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Describing the psychosocial challenges faced by disadvantaged girl children under a specific holistic education model

The Department of Social Work

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Research Report

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This research study was an enjoyable learning experience and has taught me determination and resilience. This research would not have been possible without the love, support and guidance of my family, more specifically, my aunt, Susan Carey; as well as the support and guidance provided to me by my research supervisor, Laetitia Petersen. Thank you to the school for allowing me to conduct the research and supporting me through the process. I am hopeful that the research will enhance the experience of the Mountain View girl.

Abstract

The research aimed at decribing the psycho-social challenges that a specific group of disadvantaged girls (aged 15-17) face. These girls have been selected to complete their secondary schooling on a full scholarship at a private school funded by a wealthy benefactor in South Africa. The school was designed specifically for disadvantaged South African girl children who have displayed either academic or leadership excellence. This research looked at the effects of attending this school on the student's relationships with their friends and family, culture and acculturation, and the way these challenges have impacted their functioning at the school. The school has adopted a holistic approach to education meaning that it acknowledges the importance of the students' emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual and psychological spheres. The research has enhanced the understanding of the psychosocial challenges the students navigate by identifying common themes within the data from which some recommendations were made. Ultimately the themes that are described will lay the foundation for further research at the institution. This study followed a qualitative research design. The population for the research was obtained by using purposive, non-probability sampling techniques. Data was gathered by making use of an interview schedule while conducting semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was used for analyzing the data.

Key Words

Descriptions, psychosocial, challenges, girl-child, holistic education model.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a brief overview of the study. The chapter consists of the rationale, research questions and purpose of the study. In addition to a brief description the research approach and design, the chapter contains a small description of how the report is organized.

1.2 Rationale for the study

The research was conducted at a school that was designed specifically to accommodate underprivileged girls from all over South Africa. For the girls to be eligible for completion of their secondary education at the school they need to display either academic or leadership excellence and the household in which they reside needs to earn a combined total of less than R12 000 per month. Following this, there is a lengthy selection process that takes place. The girls are tested psychologically, emotionally and intellectually, and the school conducts interviews with the girls. Once selected they are offered a full scholarship to attend Mountain View. This includes boarding termly at the school, with the girls only going home during school holidays, which is paid for by the school.

When the girls start attending the school they are required to adjust to a different way of life, where every aspect of their life is scheduled and monitored, as well as a more westernized culture all while meeting the tough academic standards of the school in a strange environment. The girls who attend Mountain View are expected to do all of this while no longer having the support of their friends and families from the place they know as home. Understanding the psychosocial challenges these girls face whilst attending Mountain View is essential as this may have effects in other spheres of the girl's life such as their academic performance and their personal well-being.

According to the Principal, there has been no prior research done at the school. Although there has been research done at schools of a similar nature, every schools environment is unique to their specific challenges and successes. Research into this topic enables those tasked with monitoring the wellbeing of the girls at the school to obtain a more holistic understanding of the challenges the girls may be navigating. The relevance of the research is validated by the fact that it is coming purely from the student's point of view. In obtaining a more holistic understanding of the problem, the team may be able to gain a more in depth understanding of the challenges these girls face. In doing so, the interventions currently offered at the school may be tailored to

meet the needs of the girls more effectively. This research aims to lay the foundation for further research into this topic.

1.3 Research Questions

- What are the different psychosocial pressures and challenges the girls face when entering a school of this nature?
- Has the potential empowerment of the girl-child lead to changes within the social structure of the girls' family?
- How have the girls' relationships with their siblings, family members and communities changed since attending the school?
- What does attending a school of this nature mean for the girls and their futures?
- Does the need to adapt to a different culture at the school alienate the students from their cultures at home, their friends and their families? If so, how.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the research was to describe the psychosocial challenges experienced by disadvantaged girl children who are educated under a specific, Holistic Model of Education. The study attempts to describe the psychological and social challenges the students experience and is aimed at enhancing the interventions the school is currently provides. In addition, the research was conducted to identify themes of interest which can be expanded upon in further research studies.

1.5 Research Approach

For the purposes of this study, the researcher made use of a qualitative research design. After gathering the participants using purposive, non-probability sampling techniques, the researcher interviewed 10 participants. The researcher made use of a standardized interview schedule to gather the data for the study. The participants for the study were between the ages of 15 and 17 and were in grades 10-12 at the school.

1.6 Organization of the Report

1.6.1 Chapter 1

This introductory chapter contains a brief outline of the purpose, rationale, research questions and the research approach of the study. In addition, this chapter roots the research within a South African context.

1.6.2 Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of the study contains the literature review. The literature review aims to identify and elaborate on major concepts identified within the research. This chapter contains the literature the research is formulated upon and describes to the theoretical lens with which the researcher approached the research.

1.6.3 Chapter 3

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the research. The aims and objectives, research approach and design, sampling procedures, research instrumentation, data analysis and collection and the ethical considerations of the study are all described within this chapter.

1.6.4 Chapter 4

This chapter presents the findings of the research. The chapter discusses the major themes, namely; psychological challenges, social challenges and The Holistic Model of Education.

1.6.5 Chapter 5

This chapter explains the findings of the study in relation to the research questions identified within the introductory chapter of the report. The chapter discusses the strengths and limitations of the study. Finally, the recommendations of the study are listed and discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the literature review of the research report. A literature review aims to discuss research which is relevant to the report. It also aims to highlight the gaps within the field of research and tries to fill in these gaps (Oermann, 2011). In addition, the theory that speaks to the main themes identified in the research study is discussed below.

2.2 Outline of the Environment

The term psychosocial refers to both the psychological and social spheres of an individual's life. "The prefix psycho refers to the psychological dimension of the individual, and it is to do with the inner world of thoughts, feelings, desires, beliefs, values, cognition and the ways in which people perceive themselves and others…the suffix social refers to the relationships and environments of the individual" (Brandell, 2011, p. 374). This research looked at the psycho-social challenges the students under this unique model of education face. This is a result of both the separation and alienation they experience from their families and their culture as well as the pressure and expectation placed upon them to excel.

In addition to having to cope with the pressures the students are placed under at the school, the students continue to have a connection to, and awareness of the often dire situation their families and care givers are facing at home. The students are required to manage, adapt and perform; while feeling the pressure associated with psycho-social challenges they may be navigating. In order to help the students' cope with these pressures and better adapt to their new environment, the school conducts interventions such as regular home visits and progress calls. The research is intended to better understand these challenges and pressures and to make recommendations on how to enhance the existing interventions. Furthermore, it is intended to generally highlight the need of a social worker in the education model in South Africa.

2.3 Poverty

Due to the fact that the school has been specifically set up to provide schooling for academically gifted girls from disadvantaged homes, all the participants of this study come from poverty stricken backgrounds. Poverty, as defined by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2002), is "a human condition characterized by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of

an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights" (As cited in Dykes, 2010.p.302). Newman, 2015 further elaborates on the fact that "families in poverty are a diverse group, characterized by a range of conditions that could present challenges to optimal development" (Newman, 2015, p. 228). In addition, it is important to note that the concept of poverty has strong gender connotations. The female experience of poverty is characterized by various forms of abuse, fatigue, high amounts of stress and anxiety and a strong element of voicelessness (Sweetman, 2005). Poverty affects the most vulnerable members of a society the hardest. "International human rights law and domestic family law recognize children as among the most vulnerable members of society" (Baum, 2010, p. 6). The gender component of poverty enhances the vulnerability within society of the girl-child. "Children experiencing poverty are also especially vulnerable to the effects of poor nutrition, disease, family insecurity and social instability" (Sheafor, 2012, p. 353). Poverty is not a simple phenomenon. It has economic, political, cultural, emotional and psychological dimensions" (Graaf, 2012, p. 8)

Poverty is a direct contributing factor to many of the social ills and pressures the students are faced with and have been affected by throughout their lives (Sheafor, 2012). In addition to the harsh reality described in the previous paragraph, a life defined by poverty is one filled with stress and anxiety, and as mentioned previously, this is particularly true for the female experience of poverty. Since a life defined by poverty can have wide-ranging effects on the individual's growth and development, an understanding of the concept and its effects is crucial to be able to put sustainable interventions in place. Due to this, having a rich understanding of the concept is a crucial step in being able to provide effective and sustainable interventions to combat or reduce the social ill. Understanding poverty in all its dimensions provides a platform for understanding the extent of the issues that these girls are facing, cope with and ultimately integrate within their "new identity".

2.4 Education within South Africa

Considering the history of South Africa's education system and the legacy of apartheid, education plays a pivotal role in transformation and change (Nyoka, 2014). Education within South Africa is at a tipping point. South Africa's new democracy was faced with severe challenges in attempting to ensure access to education for all South Africans. "…South Africa, a country trying to embrace inclusive education against a background of educational segregation and exclusion…" (Walton, 2012, p. 2). The Education system of the new democracy, required

immediate attention to achieve equal access and opportunity for all South Africans. Despite being allocated the largest budget share over the last twenty years the quality of public education that many South African learners are receiving is still incredibly low (Spaull, 2013). "…South Africa has the worst education system of all middle-income countries that participate in cross-national assessments of educational achievement" (Spaull, 2013, p. 3). The traditional notion of education has not been as effective as possible in enabling the youth to find employment after completing their National Senior Certificate (hereafter, NSC).

"…Unemployment rates for 18-24-year-olds with NSC and those with less than an NSC – a group that is about 90 percent black- appear to be almost equal" (van Broekhuizen, H. as cited in. Spaull, 2013, p. 47). These alarming statistics may provide some understanding as to why South Africa is home to such high dropout rates prior to completing the NSC. In 2011, just over 60 percent of the population of the youth had obtained less than a NSC with regards to their educational qualification (van Broekhuizen, H. as cited in. Spaull, 2013). There has however been an increase in the percentage of students who have achieved the NSC as their highest level of education. "Among individuals aged 20 years and older, the percentage who attained Grade 12 as their highest level of education increased from 21,9% in 2002 to 28,0% in 2015" (StatsSA, 2015).

However, there is still reason for concern with the high dropout rates of students. "Just over a fifth (22,5%) of premature school leavers in this age group mentioned 'a lack of money' as the reason for not studying, while 20,3% reportedly fell out due to poor academic performance" (StatsSA, 2015). Despite the statistics, much of the youth still see tremendous value and promise in completing secondary and tertiary schooling, and this continues to be one of the most common ways of potentially breaking the cycle of poverty within an individual's family (Mlatsheni, 2012).

One of the most pressing issues in South Africa with regards to education, is attempting to implement a model of inclusive education that can be applied to all schools across the country (Mnguni, 1998). "There are two main types of schools in South Africa, namely public and independent schools…" (Balfour, 2015, p. 14). Public schools are controlled and regulated by the Government, Independent or Private schools are controlled and regulated by private individuals or corporations (Balfour, 2015). There were approximately 14 million learners at

school in 2015. Approximately six percent of these learners attended private schools (StatsSA, 2015). This means that over 90% of South African children attend public schools (StatsSA, 2015). The standard of education within public schools in South Africa is incredibly inconsistent. Model C schools, government schools administrated and funded largely by the schools governing body, offer a much higher standard of education to that offered at little, or no-fee paying schools within many townships and rural areas in South Africa. However, it is not only about education. Three-quarters (76,2%) of learners who attended public schools benefited from school feeding schemes (StatsSA, 2015). This demonstrates the extent of poverty, with the clear majority of children attending school, also receiving a meal.

