolved, becoming grander in scale, and effecting damage as time progresses. The application of Rituals and Masks, therefore, assisted with outlining the turning and growing points that lead to the monotonous violence-ridden narrative to affect me to a point where it felt like learned helplessness. This realisation prompted the drafting of the diagram where I demonstrate how the concretisation of structural factors branches into gender performativity and the simultaneous establishment of Rituals and Masks, into toxic masculinity that leads to toxic femininity, leading to GBV and IPV, then BWS, enabling of GBV in intimate partner relationships, and finally, Rituals and Masks that, in turn, establish their own structural dynamics to govern the already battering relationship.

Autoethnography and Rituals and Masks, coupled together, provided the necessary safety net and direction for me to honestly and vulnerably introspect my personal experiences. This methodology and tool enlightened me about the aspects of structural factors I need to unlearn to not enable and perpetuate violence in any aspect of my life moving forward. I noticed that I was engaging my mind more than I was engaging my body, creating a disconnect between the brain activity and the embodied experience. There were moments when my body would feel locked up, especially while playing the role of the oppressed. It is during these moments that the oppressed role retaliated to disrupt the ritual through spoken word. The body, however, felt weird and awkward to move around in the explorative space. It felt like the oppressed was an intruder in a space where they do not belong. It felt uneasy and strange to disrupt a ritual that I had been accustomed to for most of my life. There was a part of me that did not want to defy the teachings I was raised by because I felt guilty, almost like I was disrespecting the elders that raised me by acting against their teachings. I say this because practicing respect is largely associated with doing as one's parents say in the village I am from. Wanting to honour and respect their teachings meant dishonouring and disrespecting my need to disrupt the structural factors that governed my gender expression in intimate partner relationships. I went on to disrupt the rituals anyway, and it felt awesome to listen

to myself and do as I please, regardless of whatever foundational indoctrinations were being disregarded.

I feel I have addressed the last two questions of this inquiry: In what ways do autoethnography and Rituals and Masks address structural factors to shift the experiences of women presenting battering symptoms? In what ways do Rituals and Masks allow for vulnerability and introspection for a feminist who displayed symptoms of the battered woman syndrome, therefore developing learned helplessness and perpetuating GBV in a former intimate partner relationship? I deem it necessary to practice ethnographic refusal through refusing to make available, further harmful and pain-based narratives for academic scrutiny, as Zahara (2016) advises. This is as far as I am willing to go to address the two remaining questions. Going any further with these questions would be violating my agency and autonomy over the amount of information, reflections, and recounting of personal narratives I am willing to share on the academic report for this inquiry.

However, I will reflect on the process itself, and observations I made regarding my own resistance and ability to take myself through the rituals.

Before the performance

It was incredibly challenging for me to let go of control and to open myself up and relive some of the horrific battering experiences I experienced. I feared bringing sensitive GBV personal encounters for academic scrutiny. I felt it would be easier to just tell my story without having to supplement it with academic language to attempt to answer a research question. It did not feel safe and comfortable to open myself up and I consulted my therapist about these feelings of uncertainty and a lack of safety of comfortability. I anticipated a kind of mess from my emotional response when attempting to open myself up to the performance and I feared the wounds that mess will reveal and create. I knew that the exploration needed to happen because it is where the answer to this inquiry lies, but I feared the unknown that resided in the performance space. It took a few sessions with my drama therapist to slowly ease me into getting to a state of readiness for me to allow myself to recount the experiences and explore them using Rituals and Masks.

After the consultations, I created pre-rituals to help with preparing myself, to bridge myself into the performance of Rituals and Masks. “Ritual is… an approach to the staging and setting of the play” (Boal, 2002: 200). Using Boal’s reasoning on rituals to my advantage, I found ways of creating safety for myself through creating the pre-ritual-ritual that I explained in the method section, demarcating the space, and selecting the props and costume that would be a part of the performance. These pre-ritual-rituals allowed for a creation of an aesthetic distance, which, according to Jackson (2011), is

> “…the clear separation of the stage-world from the audience’s world, allowing the author’s narrative to unfold unimpeded… Audience participation and aesthetic distance do not have to be mutually exclusive: audiences can be actively engaged in ways that retain a degree of aesthetic distance, even if the nature of the ‘distance’ may appear to be of a markedly different kind from that found in conventional theatre practice” (2011: 238).