These harsh societal factors often have a huge impact on the individual's ability to succeed within the main stream schooling system. This is something which the Government of South Africa needs to address in order to enable the students under these models to have a chance of breaking the cycle of poverty that has defined their lives for so long. The quality of education received at secondary level therefore has a significant impact on a learner's ability in obtaining a NSC, but does not mean that they will necessarily escape a future of unemployment. There is therefore added pressure to excel so that they may go on to get bursaries for tertiary education, because merely having a NSC in South Africa is not sufficient to escape poverty and unemployment.

2.5 Model of Holistic Education

Typical understandings of this approach focus on the "growth of every person's intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative and spiritual potentials" (Network, 2011). Singh, 1996 explains "holistic education addresses the broadest development of the whole person at the cognitive and affective levels" (Mahmoudi, 2012, p. 179). Holistic education facilitates the development of all aspects of self to ensure the individual can reach their full potential, in all aspects that make up the individual self, to ensure optimal functioning within the self, family space, community and broader society (Mahmoudi, 2012). This model of education challenges the traditional notion of education as it is believed that this notion separates all the different aspects that make us human and this is not conducive to achieving optimal functioning. "…much of traditional education tends to be static and fragmented, ultimately promoting alienation and suffering" (Neves, 2009. As cited in Mahmoudi, 2012, p.179). The concept of holistic education is something that is on the rise globally. As societies are becoming more conscious of the effects

of the other aspects of self and an individual's life on education, so the importance of this model of education grows.

The model of holistc education highlights the importance of the interconnectedness of the individual and all the aspects that have shaped their current self on their functioning and performance within different aspects of society. The holistic model of education aims to emphasize the importance of the development of the individual as a whole person, the uniqueness and inherent ability each indiviual automaticially possesses, the multi-facted nature of learning and teaching, the right to self-determination, the development of one's spiritual grounding, the relationship and responsibility we as human beings have with nature and the natural world and the importance of community and giving back (Mahmoudi, 2012). All these aspects are fundamental in ensuring the whole development of students and the increased ability of them to be able to reach their full potential.

Mountain View is aimed specifically at empowering the young 'girl child' within South Africa. The term girl child, in this study, refers to "…a socially constructed category around female persons between 0 and 18 years" (Ponte, 2006, p. 2). Empowerment of the 'girl child' is something that is affirming the potential and power of young women in a world which is still male dominated. Empowerment of the 'girl child' is particularly important in the twenty first century. Perhaps one of the most vulnerable groups within the South African youth is that of the young, teenage girl. Due to this, a school designed specifically for empowering young South African girls from disadvantaged rural or urban areas, recognizes the potential of an empowered woman and the catalyst they can be within their families and communities. This again places pressure on the girl child because they are breaking the stereotype, and as they become more successful, they will often have to negotiate sexist remarks when others feel threatened.

Mountain View acknowledges the importance of the emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual and psychological spheres of an individual's life in obtaining an education and has therefore, adopted a holistic model of education within their approach to teaching and learning. All the students at this school come from homes with problems associated with poverty such a sexual violence; poorly serviced, inadequate and over populated accommodation; high levels of general violence and crime; and high levels of HIV/AIDS. These students are removed from these environments for the duration of their secondary education and placed in a safe, protected and

comfortable environment in which all their physical and environmental needs are addressed. In addition, the students have several resources available to take care of their emotional, spiritual, recreational and social needs. However, they are connected back to their home environments and the effects of these environments are felt by the students during the term and, more specifically, when they return home for the duration of their school holidays. It is therefore essential to acknowledge the different spheres of a student's life as these ultimately play a role in the student's ability to perform academically.

Holistic Education, in this study, assumes the notions of holistic education as discussed above; while taking into consideration a South African context, but as applied to a girl child only. Many South African's are accustomed to a life defined by inequality and this has a major impact on the development of the individual. In order for the students at the school to achieve success, applying these notions of education to their teaching and learning is critical. The holistic education model at the school assumes that the spiritual, emotional, psychological, mental and physical aspects of an individual's life are equally as important for success. The model assumes that in order for the child to function effectively in the pressure filled school environment, services are provided to assist the students as well as develop the students in the other identified spheres of self.

The school offers a range of services to ensure the students wellbeing. There is a comprehensive Wellness Team made up of social workers, nurses and psychologists that are tasked with assisting the girls and their families with the social, emotional and physical support they may require (Principal, 2016). There are dedicated teaching staff that aim to assist the girls in the academic realm. Spiritual activities are offered that support several different religions. The school also provides the students with yoga, meditation and dance practices as a form of expression (Principal, 2016). While this is enjoyable, this is not necessarily what adolescents may define as 'fun'. In addition, there are several different music programs in which the girls can participate in that also contribute to the process of expression.

The students at this school spend extended periods of time away from their traditional structures of support. In being away from the students' known structures of support, the girls at the school are required to develop characteristics such as independence, determination and resilience. The development these characteristics speak to the notion of the development of the individual as a

whole. It is important to note that this model of education is not the norm in South Africa. The students at the school are aware of the exceptional educational opportunity they are receiving, but this is a source of additional pressure for the students because they have no reason to "fail" or not to become a success.

2.6 Social Support

As these students progress through the journey of life certain behaviors, skills and habits develop. In going through an experience, we learn what our ideal and most effective coping mechanisms are when we are in need of care and support. Naturally, we as human beings, may become accustomed and dependent on these. The participants may be accustomed to the free space in which they are able to express themselves with no consequences or the love and support provided to them by their families, these are coping mechanisms that have to change while at Mountain View. The family relationship and situation from which the child emerges is an extremely important facet of the individual's life. "During the last several years how families were defined emphasized legal, economic, religious and political interests or some combination thereof" (Hepworth, 2010, p. 227). However, there are several different family forms which are not accounted for within the above described definition, that take on the role and perform the function of a family (Hepworth, 2010). "…Diverse family forms add to the rich opportunities in which individuals experience a sense of belonging, loyalty, reciprocal care and interrelatedness" (Hepworth, 2010, p. 227). The importance of this system in meeting the above mention needs cannot be underestimated.

Perhaps one of the most important relationships within the family system is the one with an individual's sibling **(**Collins, 2013**)**. "For most people, the sibling relationship is lifelong because siblings usually outlive parents and the sibling relationship is only second only to the parent-child bond in importance" (McGoldrick, Watson & Benton, 2005 as cited in Collins, 2013. p. 94). In considering the nature of diverse family structures, the research assumes a sibling type relationship may be in the form of a relationship with any person with whom the individual has lived with for a substantial period of time and who the student identifies as a 'sibling'. By one of the children within the household being offered this opportunity, there are going to be some ripple effects in the individual's sibling relationships. The effects on the relationship may be further influenced by the siblings age difference, their respective genders and their known roles

within the household. Effects of this changing dynamic can be manifested in different ways, with some common responses to this being envy and conflict.

When one spends extended periods of time away from their family and friends, there are bound to be some changes within these relationships. Negotiating these changes, while adapting to the stressful demands of the school is a challenge the students are faced with regularly. When one is experiencing dramatic changes within the relationships they previously relied on for support, one can be placed in an extremely unsettled position. “The term social support refers to assistance and caring provided by others and perceived by the person on the receiving end as desirable and beneficial. Family, friends or neighbors most often provide social support” (Sheafor, 2012, p. 190). As one grows up and develops, they become accustomed to these known structures of support.

Experiencing long periods of time away from one’s support structures can be very challenging for the student to adapt too. This may even inhibit the student from successfully adapting to the schools’ environment. In addition to the student struggling to adapt to the school’s environment, they may struggle to adapt to their home environment when they return home during the school holidays. In receiving an educational opportunity such as this, the child may feel alienated and isolated from their friends and families at home. Holistic Education encourages the students to think globally, confront issues, develop a sense of self-awareness and reach your inner potential; this kind of lifestyle can be extremely threatening to those who are not afforded the same opportunity.

The students at the school run the risk of feeling and experiencing social isolation and alienation both at home and at school and this can have tremendous effects on an individual’s functioning and performance, especially when they are still adapting to the school environment. Maladaptive social functioning occurs when the individuals “ability to cope is diminished by situations that inhibit their ability to function effectively” (Potgieter, 1998, p. 118). Due to the stressful environment of the school, chances of maladaptive social functioning are increased. This is extremely problematic as the child is expected to cope in an environment that is performance dependent. Due to this, having a holistic understanding of the student and the stresses they are currently facing is critical for ensuring the student is able to make the best of the opportunity that they have worked so hard for and have been afforded.

2.7 Female Headed Households

A common trend within South African society and in fact Africa, is that of the single, female headed household. Traditionally, the migrant labour system was a major contributor to the existence of female headed households. It is important to note the woman heading these households may be grandmothers, aunts and sisters- and they are not necessarily the biological mothers of the children within the household. “Nearly one in four households in Africa are headed by a woman” (Van De Walle, 2015). A gender study completed in 2015 indicated that 75.1% of households in Africa that fell within the low-income range where headed by woman (Woman., 2015). Female headed households are particularly common within Black African households. In 2011 Stats SA reported that 41.9% of Black African households were headed by woman (Statssa, 2013). The study went on to highlight gender inequality that is still a fundamental issue within South African society.

The school’s ethos speaks of empowering future female leaders and such, the girls at this school are going to be more equipped to handle the challenges that come along with this responsibility. In providing the girl child with a holistic education, one is essentially providing the child with some of the essential tools needed in breaking the cycle of poverty and becoming the economic game changer within their families. “Decomposing the change in poverty shows that, rather than putting a break on poverty reduction, female headed households are contributing appreciably to the overall decline in poverty” (Van De Walle, 2015). The majority of the students at the school come from female headed households. The concept of family has a unique meaning due to the non-traditional environments in which many of the students grew up in. Thus, there may be added pressure to build a more constructive functional family model in the future. In this context, the uniqueness and importance of a school designed specifically to empower young South African woman cannot be over emphasized.

2.8 Culture

On a broad scale the rise in female headed households highlights the fact that woman are becoming more empowered and, through this, they are able to gain access to an education, stand up for their rights as an individual within their relationship and ultimately gain a sense of independence (Van De Walle, 2015). In one sense, this conflicts with the traditional notions of African culture, however in another it highlights the ways in which traditional African Cultures are adapting to the demands of modernization and the twenty first century. The majority of the

students at Mountain View are black South African girls. Traditional African culture has a unique understanding of the male and female gender roles within the family structure. It can be said that generally within traditional African culture, men are offered far more opportunities than woman are (Gannon, 2015) "In most African societies young men enjoy more social preference and livelihood opportunities than young woman do" (Dugbazah, 2015, p. 221). Having said that, it is important to note the importance of the role woman occupy within many diverse cultures.

"…Woman continue to perform their mothering activities within the family; the rearing of children remains a major family responsibility" (Chodorow, 1978, p. 5). The role of caring for the children and maintaining the home is frequently undertaken by the woman. "Being a mother, then, is not only bearing a child- it is being a person who socializes and nurtures. It is being a primary parent of care taker" (Chodorow, 1978, p. 11). Males within this system are often absent or away earning a wage, even with the responsibility of being a breadwinner, males in this system are not present and are not responsible for many aspects of the child's care. The gender disparity can be highlighted further by looking at the 2015 General Household Survey, "although 9,4% of individuals left their studies as a result of family commitments (i.e. getting married, minding children and pregnancy), it is noticeable that a larger percentage of females than males offered this as a reason (18,1% compared to 0,4%)" (StatsSA, 2015) Even with woman performing such a crucial role within the home, men dominate this system as they are still seen as superior within the cultural and public spheres of social life (Chodorow, 1978). "Culturally and politically, the public sphere dominates the domestic, and hence men dominate woman" (Chodorow, 1978, p. 10).

A significant amount of the students come from rural areas that still ascribe to a more traditional South African culture. Under this notion of culture, it is rare that a 'girl child' would be afforded such an educational opportunity. The school is home to a more western type of culture with a wide array of practices and facilities which the girls are not familiar with. Culture as a concept can be described as "a theoretically defined category or aspect of social life that must be abstracted out from the complex reality of human experience" (Sewell, 1999, p. 39). One's culture often lays the foundation of an individual's life by providing meaning and understanding to different situations. Due to the fact that these girls interact with two substantially different cultures, acculturation is something that could naturally occur. Although the school encourages

the students to ascribe to any culture of their choice, acculturation is a reality many of the students face. "Acculturation theory refers to changes in an individual's behavior, social activities, thinking patterns, values and self-identity as a result of interaction with another culture" (Gordan, 1967. as cited in Taqi Tirmazi, 2016.p.390).

In accordance with the principals of the holistic model of education that the school implements, the students are taught and encouraged to think on a broad scale on a range of issues and develop their own unique self-identities. This shift in thinking is often something that plays a large role in alienating one from their friends and family and ultimately, their culture. For many people, culture is heavily influenced by the social component, diverting or challenging this traditional cultural notion can easily play a role in further alienating the child from the life in which they have always known. The acculturation many students experience may have a dramatic impact on the individuals overall social functioning within their respective environments.

2.9 Economic Game Changers

Through the education recieved Mountain View, it is hoped that the students will go on to become Economic Game Changers for their families and communities. "…a game changer is a doer, a person, organization or movement that in the face of adversity and against the odds, redefines the who, what, when, where and how of achieving results and impact" (Mitchell, 2013, p. 8). . This means that they are expected to financially support their immediate and extended family in the future so that others may go on to receive an education or start a business or just live off the charity of the Economic Game Changer. The hope is that one is able to break the cycle of poverty within their family structure and in doing so, go on to inspire others within their community.

2.10 Black Tax

The majority of the students at Mountain View are the first individuals within their families to have the opportunity to possibly progress and achieve a tertiary education. All with the hope of better employment opportunities. The expectation that is placed on the individual to succeed and become the Economic Game Changer in the family increases the stress the students within the school have to manage. In addition, a concept known as 'Black Tax' is a major stressor for future economic Game Changers within African families. "The phrase "Black Tax" is the fairly recent and well-intentioned shorthand used to articulate the financial responsibility of providing for extended family" (Mhlungu, 2015).

Although the concept is not a real 'tax', there is a responsibility placed on individuals to financially support less fortunate family members due to large amount of structural and generational inequalities within the black community (Mhlungu, 2015). In addition to the social responsibility individuals in this situation feel, there may also be feelings of guilt around being successful. The apartheid regime laid an unequal foundation for the different race groups of the citizens of our country in the shift towards democracy. The expectation and pressure placed on an individual to succeed and in turn provide, is a major stressor for many of South Africa's youth. Due to the fact that the students from this school emerge from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, the pressure to make use of the opportunity they have been afforded places a large amount of stress on these students. These students know that if they don't succeed, they are not only letting themselves down, but an entire extended family who is counting on their future success to lift them out of poverty.

2.11 Theoretical Lens

The theoretical framework upon which this research was based is known as the ecosystems perspective. The ecosystems approach to social work emerges from a combination of the systems theory within social work theory and the ecological perspective within scientific theory (van Wormer, 2007). The ecosystems approach assumes that "since all aspects of a client's environment are connected to and dependent on all other parts, a change in any one part will affect all other parts" (Sheafor, 2012, p. 62). The approach emphasizes the importance of the environment in which the individual comes from and how this combined with social interaction, self-concept and the different roles the individual is expected to play impact the current functioning of the individual (van Wormer, 2007). The ecosystems approach highlights the importance of a holistic view on the situation, as all the parts of the environment are connected and will have an effect on one another.

Furthermore, the ecosystems perspective acknowledges the ways in which human beings are required to continually adapt to their ever-changing social realities. The perspective shines light on competition, a major characteristic of social life, and the ways in which competition may affect an individual. The students at the school are constantly aware of this and it is a major contributor to the pressure in they feel. Competition, when positive, can encourage and assist people in reaching their full potential (Sheafor, 2012). "…unbridled competition can be a destructive force that gives rise to societal and economic oppression and exploitation and to

personal feelings of inadequacy and despair" (Sheafor, 2012, p. 63). As this can have such far reaching implications, having an understanding and awareness of this is imperative to ensuring the enhanced adaptive capacity of each student within their respective environments.

The information discussed above highlights that the challenges the students face may arise from a variety of different sources. The nature of these challenges influences all spheres of the individual's life. Therefore, looking at the girl holistically is imperative in being able to meet the schools aims successfully. "When viewed through the ecosystems perspective, the social work profession strives to enhance the adaptive capacities of people, remove environmental obstacles that limit effective social functioning and expand the availability of resources that meet the basic needs…" (Sheafor, 2012, p. 63). Enhancing the adaptive capacity of the students is essential in enhancing the individual's success at the school. The ecosystems approach speaks to the holistic education model, and both assume that when all the different spheres of one's life are in balance then the individuals is more likely to function successfully within society.

2.11 Summary

This chapter attempts to provide an outline of the environments in which the participants exist; describe the education system within South Africa; outline the Model of Holistic Education assumed by the school; describe the importance of social support; describe the uniqueness of empowering the girl child; describe the concept of female headed households; describe culture and acculturation; define what it means to be an Economic Game Changer and the concept of Black tax and finally; outline the theoretical lens of the study. The descriptions of the above-mentioned concepts were done in an effort to conceptualize the findings of the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the aims and objectives; the research approach and design; the population and sample; the research instrumentation; data collection; data analysis and the ethical considerations of the study.

3.2 Aims and Objectives of the study

Primary Aims

- To explore and describe the psychosocial experiences the disadvantaged girlchild faces when boarding at a holistic model of education school while being separated from their homes and social support structure.

Objectives

- To explore the different psychosocial pressures and challenges the students have had to overcome as a result of attending this school.
- To understand how receiving a holistic education, aimed at empowering young girls, has led to changes within the social structure of the individual's family.
- To understand the effect that continued separation and development of the student has had in terms of their relationship with their siblings, other family members and community.
- To understand how, according to the students, attending a school of this nature will impact their futures.
- To understand whether the students have to overcome challenges around acculturation and how this has impacted on them with regards to feelings of alienation from their friends, families and communities.

3.3 Research Approach and Design

"Research approaches and designs are plans and the procedures for the research that span the steps from broad assumptions to to detailed methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation" (Creswell, 2014, p. 3). Quantitative research aims to test and measure theoretical frameworks while mixed method research is made up of both quantitative (measuring variables) and qualitative (gaining insight into personal understanding and experience) elements of research. This research study is aimed at gaining insight into in depth, personal experiences and

realities. In order to best meet the aims and objectives of the research, the study took on a Qualitative research approach.

Qualitative research is complex due to the nature of the data one aims to collect. "Qualitative Research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2014, p. 4). This type of approach calls for the researcher to gather data that is rich and specific to the participant's environment and perception. Merriman, 2016 identifies the following as key characteristics in being able to understand this method of research, "…the focus is on process, understanding and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive" (Merriam, 2016, p. 14). With emphasis being placed on the data gathered under this notion of research, one can see how important it is to ensure he trustworthiness of the sampling procedure, research instrumentation and so on. The data gathered for this study is descriptive, in that is has described the challenges encountered by participants.

This form of research emphasizes the importance of the individual's interpretation of events when gathering research (Creswell, 2014). The research considers the context the individual may find themselves in and how this may affect their interpretation of events (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research strives to understand and explain social behavior, through concepts that are already in existence (Creswell, 2014). The research relied on the participant's unique experience of adapting to the two, very different lifestyles they have become accustomed too; the impact this has had on their relationships and the different challenges; and pressures they have encountered in doing so. The rich, descriptive nature of qualitative research plays a large role in ensuring that the results of the study are effective in meeting the descriptive aims and objectives of the research.

There is no perfect research design, and there will be limitations to making use of this approach. Perhaps one of the most problematic limitations of qualitative research is ensuring trustworthiness within the data. "Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to methodological soundness and adequacy" (Holloway, 2010, p. 309). Qualitative research leaves the door open to a number of different sources of influence within the research process; one needs to ensure their research embodies an accurate depiction of the research topic, the process and the results of the

findings. One is able to make decisions as to the trustworthiness of the research when looking at "dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability" (Holloway, 2010, p. 309).

"In qualitative research, dependability involves accommodating changes in the environment studied and in the research design itself" (Toma, 2006, p. 416). The context of the environment can have major implications on the data that is gathered, therefore an awareness is required. Ensuring dependability requires an element of consistency throughout the research. The reader should be able to evaluate and draw their own assumptions from the research by following the process of decision making the researcher took throughout the research study (Holloway, 2010). The researcher was consistently aware of the design of the study and how this may influence the overall findings of the research. The researcher attempted to make transparent, logical decisions with regards to the data collection and analysis.

Credibility refers to the awareness of the meaning participants give to their experience (Holloway, 2010). The individualistic nature of one's experience may not speak to the population as a whole. Participants need to be aware of the way in which their understanding of experience may have been influenced. While conducting the interviews, an understanding of this concept from the participants was clear. The uniqueness of their situation, their own beliefs and interpretations of the experience was continually emphasized by the participants. The uniqueness of the environment the research took place in was considered at each step of the research process. This was also considered while conducting data analysis and formulating the recommendations of the study.

Transferability aims to ensure that the findings within the research can be applied to others in similar situations (Holloway, 2010). This concept aims to apply the results and recommendations in environments that are similar in nature to that where the study was conducted. Although the school the research was conducted at is unique, the findings can be applied to any individual who is functioning in two very different environments. As this research is only a preliminary study, the transferability of the study can be better tested when the study is expanded.

Finally, confirmability speaks to the soundness of the findings in meeting the studies aim and are not the result of the researchers desired outcome (Holloway, 2010). Qualitative research is heavily at risk if researcher bias due to the fact that the researcher is the research tool. This was

avoided in the study by making use of a standardized research instrument in all the interviews I conducted with the participants.

Although there are limitations to making us of this type of research, the benefits of this method far outweighed the draw backs. In being able to meet the aims and objectives of the study, rich data was required. In any major institution, the voice of the population on the grassroots can often be lost, manipulated or distorted. In being able to give the participants a voice, the research aims enhance the functioning of the students and the interventions of the school.

3.4 Population and Sample

Mountain View is home to 291 students from all over South Africa, all with unique life experiences that have shaped them and their unique perceptions. The research has been conducted with the Grade 10, 11 and 12 learners or with learners who fell within the age gap of 15- 17 years old. Upon discussion with the school, it was felt that this group of learners would best be able to describe the pressures as they had already had experience of navigating their contrasting environments and had developed mechanisms to cope with the pressures.

There are 54 grade 11 learners, 56 grade 10 learners and 48 grade 12 learners. Out of a possible 158 learners, 10 participants were required for the sample population. These participants were selected by a request sent out by the researcher to all eligible participants. Although the sample population is relatively small, about 6 %, compared to the number of learners eligible for participation within the study, it created an environment in which extremely in-depth data was gathered. Small samples in which you can gather rich, in-depth data, have provided many of the most important advances in understanding the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2015). To try and enhance the understanding of the different experience the students have, participants from a variety of races, cultures, religions and geographic locations were recruited to participate in the research.