Creating the aesthetic distance made it easier for me to outline how to interact with the performance as the researcher, the subject, the performer, the facilitator, and the observer. Refining these decisions with the assistance of my therapist ensured that I do not let go of control completely from the performance. I demarcated the space as a safety net for me to know that I can step out of the performance area whenever I felt like I needed to distance myself from the performance.

It was challenging to pick a costume or prop for the oppressor because I felt that the character was empowered enough to be explored without material possessions signifying that they are the oppressor. I found it easier to wear and tie the doek facing the ground. I was disgusted by how easy it was to physically slouch and look to the ground while wearing this piece of clothing while preparing to play this battered woman because it felt like I was being subservient to the role of the batterer. Although it felt strange to play the batterer, I enjoyed how decisive and empowered the character felt. I wished I could impose a similar attitude to the docile, oppressed woman as well. The embodied action of looking down to wear a headwrap insinuated the repetitive submissive acts that cultivated continuous battering experiences against the woman in the former intimate partner relationship.

During the performance

It was easier to reference my performance background and training to treat the performance of Rituals and Masks as a one-hander theatre performance. I was more concerned about the spectacle and presentational aspects of the traditional breaking of the fourth wall performance approach. I was not ready to immerse myself in the embodied experience fully because the fears around opening vulnerable parts of myself for academic exploration resurfaced. It was easier to enroll myself as a performer with a script and directions to follow, rather than becoming a subject with experiences to be scrutinised.

Using this approach to performance helped to provide structure for the performance and to avoid muddling between the roles of the oppressor, the oppressed, and the joker. It almost felt like a live performance rehearsal with staging and direction and transition cues as I continued the exploration. The performer in me was quite entertained and enjoying this process and a part of me felt like I was robbing myself of the experience of intuitively exploring the scenes with an intention to introspect my enabling actions and to disrupt the monotonous and oppressive dialogue. I took a moment to journal about the ease that came with treating the experiment as a trained actor. From this journaling process came the acceptance of using performance training as a defence mechanism of not wanting to engage emotionally with the material I was exploring.

I attempted the exploration of the scenes again, trying to be present in the moment as a reflexive Applied Drama and Theatre practitioner. This time around, however, it was easier to muddle the roles and to privilege the views of the oppressed more than the oppressor. Instead of creating a dialogue, as Boal (2008) suggests, the monologue was monotonous again, the only difference being the oppressed taking charge. This was an empowering purge of thoughts and emotions for the victim, but it was not a pragmatic exploration for adapting to real-life circumstances. I had to try again. At this point, it became clear to me that using Rituals and Masks as a solo player is useful for externalising thoughts and feelings and reflective purposes but is rather impractical for application in real life after the oppressed explore on their own.

The role of the joker remained internal. I did not stop to embody the role of the joker; rather this role was explored through mental cues and questions that guided how I navigated the performance.

This internal joker was concerned with the amount of desirable engagement with a specific point or topic to avoid redundancy, and the reflective technique I used after each disruption of the rituals. The researcher-performer playing the roles of the oppressor and oppressed co-existed with the joker in a state of metaxis. Boal (1995) defines metaxis as "the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image" (1995: 43). The joker became the internal coordinator overseeing the facilitation of the workshop, ensuring that the vulnerable, sensitive, and personal is not compromised in an effort to engage the methodological and academic requirements of this inquiry. The role of the joker allowed me to have control over the explorations, considering the reluctance I had towards opening myself up to and for this exploration. It was reassuring and comforting to know that I did not relinquish all control through using the joker's role to negotiate what and how I allow myself to constitute part of the explorative performance.

My deduction for the exploration: Have you ever had a moment where you plan on confronting someone about something you do not like, so you rehearse how you anticipate the confrontation to go in your head? With your probing and the responses from the person you will be confronting, but it does not go your way or anything like you imagined when you confront the person. That is what this exploration felt like. It was challenging to antagonise through the role of the oppressor because I desperately wanted to empower and privilege the oppressed more than the oppressor. I knew this would not be feasible in real life should the oppressed find themselves in the same situation again because, according to Boal (2008), oppressors do not relinquish power and dominance, they fight to ensure they stay in power and are not concerned with the issues faced by the oppressed.