There are two main types of sampling one can make use of within research, namely, probability and non-probability sampling. “Since generalization is not a goal of qualitative research, probabilistic sampling is not necessary or even justifiable in qualitative research” (Merriam, 2016, p. 96). As this study, has been identified as a qualitative research study, purposive, non-probability sampling, was used to gather the participants.

"The procedure of selecting a sample without using any probability mechanism is termed as non-probability sampling" (Singh, 1996, p. 7). Non-probability sampling has several different methods in which one can make use of to gather participants for the purpose of their study. "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2016, p. 96). As qualitative research requires a rich, in-depth understanding of an individual's personal experience or account of an event, the specific selection criteria required with purposeful sampling is ideal for gathering the participants for the sample. "To begin purposive sampling, you must first determine what selection criteria are essential in choosing the people of sites to be studied" (Merriam, 2016, p. 77).

The requirements for being part of the sample were as follows;

- The participant needed to be a student at Mountain View.
- The participant needed to either be in Grade 10, Grade 11 or Grade 12, or between the ages of 15 and 17, and needed to have been at the school for longer than 1 year.
- The participant should have siblings that are not receiving their education at Mountain View.

3.5 Research Instrumentation

The data for the research was gathered by conducting a semi-structured interview with the participants in which a standardized set of questions was worked through. "An interview schedule is a written list of questions, open ended or clos ended, prepared for use by an interviewer in a person-to person interaction…" (Kumar, 2011, p. 145). By making use of an interview schedule, one increases the overall trustworthiness of the study. This is especially important when one is making use of a qualitative research design. The questions were all aimed at furthering the purposes of the research topic. The questions were however open-ended, allowing for extra exploration of relevant issues raised. To ensure the tool was effective, the researcher pre-tested the instrument and was able to make some minor changes to the instrument.

3.6 Data Collection

In order to gather the data for the study, 10 semi-structured individual interviews were conducted, with a pre-determined interview schedule. Semi-structured interviews enable the interviewer to go into the session with pre-determined questions. There is, however, there is

room for discussion and explanation within the participant's responses (Klenke, 2008). By making use of semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection, "interviewers are also free to probe the research participants for more information on particular points, to explore the topics more discursively than in structured approaches, and to even explore the topics that may emerge that were not included within the interview schedule" (Gibson, 2009, p. 88). In order to gather the unique insights, the research required, having semi-structured interviews was a crucial component of the data collection process.

The semi-structured interviews were all conducted over a period of three weeks in September and October of 2016. All the interviews were conducted at the participants' convenience at Mountain View. It was estimated that the interviews would take about 45 minutes to complete, however the average interview time was between 20 and 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed accurately, in an effort to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. Consent to record the interviews was obtained from each of the participants prior to the interview starting. In an effort to increase the trustworthiness of the data, a standardized interview schedule was used. This guided the sessions and ensured that the questions asked met the aims and objectives of the study. The data gathered is stored on a password locked computer under the individual's pseudonym to ensure confidentiality is maintained. During the data gathering phase the researcher's supervisor has had access to the data. The data will continue to be stored on the researchers device for the required period of six years after which the data will be destroyed.

In addition, it is important to note that the researcher was placed at the school for the duration of her Field Instruction Practicum (January to November 2016/) and was required to stay at the school weekly from Friday morning until Saturday afternoon, in addition a two-week block placement was completed by the researcher. During this period the researcher observed and conducted home visits, engaged with students and analyzed content all in an effort to obtain a richer understanding psychosocial pressures the girls face and have to cope with. This data was captured in the form of reflective field notes and daily reflection diaries. Time spent at the school enabled the researcher to emerge herself in the school's environment and this provided the researcher with some unique understandings prior to conducting the research.

3.7 Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis was used to analyze the data in this study. Thematic Analysis is a method of analysis that has been designed specifically for analyzing qualitative data (Klenke, 2008). The data for this study was coded under different themes to make and this made the data more manageable (Kuckartz, 2014). The data was the organized into themes and sub-themes (Kuckartz, 2014). After completing this, the data was further analyzed by looking at the ways in which the sub-themes are connected. This enabled the researcher to do a holistic analysis of the data gathered and to provide more conclusive and all-encompassing findings and recommendations. As qualitative research always runs the risk of researcher bias, transparency was critical in being able to increase the reliability of the study (Holloway, 2010).

3.8 Ethical Consideration

"Ethics is one of the most important aspects of conducting research" (Ogletree, 2012, p. 70). The researcher needs to ensure that the safety of the participants is ensured and the rights of the participants are clearly outlined (Ogletree, 2012)."Ethics is an issue that must be considered at every step of the research design and implementation process" (Ogletree, 2012, p. 62). To ensure this, transparency has been a key component of this research. Due to the nature of the study, there were several different ethical considerations that needed to be considered to ensure that the study was conducted ethically. The ethical considerations are elaborated on below.

3.8.1 Voluntary Participation

Voluntary participation works hand in hand with informed consent and assent. "All participants must be aware that they are participating in a study, be informed of all the consequences of the study and consent to participate in it" (Babbie, 2011, p. 77). The researcher provided the participants with a Participant Information Sheet *(see Appendix A)* as well as the chance to ask any questions pertaining to the research to ensure that should the individual decide to participate they do so voluntarily. "Social research, moreover, often requires people to reveal personal information about themselves, information that may be unknown to their friends and associates" (Babbie E. M., 2001, p. 521). Participation had to be voluntary to enhance he credibility of the study.

3.8.2 Informed Consent

Participants should have a clear understanding of their rights with regards to what participation in the research entails. The individual should not feel pressured in participating in the research in

any way (Barsky, 2010). Obtaining informed consent is highly connected to an individual's right to self-determination within their lives. "Informed consent is a vital part of the research process and, whilst most researchers agreed that written consent forms are necessary and empower the informant, consent involves much more than just a simple signature of a form" (Ogletree, 2012, p. 68). The researcher worked through a participant information sheet in which the participants were made aware of their rights, and were provided with the understanding that consent is completely voluntary and they had the option of dropping out or withdrawing at any time (Ogletree, 2012). In going through the Participant Information Sheet, the potential risk factors were explained to the participants to ensure that they make informed decisions. Since the researcher was not able to send home consent forms with each of the participants to be signed by their legal guardians, the school provided consent for the student's participation. This was required as the students are all minors.

3.8.3 Working with minors

This research was conducted with minors. The students are termly boarders at the school do not go home often. The school has the legal capacity to provide consent on behalf of the parents or legal guardians, while the students are at the school. Since the students do not go home regularly, the researcher used the school's ability to provide consent for the students to participate. In addition, the researcher obtained assent from the participants themselves to ensure voluntary participation. The research was guided by several different social work values, ensuring that the participants were not harmed in anyway, both physically and emotionally, because of participating in this research. If any of the students did experience distress, there was the provision made that one of the Social Workers on campus could provide support. This service was not required by any of the participants

3.8.4 Assent

Furthermore, the researcher obtained assent from the participants of the study. The participants are all at an age where they can have a strong voice with regards to what they do and do not want to participate in. "The term assent refers to permission from clients who lack mental capacity or legal competence to provide informed consent on their own" (Barsky, 2010, p. 347). Although the researcher received consent from the school to conduct research with the participants, the researcher also obtained assent from the participants themselves. Assent speaks to the

individual's right to self-determination and due to this, it is important to obtain assent from the participants to make them feel valued and respected within the process (Barsky, 2010).

3.8.5 Potential harm to clients

"It is the researcher's primary responsibility to make sure that the participants are in no way harmed as a result of participation in the study" (Ogletree, 2012, p. 65). The potential harm to the participants may be the different types of emotions that the participants may experience in the interview. The topics being discussed are of a personal nature and due to this, the researcher needed to be cognizant of the potential effects on the participants. It was noted in the Participant Information Sheet, that counselling with one of the other Social Workers in the Department will be made available if required. With all the interviews that the researcher conducted, further counselling was not required. The researcher felt that the participants left the interview upbeat and emotionally contained.

3.8.6 Confidentiality

"In a survey that provides confidentiality, the researcher is able to identify a given person's responses but essentially promises not to do so publicly" (Babbie, 2011, p. 83). Confidentially enables the researcher to have an awareness of who the participant is, however the identity of the individual is withheld from all other parties and reports. To enhance the confidentiality of the study, the name of the school will not be disclosed and pseudonyms have been used to withhold the actual identities of the participants and the school.

3.9 Limitations

The following limitations for the study have been identified:

- The research is only able to identify common themes or trends from the data. The research does not produce conclusive findings. This is because the sample size much too small to produce conclusive findings. The themes identified within this study can be confirmed or denied with further research at a later stage.
- The scope of the population is very small and this allows for generalization to take place. As with most qualitative research studies there is a risk of generalization, however this was something the researcher was aware of throughout the study and therefore consciously tried to avoid. Although there were very prominent common themes that

emerged amongst the participants, there was continuous emphasis placed on the individuals own unique experience of attending the school.

- All the data gathered comes from the perspective of the girls themselves. Some further input from their family members may have been extremely valuable in providing the research with a holistic understanding of the situation. However, this is not possible because families of the participants live all over South Africa and were difficult to access. Language could also have been an issue and interpreters would have been required.
- The population of the research was compiled of students from the senior grades of the school. These students have already become accustomed to many of the challenges the girls at the school face, due to their extended period at the school. In taking this study forward, it may be useful to include participants from the junior grades of the school as they are still facing and adapting to the challenges of living in an environment such as this. The contrast of the challenges that these two, different population groups face and the ways they have learned to cope, may provide a more all in-compassing account of the different challenges the students under this model of induction are facing.
- The school only allowed access to grade 10 – 12 girls as they felt that these students were better able to articulate the pressures and that they had had enough time to adjust and were able to identify coping mechanisms.

3.10 Ethical permission

I received permission from the Human Research Ethics Counsel to conduct the research after obtaining consent from the school. The permission letters for these can be found in the Appendices of the report.

3.11 Summary

This chapter outlined the aims and objectives; the research approach and design; the population and sample; the research instrumentation; data collection; data analysis and the ethical considerations of the study. These concepts are discussed to provide the reader with an understanding of how the data was collected and analysed.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the research. The data was gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews with 10 female participants at Mountain View. 8 of the participants are in Grade 10, with the other 2 participants in the process of completing Grade 12. 2 of the participants have a nuclear family structure, meaning that they live with their mother, father and siblings. 7 of the remaining participants come from diverse family structures; which are all woman headed households. 1 participant has distanced herself from her family and lives with a friend, in a nuclear family structure, which she considers to be her family. Siblings in these family structures are not all biological siblings of the participants. 1 of the participants in the study indicated that she has a good relationship with her father; while the other participants reported having strained paternal relationships and no relationship with a father due to either abandonment or death.

4.2. Model of Data Analysis

The data was analyzed considering the theoretical approach of the study being; the Ecosystems Perspective. Pseudonyms for all the participants as well as the school have been used to discuss the findings and maintain confidentiality. Data analysis for the study was completed by making use of Thematic Analysis. The interview transcripts were coded, per themes such as; pressure to succeed, alternating environments and identity. These sub-themes were then organized into categories from which the main themes of the study emerged. The main themes are; strained relationships, alienation, development towards the 'ideal' self and the implications of empowerment of the girl-child. The main themes and sub-themes of the data analysis are discussed below.

4.3 Strained Relationships

Strained relationships were identified as an unintended consequence of attending Mountain View by all the participants. This is something the participants were unprepared for upon admission to Mountain View. The different aspects of these strained relationships are discussed below.

4.3.1 Strained Relationships within the household

7 out of the 10 participants identified that their relationships with their siblings had suffered since attending Mountain View. There were varied reasons as to why this was the case. Some participants identified changes within this relationship due to them being at Mountain View,

while others accredited the change to the long periods of time spent from their siblings. It was identified that while the participants are at Mountain View, the family adapts to them not being part of the physical family structure. Siblings adjust to this, and the dynamics are strained when the participant returns home. It was identified there was conflict over shared spaces and belongings and this reinforced the divide between siblings. The participants identified feeling as though they were strangers within their homes.

The fact that the participants had been awarded the bursary to go to Mountain View was a common source of conflict within the sibling relationship for various participants. This was echoed strongly in two participant's relationships with their siblings. They indicated that there is often jealousy by their siblings over the opportunities and material rewards participants receive at Mountain View. Also, that the perception exists that they were now better than their siblings because of the privileges associated with attending the school and the expectation that they were going to make a success of their lives. Their siblings felt left behind, stuck in the cycle of poverty. These feelings and perceptions contributed to the strain placed on the relationships the participants have with their siblings.

Participants felt angry because they felt that they had worked hard to be awarded these opportunities, and that they were not just given to them and that this is not always acknowledged. Desire described;

> *Desire: Like in arguments he always has to bring up the fact that I come to this school and I think I am better than them and better than him and all of that. I have seen those changes. He bases everything I do on the fact that I come to this school.*

The age of the sibling, regardless whether the sibling was a male of a female, also had an impact on the type of changes participants identified in sibling relationships. In situations where the sibling is younger, the participants attributed the change to be a natural one as they feel it is natural to grow apart as different things interest them. 5 participants indicated that their sibling relationships had remained the same. These participants indicated that they did not have a good relationship with their siblings prior to coming to Mountain View and that, this was almost always attributed to the age gap between the siblings.

The severity of the changes the participants identified in their sibling relationship was largely dependent on the gender of the sibling. 4 out of the 7 participants who identified challenges

within the sibling relationship, noted that this was particularly the case in the relationship with a male sibling. This could be explained by traditional understandings of gender roles. The participants explained that they had become more assertive, more knowledgeable and had more power and felt that were better equipped to challenge the status quo.

The empowerment of the participant, as identified previously, has also influenced the relationship some participants have with their parents or legal guardians. It was identified that participants are encouraged to ask questions and understand different concepts at Mountain View, but this was often seen as disrespectful when they returned home. Although Mountain View attempts to empower parents and explain this change, this does not guarantee acceptance within the home. Precious explained;

> *Precious: …like I said before, the speaking back part is a challenge. In our culture, when your parents say don't do it, you don't even ask back as to why you mustn't do it. So no, Mountain view makes you a curious inquirer. So now you're like "mom, but what mustn't I try it?" …*

Mountain View attempts to explain the changes parents may identify within their children, but this is not always a guarantee of families or communities displaying an understanding of this. Generally, it was identified by the participants that immediate family members were more patient and understanding in this regard, however the same cannot be said for extended family members and their friends. It was identified that there was little patience shown to the participants while they adapt back to their home environment, and this has caused participants to distance themselves from certain members of their families. This again results in feelings of alienation and isolation.

4.3.2 Strained Relationships within the Community

The most common relationship that the participants identified tension was with their friends within the community. This has resulted in participants feeling alienated and lonely. The reasons for this alienation varied with the common reasons being that their education at Mountain View which had changed them. Attending the school had exposed them to new experiences, great facilities and services. They have open access to books, the internet, great teachers, psychologists and social workers. This has resulted in the participants not being able to connect with friends at home as they have lost what they previously had in common and are not able to relate as well to each other's circumstances anymore. The difference in experience results in different interests,

viewpoints and understandings, consequently, both parties may have distanced themselves from one another, making this more of a mutual separation accelerated by the experience at Mountain View. Doris explained, *"It would happen naturally, but being at Mountain View just makes it a lot faster"*. This does not reduce the challenge or reduce the gravity of the participant's situation while they are going through it. The participants have had to come to terms with the fact that growing apart from their friends was inevitable.

The feeling of, being better than their friends within the community, was frequently referred to amongst participants as one of the primary reasons as to why they felt disconnected and alienated from their friends. The participants identified not expecting this change to take place, and that this enhanced the stress and anxiety participants initially felt over these relationships. While it was identified that the participants missed the relationships they had with their friends and the breakdown of these relationships had caused feelings of stress and anxiety; they want to engage with people who engage with people who are on the same level as thinking. While discussing the relationship with friends in the community, Nabeelah explained;

> *Nabeelah: They make me feel like I am sort of better because I get all these things at the school and a lot of people at home don't get this stuff and it makes you feel like you are not with them anymore.*

4.3.3 The influence of strained relationships on social support

All the participants interviewed for this study identified that they had experienced changes within the relationships with their families, friends and communities. In an environment that is predominantly performance based, the stress of these strained relationships, can have harsh consequences as they have lost their social support structure to help them through the stressful times. Social support lays down a strong emotional foundation in which the individual can lean on during hard times, this enhances their ability to function in that environment. Without that support, functioning at your full potential is incredibly difficult.

The unintended consequence of the change in important relationships because of going to Mountain View, was further reinforced by the long periods of time the students spend away from their home environments. Being away from known and trusted structures of support is already a challenge, combined with the breakdown of these important relationships and the pressure to achieve at Mountain View; all adds to the fact that the participants are coping with an emotionally taxing and incredibly stressful situation.

It is important to acknowledge the effect of the breakdown of the core relationships of an individual's social support system, as this will impact their ability to adapt and function within the demanding environment of Mountain View. The importance of receiving appropriate social support and the effect of this on an individual's social functioning is echoed by Potgieter, (1998). While the participants all identified a change in a relationship, this was an unintended consequence and the girls had no preparation as to how to cope and respond when this happened. Developing the skills to be able to cope with these changing relationships and still preform at Mountain View could enhance the overall experience of the participant at Mountain View. When applying the ecosystems perspective to the research, the importance of developing skills to manage and cope with the changing nature relationships experienced by participants and helping them establish new networks of social support, is imperative as this can and will influence other spheres of the participants' life.

4.4 Alienation

Feelings of alienation due to the changing nature of relationships, and having to find new social systems of support, was identified as perhaps the most distressing challenge the participants since attending Mountain View. Alienation refers to the feelings of being excluded from known social environments. The participants identified feeling alienated from friends, family members and community members because of the Values and Beliefs practiced at Mountain View; the language spoken at Mountain View, and becoming accustomed to material belongings received at Mountain View. In addition, the same components that made the participants feel alienated within the home environment, was a contributor to feelings of alienation within the school environment for some participants.

4.4.1 Alienation because of diverse Values and Beliefs

While discussing the concept of culture, all the participants, except for 2, understood culture by referring to structural and behavioral aspects, rather than the more traditional sense of the word incorporating personal values and beliefs as explained by Sewell, (1999). The school aims to accept and embrace all cultures and religions, however, only one participant expressed a sense of acceptance of all cultures and religions. Lola explained, *"this is a shared space so we all just need be allowed to be who we are".*

The participants identified that there was a definite sense of having to adapt to one type of culture at the school, and another when they return home. 6 out of the 10 participants felt that

they had to adapt to the culture of the school to make their stay at the school more manageable. There were mixed reactions amongst the participants when discussing how this made them feel. While most the participants just accept this as the way it is, it was acknowledged that this had caused them to act one way at the school and a different way when they return home. This makes it challenging for participants to develop a sense of who they are as they are two completely different people when they are in each of their respective environments.

While discussing the changes that Doris had experienced with regards to the culture at Mountain View, she explained, *"It is different, but it's not too different from how I want to live my life".* Life at Mountain View is influenced by modern, Western ideals and the changes the participants identify within themselves follows suit. They associate success and their future with this new way of living. The participants identify the changes they experience at the school in terms of having to adapt to a different culture, the change in thinking and the aspects they learn about themselves at the school to be fundamental components of them being able to make a better future for themselves and their families.

For many participants, these changes are a complete contrast to the norms which exist in the environments the participants come from. This begs the question, do the participants feel that moving away from the principals of Ubuntu located in traditional value sets and ascribing a more modern, individualistic way of life will enable them to achieve success? As participants identified the way they live at Mountain View, a life where one must only care for themselves, as the way they want to live their life; this may be so.

There were significant contributions made by the participants with regards to the food and eating rituals at the school. It was identified that this was something that contributed to the homesickness participants sometimes felt. Data analysis revealed the Black participants in the study identified challenges around the eating rituals at the school (eating times, and communal eating areas), the Coloured and Indian participants felt that the food was more in line with traditional African foods. Rose explained,

> *<u>Rose:</u> …As an Indian child there would always be different foods at home, there would be curries…. But here, it is very Africanized like pap and wors and I don't eat that so it was tough for me because that added to my homesickness.*

Religion was brought up by two participants in the study. While both participants identified religion to be extremely important in their lives, one participant disclosed it had been a source of anxiety for her as she was not able to practice her religion as much as she would like. This has had effects on her relationships within her community and has be something that has further alienated this participant from her friends within the community, therefor it is clear how this is a major pressure for her to cope with. In contrast, Jeremiah explained, *"Christianity has been my fortress…".* While both students have relied on their respective religious to get them through tough times at Mountain View, it can be a source of pressure when the community in which you are placed does not embody a religion like some religions require. This can alienate participants, and this is particularly worrying as an acceptance of diverse beliefs was only identified by one of the participants interviewed for the study.

4.4.2 Alienation because of Language

There were contributions made by participants that indicated they had felt feelings of alienation particularly with regards to language. Language is incredibly important in the formation and maintenance of relationships. As the students become accustomed to speaking English for the long periods of time they are at Mountain View, it can take some time for them to adapt the common spoken language within their home environments. While the participants can communicate in various languages at Mountain View, it was noted that due to this diversity, it was easier for the participants to communicate in English.

The increased fluency in English plays a significant role in contributing to feelings of alienation and isolation. As mentioned previously, being alienated from one's family or community is a major threat to their known support systems. Therefore, there is an increased pressure to want to conform to the norms of the environment in which one is in. While discussing English being the primary language of communication at the school, Rita shared;

> *Rita: …It comes in the way of me actually making friends in my community because no one really likes me there since I am the only English speaking one, well not the only one. But it is an Afrikaans community and then I come and it's like "why are you speaking English?" …*

While most students experienced the challenge of feeling alienated with regards to language in the home environment; one student identified feeling this at Mountain View. While discussing her experience of language at Mountain View, Amanda explained;

Amanda: … They're like I never hear you speak your own language but it's because I'm really scared that if I do speak my language it's going to come out as if I sound really white.

Amanda's contribution aludes to the judgmental nature of Mountain View Girls identified by several participants. It is interesting to note that Amanda is experiencing the challenge many Mountain View girls experience when they return home, yet because of the change of environment, the effects of that feeling, which most feel, is forgotten. Language plays an important role in making somebody feel connected and included in a community, as the participants' experience alienation so frequently in their home environments, they should be able to feel a sense of inclusion in the environment that has stimulated much of the change that alienates them in the first place.