Boal (1995) writes about his observations of what participants normally did in an attempt to address the oppression during *The 'Breaking the Oppression' Mode* using the various models and techniques that he pioneered. He asserts that,

> "Often, participants will tell stories and suggest improvisations in which the protagonist is extremely weak, resigned, bereft of desires. This generally arises from the fact that the actual scene 'has already taken place' in real life. And although everything that has already

> taken place 'continues to take place'...the protagonist has often almost given up: 'That's how it is, there is nothing to be done.'" (1995: 59-60).

I felt the opposite of what Boal (1995) observed during the workshops that he facilitated. In fact, I over-empowered the protagonist, inflating her will to challenge and fight the oppression in ways she has never imagined before. Boal (1995) states that breaking the oppression in these theatrical explorative approaches is not only for the protagonist to relive the oppressive scenarios, but for them to play out how they wish they wish the scenario would have developed; or how they would want the scenario to be the next time they find themselves in the same or similar oppressive situation in the future. The explorations and improvisations become rehearsals to equip the protagonist to attempt steering an oppressive situation towards the direction they wish it to follow (Boal, 1995). I overused the notion of equipping the oppressed to an unrealistic extent of silencing the antagonist without retaliation. It is important to note that this serves as data regarding the methodology, in that it becomes necessary to restore agency.

"Sometimes a scene gets too violent - emotions that have not as yet exploded in real life, explode here and now!" (Boal, 1995: 62). As explained above, I prioritised the expression of the protagonist's emotions over the antagonist's, and these expressions were not violent. Boal (1995) further asserts that when participants get overly consumed by the expression of their emotions as the oppressed, he would use *the 'softly softly' mode*, where he would ask participants to speak at very soft volumes with very slow actions. He did this to redirect the participants' energy and attention towards self-observation and to attempt to disrupt or break the oppression, instead of focusing only on externalizing their emotions. I attempted this technique but could not perform it to completion. The scenes' rhythm and pace changed drastically, making it a tedious task to transition between the roles of the oppressed and the oppressor at such a slow speed. This technique achieved the opposite effect than the one intended by Boal (1995). Instead of redirecting my attention towards self-observation and towards breaking the oppression, this technique frustrated me, resulting in the exploration going in circles, not disrupting, or breaking the oppression.

Post-performance

I had multiple realisations about the perpetrator's and my behavioural patterns that led to an ongoing cycle of abuse when we were together. One question that remained for me, however, was about why I allowed myself to write a thesis about past events that I had already grieved; worked through emotionally and psychologically for years; learned from and continued with my life after the deep self-healing work. I understood the initial impulse, outlined under the rationale, to conduct this inquiry. However, I felt that it was not a good enough reason for me to want to recount, analyse and report about these violent experiences I had through academia. In hindsight, however, it makes sense why I allowed myself to undergo this journey via the academic medium because part of the self-healing journey I underwent was self-depreciating and destructive.

This approach of re-examining this experience, however, provided a structured and controlled system that offered stable and accessible assistance avenues, like sessions with a drama therapist and ethical ethnographic refusal, for me to be able to interact with whatever surfaced before, during, and after conducting this inquiry.

The use of autoethnography and the use of an adapted approach to Rituals and Masks, both as introspective and reflexive tools made sense for the inquiry process and for me. They are a tested methodology and tool that guaranteed structure and safety booths to assist whenever I felt I needed and wanted a break from the inquiry.