4.4.3 Alienation because of material belongings

Another source of alienation is the fact the participants have become accustomed to the use of material belongings which they do not have access to within their home environments. Due to exposure to social media, the participants have had the opportunity to expand their awareness on various things. Doris explained, *"… like I feel like I can't live without technology now".* Doris went on to explain, while some of her friends had access to technology due to their older siblings, others did not and this had an influence on their relationships with one another. It is important to note, due to the extended periods of time spent at Mountain View, technology is often the only way in which students can maintain their connections and relationships in their home environments. If friends or family don't have the same availability to technology, this can cause a breakdown of the relationship due to reduced interaction. While technology is both a tool of connection for the participants, it is a tool of alienation and managing this dynamic is complicated.

Through observation and interaction, it was identified that through exposure to social media and the internet; the student body at Mountain View has developed an awareness of aspects their friends at home may place no value on. While interacting with one participant after we had conducted our interview, she described how much she wanted a *Starbucks Coffee or a Krispy Kreme*. This participant comes from rural Ulundi where the concept of a *Starbucks Coffee* may be completely foreign. The awareness of this completely different world can reinforce the frequently identified feeling of being made to feel *better than* others in the community. This is

also a driving force for them to achieve financial success as they feel they now have choices and access to so much more.

4.4.3 Alienation due to a lack of interaction

Participants identified feeling alienated from the outside world because of spending long periods of time at Mountain View. It was identified that participants often could only communicate with people at the school, and this resulted in the students craving interaction with others, whether it be with male or female individuals. This was strongly noted in cases where participants had a male dominant friendship group prior to Mountain View. It was identified that the only way participants could communicate with other outside of Mountain View was to get involved with extra-curricular activities. However the participants have noted they want to be able to communicate with others for enjoyment, not only because they are engaged in competition against them. The desire to communicate with people of a different gender is a natural one, particularly during adolescence. As the participants, often do not have a positive male role model in their lives, it is important to enable communication to take place so the participants can begin to develop a different reference point. In addition, participants may end up missing out on important rituals of socialization, and this could be problematic in the long run. There are several positive male role models within Mountain View, and through observation, it was noted how the student body enjoyed interactions with these individuals.

4.5 Development towards the 'ideal' self

Due to the self-development that the participants have had at Mountain View, the concept of the ideal self has developed. The participants want to achieve financial success, have a career and break the cycle of poverty and to achieve this, participants work towards becoming the best version of themselves. This however brings about numerous psychosocial challenges.

4.5.1 Pressure to succeed

The pressure to meet the expectations of the Mountain View, the participant's families and communities and subsequently the participants themselves, is a major source of stress and anxiety for many of the participants. The expectation of the participants at the school is to achieve academically. Pressure from the participant's families and communities comes from their expectation of the students to achieve success and become Economic Game Changers for the family; and pressure from the individuals themselves comes from them having been the top

achievers in their previous schools and because they don't want to disappoint their families, their communities and the school.

There were mixed feelings when it came to discussing the expectations that the participant's families had of them. The expectation the participants identified emerged from both extended and direct family members; however, it was often more common from the participant's direct family members. Some participants had engaged in discussion with their families about having realistic expectations of them, and, although they did still feel pressure in meeting their families' expectation, it had become more manageable. Desire indicated:

> *<u>Desire:</u> I feel as though everybody expects me to do the right thing, but at the same time they understand- I think I have sort of made it clear that I am no superhuman and that I am just normal and I want to experience life normally like they did.*

Others, and this was the more common response amongst participants, felt that they could not have this conversation with their families' and were still considered the 'beacon of hope' for their families, a role that is defined by pressure. Rita noted, *"I don't want to disappoint anyone and my family is very proud of me so the last thing I want to do is let them down".* The desire to make their families proud was a concept strived for by all the participants. This in turn, became a source of immense pressure for the participants. It was noted, as the participant's siblings had not been awarded such an opportunity, the participants felt a responsibility to achieve financial success for themselves and their families. Although this was not explicitly noted by all participants, it was eluded to several times throughout the interviews.

As the participant's family structures are often their primary source of support, there is increased value in meeting the family's expectations. In addition to meeting the family's expectations, the participants identified expectations from their extended communities. As they had been selected for a position at Mountain View, the participants were identified as Role Models within their communities. This was particularly common in low income communities. Amanda lives in an upmarket suburb with her mother's employer, indicated she did not experience this type of pressure. The pressure to be a role model for the young girls within their communities is both an honor and curse for these participants. While they are in the position empower many young girls, they are also restricted from living their lives as 'normal' teenagers. Jeremiah explained;

> *<u>Jeremiah:</u> My community looks up to me I guess, like the girls, they look at me as a role model. So then if I can do it so can they, because in Ulundi I was the only one to get accepted, like ever in history. So they're just pushing, more girls are pushing now.*

It was identified by participants that the Mountain View environment required you stand out at something, whether it be dance or academics, everyone was known for something. Roseanne explained, *"I'd say it's a matter of if you fail it's like what's wrong with you type of thing, because my academics has to be perfect".* As the participants in the study come from disadvantaged backgrounds, there is an increased pressure to succeed academically. Trying to stand out in a school full of top achievers, is a pressure many if the participants identified struggling with. It was identified as that it was much easier for participants to stand out in public schools as it was identified that the standard of education in these schools was incredibly low. This was strongly reinforced by the contributions of 2 of the participants who had previously been in public high schools. They came to Mountain View in Grade 10, and it was incredibly hard for these 2 participants to adapt to the tough academic demands of Mountain View. It was indicated that due to the natural academic success many students experienced in their previous schools, a lot of the time without having to work for it, not achieving academic success was tough.

The perception that if you obtain an education from a government school, there is a justified reason for one not to be successful in life, has emerged within the Mountain View student body. It has been noted that public schools are not equipped to provide the students with the kind of support required to function in harsh environments and achieve academically (Price, 2011). The supportive environment in which the students are accustomed to at the school, adds to the pressure as this enhances the notion that the participants have no excuse but to make a success out of their lives.

As there is great promise breaking the cycle of poverty by obtaining a good education, additional value is placed on academic success within the school. Due to the high standards at the school, and the participants drive to meet various forms of external expectations, 8 out of the 10 participants indicated that they have high expectations of themselves.

> *Desire: I feel like I can do a lot and I should be doing a lot and the sad thing is I am never satisfied with what I do when I am here because I can always do better. I put a lot of pressure on myself to become more but I am too afraid. I am not really sure if I*

want to be more. Doing better and doing more means people will expect you to do more and more and more; it's like a cycle.

The materialistic environment the participants have become accustomed to also reinforces the desire to seek financial success.

4.5.2 Being the Economic Game Changer

The goal of the participants is to make their lives a success. As they emerge from lives defined and restricted by poverty, one can assume the participants want to achieve financial success both for themselves and their families. While it was identified that success was something the participants want to achieve, it was also identified as something they are fearful of. Analysis revealed there was a fear of success due to the responsibility that may be placed on an individual. This may stem from the assumed responsibility that those within the family that can achieve success in life, particularly in the financial realm, will look after the less fortunate family members (Mhlungu, 2015). While discussing expectations placed on this participant by family Doris noted;

Doris:..I don't see them doing better things with their lives in the future. Not that they can't but they're not. I don't know, they're not driven in a way and I think looking at how they are it's going to be a burden on me when I'm done with school.

While this participant felt a responsibility to become an Economic Game Changer and provide for her family financially, she identified some resentment in doing so. Although they are family, she indicated she has a problem helping people who do not help themselves. As the participants, will have worked incredibly hard to defy the odds and become Economic Game Changers within their families, the frustration they feel over financially supporting extended family members is understandable. While there it was identified that participants would gladly, contribute financially to their direct families, there may be a deviation from doing so with extended family members.

Mountain View provides the participants with a monthly allowance, and it was identified that 2 of the participants sometimes send this money home to help with finances. This was only done as and when required, however this responsibility was something the participants took on willingly and this pressure to share is always at the back of their minds. While only 2 participants contributed, it was noted that the financial status of the household was often discussed with the participants to help with budgeting. The contributions participants make highlights how the

participants are beginning to change the families' circumstances and embody what it means to be the Economic Game Changer within their families, even though they are still at Mountain View. In addition, as the participants attend the school on a full scholarship for most of the year, the financial burden on the family is reduced as the household no longer has to pay for them.

4.5.3 Being a Mountain View Girl

Going to Mountain View, although an incredible opportunity, has an impact on the participants overall functioning. The participants identified the responsibility that is placed on them to uphold the name of the school to be a tremendous source of pressure. It was identified that they lose their unique sense of self and are simply known as *'the girl who goes to Mountain View'*.

4.5.3.1 Who am I?

Participants identified the fact that they were known for being at the school and that they are unable to be normal teenagers are the areas in which they felt the most pressure with regards to their individual identities. All 10 participants identified that they felt they were known for coming to the school; and not for who they are as individuals. Desire disclosed, *"…I would be seen as the being that girl rather than being seen for who I actually am"*. In addition, the perception of what being a Mountain View girl should be, challenges the participant's self-concept and identity. 4 participants indicated that they felt they had lost a sense of themselves in striving to embody the school's expectations. The participants can identify that they have other aspects to themselves that are unique and important however they feel that these are often clouded by the fact that they attend the school. The perception that attending Mountain View is more important than these other aspects of self is worrisome. It was identified by numerous participants that they do not disclose the school they attend as this automatically influences the way they are treated by others. Nabeelah explained;

> *Nabeelah: …I don't identify myself as that girl, other people do. If they actually make an effort to see that I am not just that kid. I make an effort to say that I am not only that kid, I have other things about me that are also important you know?*

This desire to be known for other aspects of the self-highlights an important aspect of being selected for an opportunity that is beyond the norm within the environment in which the person is from. When one is afforded a rare opportunity, that often becomes a critical component of their identity; but this does not make them who they are as individuals. When the participant receives the opportunity; how they received the opportunity is often neglected. The students were

selected for the school on their merit, they were identified to be hard working, diligent leaders within their communities, these qualities are what the participants should be known for, as these attributes have not changed since admission to Mountain View. The desire to want to be known for who one is, and not for what they have accomplished is a natural one.

The participants identified feeling a pressure to conform to the norm both within the school's environment, and within their individual home environments. The participants are placed in the unique situation in which they must juggle upholding the name of the school and wanting to experience life as a 'normal' teenager. Rita explained;

Rita: It is hard because at the end of the day we are still teenagers and we are having to think extra hard at the things we do, our actions, because what we do reflects on the school.

Should the participants give up the essence of what adolescence means to be able to achieve success? If so, this is a great deal of pressure for one to take on at such a young age. When asked to explain how this change in the way they are treated makes them feel; there were varied opinions, however all agreed it was worth it for their futures. Lola explained, *"I just had the mentality that I'll just come here and accept whatever I'm given and try and make my stay better for myself"*. Other participants indicated they accept and deal with it because they want to make their families proud. Precious mentioned, *"Then I have to survive for my parents".*

4.5.3.2 Where is 'home'?

This was a challenge that was identified by all 10 of the participants. Continuously having to alternate between two very different environments manifests challenges in the psychological and social sphere of the individuals' life. Within the social sphere, there are effects on one's relationships, as discussed above, but there are also challenges around adapting to these two contrasting environments. While discussing how this participant feels when she returns home, Doris indicated, *"…at home, sometimes I feel like a stranger".* Rita described, *"…my mom actually thinks this, when I go home I am visiting and this is actually where I live…".* This is a significant contributor to the alienation participants identified that they experience when they return home. Two participants identified that they preferred being at Mountain View due to their stressful home situations. While discussing the challenges this participant experiences when going home, she explained;

Nabeelah: …Well the thing is when I come home there is a lot of tension now between my mom and my sister and I have to play the middle man because I am so close to my sister and she is my sister but my mom is my mom and se has always been there for me. Like at home I kind of walk on egg shells…

Rita echoed similar sentiments due to feelings of stress and anxiety because of her parent's volatile marriage. This is particularly telling, as it highlights the extent of the effect the troubling home environment has on the participants. The participants are still connected to the struggles of their family members in their home environments, this, in addition to the academic pressures the students face at Mountain View, is a great deal for one to cope with. When asked whether these participants made use of the resources at the school to help cope with these feelings, both participants indicated they do not make use of the resources. Nabeelah disclosed;

Nabeelah: It's actually really weird, like if I were to come to the social workers or something and then go home, they will say "oh, why do you want to talk about out problems outside?"

The participants also identified issues, of a structural nature, that affects their adaption within the two contrasting environments. In addition to issues around the type of food served and the eating rituals at Mountain View, the participants raised issues with the schedule, the beds and the lack of privacy they feel at Mountain View. Most of the participants identified that it was challenging to adapt to the physical environment at Mountain View, there were varied responses as to why this was the case. Some participants identified the large size of the school to be something to adapt to, while other participants identified feelings of being trapped at the school for long periods and struggling with the beds. Doris noted; *"I still find it difficult for the first week to sleep because of the way the bed is".*

All the participants commented on the busy schedule they have at Mountain View, with 3 out of the 10 participants indicating that they felt they were stretched too thin. While discussing their busy schedule and all the requirements the participants need to meet, Doris indicated she felt as though *"we are actually masters at nothing".* With such a huge amount of pressure identified by the participants to find their niche at the school, this is problematic. Amanda indicated;

Amanda:…It's like we wake up go shower, go to breakfast, school, lunch, school again. Straight after that it's co-curricular and then dinner and then homework. I think one person said this to me, sometimes I feel we're robots, like we are just programmed to do certain things.

This sentiment was echoed by 2 other participants. Feeling as though there is a lack of privacy, was an issue identified by my majority of the participants. Although many of the students share homes with many family members, this was identified as a challenge because they are sharing spaces with people who the participants identified do not have their best interests at heart. This affirms the competition and judgement identified by participants to exist within the Mountain View environment. The onus is continually placed on the participant being able to adapt to the community in which they are in. This can have a tremendous impact on the relationships an individual has within that environment.

4.6 Implications of the empowerment a girl-child

As Mountain View, has been designed specifically for the empowerment of young disadvantaged girls, there are naturally going to be gender implications.

4.6.1 Role within the Household

The participants noted that they had experienced little change in the role they previously performed in the home since coming to Mountain View. It was identified that when they returned home, the participants still fulfilled the same household chores they had done so before going to Mountain View, and this was done so happily. However, it was identified by 3 participants that they were *'made a fuss of'* by family members for returning home. This did have an impact on the role the participant had previously played within the home, as now they no longer had to do the chores required of them prior to Mountain View. Jeremiah identified that as she was so stressed at Mountain View, her mother tried to help her relax at home by reducing her household chore to help her rest. Some participants did identify that they had to take on a supportive role due to challenges their families had encountered since being at Mountain View. However, most of the participants, identified that their role within the home was just that of a normal teenager.

4.6.2 Value of Empowering Girl Children

Many cultures and religions within South Africa are founded upon unequal gender roles. A school designed specifically for empowering woman, deviates from these notions, and acknowledges the potential of what an empowered woman can achieve. As the traditional role of the woman is to mind the household and care for the children, empowering woman to be their family's primary breadwinner is unique. It was deduced that all the participants of the study understood that they would be financially contributing to the wellbeing of their families in their

futures. The nurturing characteristics of a woman, further reinforces the fact the girl-children are more likely to contribute to the wellbeing of their families.

Since 7 out of the 10 participants have grown up in female headed households, the participants are accustomed to this understanding. This non-traditional family structure has influenced the traditional gender roles and this has manifested itself in the lives of the participants. While the participants identified situations in which male figures in their lives attempt to assert their dominance, data analysis revealed that this has not had much influence on the lives of the participants.

4.7 Summary

This chapter discusses the challenges faced by the girl child under the holistic model of education. This was done through the discussion of the major themes; strained relationships, alienation, being an Economic Game Changer, being a Mountain View Girl and finally the Role played by the participant within the home environment. The challenges that were identified manifested themselves in the psychosocial sphere of the participant's life. Due to the interconnected nature of most of the challenges that were identified, change in one aspect will cause a change in another, as highlighted by the Ecosystems framework from in with the study is rooted.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the research. The research questions are considered by applying the findings of the research and the theoretical lens in which the research in rooted. The strengths and limitations of the research will be discussed. Lastly, recommendations for further research and for the school to be able to better support the students to cope with the transition, are provided.

5.2 Discussion of Research Questions

5.2.1 What are the different psychosocial pressures the participants face when entering a school of this nature?

Chapter 4 describes that there are numerous psychosocial pressures which the participants experience by having being selected for a full bursary at the prestigious Mountain View school. As discussed, this requires them to leave their homes and support structures and board in a completely foreign environment. The primary pressures identified by the research were strained relationships with those that they had left behind; alienation from their friends and family; being thought of as the Economic Game Changer and having to continually uphold the schools name so that the school's reputation is not tarnished. Perhaps the most worrying pressures, identified by most of the participants, was the feeling that due to their education at Mountain View they had no excuse but to make a success out of themselves; the fact that there was the feeling that important individual qualities, making the participants who they are, were over shadowed by their attendance at Mountain View; and, that there was the feeling that their academic success was more important, to their families, the school and even themselves, than their mental and emotional wellbeing.

The challenges of being a Mountain View Girl are often overshadowed by the overall experience of going to Mountain View. The persona of being a Mountain View Girl has effected the individual's relationships, ability to be a 'normal' teenager and sense of self. However, this is often not acknowledged as the promise of receiving a good quality education is of greater importance. The participants identified missing out on many aspects of a 'normal 'life, but accept that being educated at Mountain View is their best chance of breaking the cycle of poverty within their lives, and that of their family, and as such they had better not mess up this opportunity, and were therefore willing to give up this aspect of themselves to do so.

The Ecosystems Perspective highlights how a change in one aspect of an individual's life, will have a ripple effect and cause a change in another aspect of the individual's life (Sheafor, 2012).

As a result of the interconnected nature of the pressures and challenges identified by the participants, it is clear how ineffective and unutilized sources of social support can lead to maladaptive social functioning as explained by Potgieter, 1998.

5.2.3 Has the potential empowerment of the girl-child lead to and changes within the social structure of the girls' family?

Empowerment of the girl-child has led to only subtle changes within the social structure of the family. This finding was unexpected. However; upon further reflection, it was noted that this may be because 7 out of the 10 participants interviewed for the study live in Female Headed Households. This unique family structure already embodies a breakdown of traditional gender roles and this has played a pivotal role in influencing the understanding of gender roles by the participants. It was identified that there was more discussion with regards to financial planning and decision making with the participants and their families since attending Mountain View. In addition, they are asked to make decisions on behalf of their families with regards to finances and other family matters. As some of the participants are already contributing financially to the household with their Mountain View allowance, they are already beginning to embody the role that is ultimately going to be placed on them in their futures. The role of the student within the household was identified to have stayed the same and in some cases reduced. It was identified that due to the stress the participants are under at Mountain View, their families want their time at home to be spent relaxing and building up strength for the next term. This has had implications within the sibling relationship as they are not afforded the same treatment.

5.2.4 How have the participants' relationships with their siblings, family members and communities changed since attending the school?

Evidence suggests this was one of the most challenging aspects of attending Mountain View. It was identified by all the participants that most of their relationships have taken strain, and that they had been left feeling alienated and isolated from people who used to be their main source of social support. While family was generally more understanding of the changes within the participants, their friends had been less so, largely because of jealousy and the belief that the Mountain View Girls were now better than them. Thus, almost all the participants identified losing several friends while being at Mountain View. This was identified as something that was unexpected, and the participants were unprepared for this loss. It was identified that the Mountain View girls had been made to feel as though they were better than others in the

community. It was unclear whether this was because of the attitude displayed by Mountain View girls within their communities, or because of insecurities from community members.

The sibling relationship was also identified as a relationship that had taken strain since the participants had been at Mountain View. While the importance of the sibling relationship within the family structure cannot be emphasized enough; some participants had identified that Mountain View had impacted negatively on their relationships with their siblings. This was more common with male siblings and siblings of a similar age to the participants. Aspects of jealousy were identified by some participants as a reason for the strain on this relationship; however, it was identified that the time the siblings spent apart was the primary contributor to the breakdown of some sibling relationships.

Social support, whether it be from previous support structures or professional bodies at Mountain view, can enhance the adaptive capacity and overall success of the participants within the Mountain View environment. The importance of receiving social support is highlighted by Potgieter, 1998. With many participants experiencing a breakdown or reduction of their previous structures of support, and the effects of this as described by the Ecosystems Perspective, addressing why participants are reluctant to make use of the supportive resources offered at Mountain view is necessary. While some of the participants identified making new friends to replace the social support they had lost, others had not. It was identified that these participants accept their situation and move on.

5.2.5 What does attending a school of this nature mean for the participants and their futures?

It was identified that attending this school would provide the participants with an excellent secondary education, which would in turn provide the basis for the participants being accepted for bursaries for tertiary education. It was felt that by doing well academically the participants were more likely to make a success out of their lives and subsequently, break the cycle of poverty, by becoming financially independent. While the value of the high-quality education the participants received at Mountain View was acknowledged, the participants felt that they would be able to make a success out of their lives because of what they had learnt about themselves at Mountain View. The participants have grown as people, deepened their understanding of many things and expanded their awareness within the Mountain View environment, and this has given

them confidence in their own abilities and hope for the future. This is in line with the objectives of the Holistic Model of Education the school implements.

For many participants, they are going to be the first in their families to possibly receive a tertiary education, and this is an opportunity that comes with great promise but also great responsibility; and in addition, it is expected by the family and the school. While only 1 participant directly noted the responsibility placed on her to financially support her family in the future, it was implied by all the participants, with some of the participants currently doing so by sending home their Mountain View allowance. This responsibility it a major contributor to the overall pressure put on participants, as the desire to want to make their families proud and support them ultimately results in the participants putting a tremendous amount of pressure on themselves. It also makes them feel angry because they have sacrificed a lot and worked very hard for this privilege, and they feel that some members of their family just expect to be looked after, rather than trying to do something for themselves.

The effect of living in a privileged space with all services provided, while emerging from an environment defined by poverty, also has implications. The participants want to continue to live their lives in the way they have become accustomed to at Mountain View which is another source of self-fueled pressure to achieve financial success so that they will be able to live in comfort in the future too. It has made the participants materialistic in a way, which is natural given their backgrounds, but it may mean that they lose their sense of meaning for themselves and their families as they are expected to be the provider of things and want the things that they were deprived of. This has the danger of falling into the loop where things bring you happiness, rather than relationships and experiences.

5.2.6 Does the need to adapt to a different culture at the school alienate the students from their cultures at home, their friends and their families? If so, how.

The concept of culture was understood by participants as structural and behavioral aspects, rather than the more traditional sense of the word incorporating personal values and beliefs as explained by Sewell, 1999. The concept of culture was met with a mixed response by participants. While most participants identified that they adapted to Mountain View culture to function, 1 participant identified an appreciation of her culture had developed because of this. While many of the participants had experienced acculturation, it was identified that the culture a Mountain View was in line with how they wanted to live their lives in the future.