Conclusion

I embarked on this inquiry to attempt to understand how her actions may have intentionally or unintentionally enabled the violence she endured in an intimate partner relationship. I experimented using different scenarios that led to the violence, ritualizing themselves through constant repetitions, to see what would have happened had she changed the mask, moving from saying yes to taking the advice from friends and trying alternative ways of reacting to the rituals. I am cognizant of Rituals and Masks being a tool that was developed in the context of an oppressive military government where there were clear distinctions between an oppressor and the oppressed. The modern context, however, does not have crystal clear distinctions of an oppressed and the oppressor (Snyder-Young, 2011). I was curious about the intricate dynamics of the possibility of

a dual role of victim-enabler in relation to the complex dynamics of possibly being an oppressed-oppressor; “the internalized struggle between the interdependent oppressed and oppressor within each individual,” as Schutzman (1990: 79-80) succinctly puts it.

The evidence and the argument above reveal how the oppressed woman unintentionally perpetuated and enabled GBV in an intimate partner relation due to the system she was born into. The structural systems that influenced the creation of her gender identity, expression, and performance presented what seemed in in-fact, like reality to her. These structural factors posed as the image of her reality, the rules, and expectations of living in that reality. Due to their cyclical nature, these structural factors created cycles of Rituals and Masks and gender performance that eventually translated into internalised toxic masculinity and femininity that made it justifiable for the oppressed to become her own victim-oppressor. She became a victim-oppressor through playing the dual role of an oppressed victim that unintentionally perpetuated and enabled GBV in an intimate partner relationship.

Research limitations

Because this was an autoethnographic inquiry that interrogated only my GBV related experience, it is difficult to tell whether Rituals and Masks can be used to address enabling or perpetual behaviour by other female victims and survivors of GBV in intimate partner relationships. Although the process was highly reflexive for me, I am not certain whether it would have been as beneficial if I was still in the battering relationship. Therefore, it would be challenging for women who are still in battering relationships to adapt and apply Rituals and Masks without compromising their already vulnerable wellbeing. Also, depending on the severity and extent to which they are battered, the women would probably not have the emotional and psychological capacity to facilitate a reflexive process that, on a surface level, might seem like self-blame for the violence they may have endured.

Facilitating this experiment as the researcher, the performer, and joker all by myself was also limiting. As expanded on above, I could not be a neutral joker, as Boal (1995) suggests, because I privileged the oppressed more than the oppressor. I am certain that this exploration of Rituals and Masks would have not ended like that had the joker been someone else who could facilitate the

experience using a pragmatic approach that would be applicable to real-life should the oppressed person find themselves in the same or similar situation in the future.

Recommendations

Although there were limitations from this study, there are considerations that can grow the field in the future. It would be beneficial for the discourse around interventions for GBV to take on a holistic approach of interrogating the intricate structural factors that breed healthy grounds for GBV to continue, although some interrogations and interventions may come across as victim-blaming. Examining victim behaviour to interrogate how they may have intentionally or unintentionally perpetuated the violence they endured could lead to interventions aimed firstly at finding ways for battered GBV victims to understand and realise whether their response to GBV in intimate partner relationships enables and perpetuates violence or not; secondly, at equipping battered women with alternative response strategies that at least try to not enable and/or perpetuate violence in their relationships; and thirdly, reflective interventions for battered women to identify why they may or may not be enabling violence so as to address those findings.

Considering the performance of rituals in private, public, and shared spaces:

Rituals performed within private settings, such as in therapeutic sessions or personal development workshops, as done in this inquiry, may be utilized to investigate one's personal experiences and emotions. These private rituals may be documented through various methodologies preferred by the individual performing said rituals. Through such documentation, the knowledge and wisdom gathered from these private rituals can be imparted to others through the sharing of personal experiences and insights with a wider audience, accentuating the significance of comprehending and reflecting upon personal experiences within the purview of societal issues. Conversely, rituals performed within public spaces, such as in a theatrical performance, may be adapted from private rituals to make them more universal and relatable to a wider audience. Techniques such as image and forum theatre exemplify the manner in which private rituals can be adapted for public performance.

However, when adapting and disseminating private rituals within public spaces, it is imperative to consider factors such as consent, cultural sensitivity, and respect for individual privacy. One must consider the relevance and utility of the ritual for public engagement and the comfort level of the participants of the private ritual with its public sharing. Furthermore, the reasoning behind the sharing and its value should be clearly articulated. Additionally, when adapting rituals for public performance, it is critical to be cognizant of the power dynamic between performer and audience, ethical and responsible practice.

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