Evidence pointed out that acculturation had led to alienation, particularity in the realm of religion for one participant. While the school aimed to create an environment in which participants could practice diverse cultures and religions, this did not enable the participants to do so to the extent they were used to within their home environments. While the participants have accepted, and adapted to this, for a junior student, or a new student at the school; this would be a challenge. This was also identified as an unintended consequence of going to Mountain View.

5.3 Strengths and Limitations of the Research

5.3.1 Limitations of the Research Study

Perhaps one of the biggest limitations of the study was that the researcher was only able to conduct the research with students in Grades 10-12. This group of students has already adapted and become accustomed to many of the challenges faced. It would have been interesting to match these pressures against those identified by younger students, or new students at the school, would have a more immediate understanding of the pressures as they enter the school for the first time. It also may have been useful to interview family members and past Mountain View students. The struggle to recruit sufficient, willing participants limited the researcher from conducting a focus group, in addition to the individual semi-structured interviews. A focus group discussion may have enhanced the data as the information would have come from a wide range of participants and because in a group you also get a sense of the general importance of an aspect rather than an individual perspective. Group discussions are also usually more lively with participants often being willing to share more.

5.3.2 Strengths of the Research Study

The initial aim of this research was to identify broad themes with regards to the psychosocial pressures the students at Mountain View faced and lay the foundation for further research at the institution. To the extent that this was possible, this has been achieved. The research report provides a platform in which the voices of the participants are heard. This was identified as something that was lacking within the Mountain View environment. It was also the first time research of this nature has been conducted at the school and therefore provided the basis for continued research in the future. It provides a starting point for continued conversation and highlights the importance of undertaking reviews such as this on a regular basis.

5.4 Recommendations

5.4.1 Recommendations for Mountain View

It was noted numerous times that although the participants are struggling with several challenges, they do not make use of the support structures offered at Mountain View. It is recommended that

Mountain View should review their current sources of support and investigate why participants are not making full use of the sources of support, when it is clear, that the participants could benefit from it. There is an extensive Wellness Team, made up of different professionals, and this needs to be utilized effectively. The students' adaptive capacity can be enhanced, and one of the ways this can be achieved is through the provision of the support from the school. In addition, the desire for fun and enjoyment mentioned by many participants. Implementing some fun activities, that the students identified as fun, may enhance their adaptive capacity at the school.

It is further recommended that Mountain View takes cognizance of the heartfelt voices of their students, as they have valuable contributions to make in assisting future students better cope with the adjustments as they are the only ones who really understand what it means to be a Mountain View girl. A 'bottom-up 'approach is recommended to develop more effective interventions that speak directly to the needs of the student body, as identified by the students themselves. Girls are currently afraid to speak up in case they appear ungrateful, when in fact they are extremely grateful and would not want to give up their opportunity, but they feel that they could make things easier in helping future students cope with the pressures. The voicelessness of the female experience of poverty should not be manifested within the institution that aims to empower young dynamic woman to become Economic Game Changers.

5.4.3Recomendations for future research

In taking this research further, it is recommended that one includes past Mountain View alumni, junior and senior Mountain View students and parents or legal guardians in the sample population. This will provide a holistic understanding of the challenges presented by the students in this report. In addition, it is recommended that focus groups, in conjunction with semi-structured interviews, are made use of to gather the data for the study. Finally, some research into the pressures associated with being the Economic Game Changer both in a holistic model of education and within the mainstream schooling system is required, as this is a responsibility placed on a large amount of the youth of today.

5.5 Conclusion

This research was conducted to highlight the psychosocial pressures faced by students at Mountain View. While the evidence presented clearly indicates the students face several challenges in being selected to complete their secondary education at Mountain View, it was

noted that it was ‘worth it’. Mountain View offers students, who were previously in a disheartened situation, great hope for a better and more positive future, both for themselves and their families. Having said that, the students pay a tremendous price for this privilege, and if more effective interventions can be implemented to better help the girls adapt and deal with the pressures placed on them, then these should be encouraged. As there is such a great responsibility placed on these students because of this opportunity, enhancing and improving their experience at the school, is fundamental to the success of the investment the school makes with each girl.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Evidence of Ethical Clearance from Mountain View.

12 August 2016

To Whom It May Concern

This letter serves to confirm that I, [redacted] gives consent to Drew Holman, a current intern Social Worker at [redacted] to conduct her research "Describing the psychosocial challenges faced by girl children under a specific holistic education model" at the school. Further to this, in my capacity as loco parentis to all the students at [redacted] she is allowed to engage with students at [redacted] provided that there are available and willing to participate in this research.

Best Regards

[redacted]

Appendix B: Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) clearance certificate

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Holman

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H16/07/07**
PROJECT TITLE	Describing the psychossocial challenges faced by girl children under a specific holistic education model
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Miss D Holman
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Social Work/
DATE CONSIDERED	22 July 2016
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
EXPIRY DATE	15 August 2019

DATE 16 August 2016 **CHAIRPERSON** _____ (Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Ms L Petersen

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10005, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the researc procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

_____ Signature

_____/_____/_____ Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet.



Participant Information Sheet

Research title: Describing the psychosocial challenges faced by disadvantaged girl children under a specific holistic education model.

Good day,

My name is Drew Holman and I am a final year student registered for the degree, Bachelor of Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As part of the requirements for my degree, I am conducting research into your experiences and challenges of being selected to obtain your education at a school such as yours. I feel that as you are in one of the most senior grade within the school, you will be able to provide some valuable insight in this regard. It is my hope that the information I am able to gather and interpret will be able to enhance the Wellness Teams interventions with girls coming to the school in the future.

I therefore wish to invite you to participate in my study. The school has given me permission to conduct the study and your participation is entirely voluntary and refusal to participate will not be held against you in any way. If you agree to take part, I shall arrange an interview with you at a time and place of your convenience. The interview will last approximately 1 hour and we will work through a set of pre-determined questions during this time. You may withdraw from the study at any time and you may refuse to answer any questions which you do not feel comfortable in answering.

With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded. No-one other than my supervisor and I will have access to these tapes. The tapes and interview schedules will be kept for two years following any publications of the study or for six years if not publications emanate from the study. Please be assured that your name and personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final report.

As the interview may include some sensitive topics, there is some possibility that you may experience some emotional distress. Should you feel the need for some supportive counselling, I have arranged for this service to be provided to you within the Wellness Team at the school. One of the Social Workers on campus, Andiswa Nyovane or Lynn Metsing, will be available for you to talk to should you feel the need. I am able to arrange this service for you should you require it.

Please feel free to ask any questions you feel you need clarity on regarding the study. I shall answer them to the best of my ability. I may be contacted on 0163669058, or alternatively you can email me on drewholman19@gmail.com. Should you require further clarity, you may contact my supervisor Laetitia Petersen on, 0117175412 or via email at Laetitia.petersen@wits.ac.za. The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) and they can be contacted on 0117171408 or Lucille.Mooragan@wits.ac.za for any additional concerns. Should you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study, one can be made available to you upon request.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in the study.

Yours sincerely

Drew Holman

Appendix D: Assent Form



Assent Form: Student

Research title: Describing the psychosocial challenges faced by girl children under a specific holistic education model.

I, _____, hereby consent to participate in this research project. The purpose and procedures of this study have been explained to me in detail, and I have a clear understanding of them. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to answer any particular items or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. I understand that my responses will be kept confidential.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) Contact Details:

- *Chairperson: Jasper.Knight@wits.ac.za*
- *Administrator: Mrs Lucille Mooragan Tel 011 717 1408 or Lucille.Mooragan@wits.ac.za*

Appendix E: Consent form for Audio-Taping the Interview



Consent form for Audio-Taping of the interview for the study:

Research title: Describing the psychosocial challenges faced by disadvantaged girl children under a specific holistic education model.

I hereby consent to tape-recording of the interview.

I understand that:

- The recording will be stored in a secure location (a locked cupboard or password-protected computer) with restricted access to the researcher and the research supervisor.
- The recording will be transcribed and any information that could identify me will be removed.
- When the data analysis and write-up of the research study is complete, the audio-recording of the interview will be kept for two years following any publications or for six years if no publications emanate from the study.
- The transcript with all identifying information directly linked to me removed, will be stored permanently and may be used for future research.
- Direct quotes from my interview, without any information that could identify me may be cited in the research report or other write-ups of the research.

Name of participant: …….

Date: ……

Signature of the participant: …….

Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) Contact Details:

- *Chairperson: Jasper.Knight@wits.ac.za*
- *Administrator: Mrs Lucille Mooragan Tel 011 717 1408 or Lucille.Mooragan@wits.ac.za*

Appendix F: Interview Schedule

SOCIAL WORK
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)

Interview Schedule

1. Please could you explain who you live with at home?
2. Please could you indicate whether your parents are still in a committed relationship with one another? If not, please indicate when this separation occurred.
3. Please could you indicate how many siblings you have and their respective ages?
4. What is your role within the family when you are at home?
5. Have you experienced any changes in the way you are treated by your family, friends or community since coming to this school? If so, please explain how and why.
6. Have you experienced any changes in your relationships with your siblings? If so, do you think it is because of the education you are receiving at the school or because you are away from home for extended periods of time?
7. Do you feel as though the school has required to take on aspects of a different culture to what you are accustomed to at home? Please explain why or why not and how.
8. What kind of challenges do you feel as though you have had to overcome since coming to the school? Please explain how you have overcome these.
9. What kind of pressures do you face around attending a school like this?
10. What were your expectations around coming to the school initially and how have these changed over time?
11. Do you feel as though your education at this school is going to play a role in helping you break the cycle of poverty within your family? Please explain how and why.

Appendix G: Extract of interview transcription



Interview with Participant #4 Lola *

- **Interviewer: Drew**
- Participant: Lola

Interviewer: okay so please explain who you live with at home

Uhm, it's quite complicated because it depends, so I lost both my parents. My father passed away and my mom is alive but she kind of left me so I lost her too. Uhm so sometimes I live with my aunt who lives in Durban. Sometimes I go to Richard's bay, my other aunt. And they're both related to my dad. And sometimes I live with my gran my dad's mom in Ulundi so it really depends

Interviewer: and how does it depend?

Yes like closer to the holidays I'll call like my aunt and ask her like how's the situation at home like financially and stuff like that and if she'd manage having another child there

Interviewer: okay and do you have any siblings?

Its another complicated question but yes, like with my aunt okay my aunt in Durban I don't have siblings because yea she's still single. My aunt in Richards bay I have 2 siblings. My real dad I have 3 siblings.

Interviewer: okay so the siblings from your real dad, do they have a different mom to you?

Yes

Interviewer: and where do they live? Who do they live with?

Appendix H: Extract of Interview Transcription

Interview with participant 5: Amanda*

- **Interviewer: Drew**
- Participant: Amanda*

Interviewer: okay, so please could you explain who you live with at home.

Okay I live with my mom and my 8-year-old sister

Interviewer: okay, and where is your dad?

My dad lives a bit near us, yea we don't live with him, my parents aren't married

Interviewer: okay and do you have a good relationship with your dad?

Yes I can say its good yea it's okay

Interviewer: you see him often and he supports you?

Yes, yes

Interviewer: okay so when did your parents split up?

I'm not actually sure when, I've never really asked about it, because I'm kind of scared so, I don't think my mom likes talking about it so I don't ask.

Interviewer: so it's just been as long as you can remember?

Yea as long as I can remember

Interviewer: Okay and he doesn't live far just down the road?

No, yea, you can just say like, you can walk there so yea it's not that bad

Interviewer: Okay. And with your mom? Do you have a good relationship with her