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Rukato, Obert Takudzwa

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University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

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NARRATIVES OF IDENTITY IN FOOTBALL FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA.

By: Obert Takudzwa Rukato
Student number: 1410130
A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Supervisor: Prof Jill Bradbury

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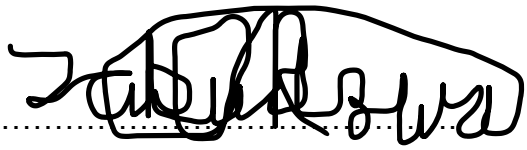
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Obert Takudzwa Rukato, hereby declare that this research report is my own original work.

In the instances where the work of another person has been referenced or quoted, it has been cited and fully referenced according to the American Psychological Association (APA) format. I am fully aware of the implications of using plagiarised work in a project of this nature.



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Obert Takudzwa Rukato

15/03/2024

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Date

Department of Psychology
University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg
2024

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To my family, thank you for supporting me throughout this journey and constantly asking me how far I am with research. Despite how annoying it was, it definitely spurred me on to getting over the line.

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To football, I could write a thesis about what you have done for my life. In short: Thank you for keeping me sane, thank you for saving my life.

Chapter 1 – Introduction and context

1.1 The city of Johannesburg

This chapter discusses the locational and contextual relevance of the project by introducing the location where the study took place. This introduction offers the historical importance of the location of the project. The chapter also notes the rationale for this project in the current South African context. This project took place in Johannesburg, South Africa. Nicknamed “the City of Gold”, Johannesburg is steeped in contradiction and intersections. Historically ‘Joburg’ was born out of the hopes and dreams that accompanied the gold rush of the 1880’s (Murray, 2011). On the surface, people flocked to Joburg with the hopes of making big money from gold. Beneath the surface, migrant workers and others arrived in Johannesburg as a means to provide for their families, by working in exploitative conditions grounded in the colonial and racial ideologies of the time. This is an example of the stark contrast that still exists in present day Johannesburg. The city is seemingly split into a largely affluent ‘White’ north and a degenerating ‘Black’ south (Crankshaw, 2007). However, when explored with increased detail, this divide is more nuanced and complex. An example of this nuance and contrast is seen in the example of Sandton and the Alexandra township. Separated by little more than three roads, Sandton – arguably the richest square mile in Africa – exudes opulence and luxury while Alexandra – one of South Africa’s biggest and poorest townships – wreaks of despair and poverty (Du Toit, 2003). The inhabitants of Alexxandra also form a large part of the backbone of the workforce that sustains the lives of Sandton’s elites. This context means the population of this part of Johannesburg, and Johannesburg at large, experience and negotiate multiple intersections of identity in daily interactions. These negotiations include race, class and gender (Murray, 2011). Johannesburg is further underpinned by homelessness and unemployment, which can be seen at every other traffic light. This in itself links to crime and leaves the city with a mixed sense of anxiety about needing to make money and needing to remain safe, amongst other worries (Murray, 2011).

It is critical to detail and explore the location of the study in this way because of the meanings and expectations that a city like Johannesburg exists with. The negotiation between hope, opportunity and dreams mixed with pressure, anxiety and otherness form part of the very fabric of living in Johannesburg. The participants in this study are

grounded in this reality and this is the context under which their identities are formed and narrated.

1.2 Sport based youth development in the South African context.

The wounds of Apartheid can still be felt within South African youth. With racialised educational discrepancies as well as deeply etched colonial roots, youth in South Africa have to deal with poor service delivery in Black areas compared to White areas and the often-powerful impacts of a subliminal lower valuation of Black bodies (Manganyi, 1973). A sort of backwards hope can be offered by the fact that the 'worst' atrocities of Apartheid have been overcome which can offer a sense that a better future can happen because of the existence of a better present relative to the past (Bradbury, 2020). However, these contextual issues still make it difficult for young people to then reap the benefits of sports fully (Burnett, 2009). Engaging in sports when primary basic needs of safety and nutrition are not met, is likely to reduce the positive sequalae of the sports-based intervention.

The community and surrounding environment in a young person's sporting life influences the development of the child affects their identity (Jones et al., 2019). Adults play an integral role in the usefulness of sport in youth identity construction (Burnett, 2009). This is particularly seen in the role of coaches or in the support from parents or caregivers for the sport that the individual is engaged in. These adults offer safety, learning and positive relationships to the children involved but conversely can negatively influence the individual and their development through negative perceptions (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005).

The importance of well-planned and structured sports programs is highlighted in this way. No matter how effective the sports-based program is for development at the end of the day the child still has to go home. In this way it is vital for such programs to also improve the community as a whole (Burnett, 2009). Youth development is a product of the multiple separate environments in a young person's life and the ways these environments interact (Jacobs et al., 2017). The context in which sport occurs makes a difference to the narrative that is expressed by the youth involved (Jacobs & Wright, 2017).

In the South African context, the issue of assessing sporting benefits on individual and team outcomes is limiting (Burnett, 2015) as it prioritizes the potential success stories of individuals (in what is the dominant 'fame and fortune' narrative of success in sport) over the impact that sport can offer to development and the lives of young people. A similarly constructive and supportive community and surrounding environment is needed for creating secure environments for youth development (Burnett, 2009). Sport also has the potential to keep kids away from the dangers of street-life and gangsterism (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005), which are particularly dangerous, but accessible, alternative avenues for adolescents to find belonging and negotiate identity.

In this way, the proposed study is well placed to gain insights into where football in South Africa can be used as a mechanism for positive identity development in South African youth. It may inform the directions which may need to be taken to get to a more hopeful future despite South Africa's current context (Burnett, 2015). Considering the available resources and specific history - sport can attempt to bridge the gap of unequal access to opportunity in South Africa (Sanders et al., 2012). In offering an outlet from mundane daily life and all its difficulties and uncertainties like Covid-19, climate change and poverty sport and, in the case of this study, football, offers the youth of South Africa hope of a better future, and an avenue for agency (Jones et al., 2019).

The unique contextual issues within South Africa highlight the importance of young people's environment when engaged in sports for development (Bruner, et al., 2017). Structures need to be well thought out to use sport as a foundation for youth development and identity construction (Jacobs et al., 2017). Narrative understandings from the perspective of those involved in the sports could engender important information. Sports has the power to be a vehicle to offer young people meaning in their lives, offering hope for future generations in this difficult post-Covid climate. If implemented poorly, sport can be a negative space for youth development overall, particularly if misguided in ways that echo the cries of South Africa's history. Therefore, in understanding the narratives of identity construction in the football youth of South Africa, one may begin to take steps towards equipping football in South Africa with the tools to transform the narratives of youth in the country from what may be seen as a

narrative of struggle, to one of hope and provide a vision of a better future to the nation's youth.

1.3 Class; Race and Masculinity

The football club which the participants are drawn from, Joburg City FC, is situated in Senderwood, Johannesburg. Senderwood is in the northeast of Johannesburg. Joburg City FC, being a football academy[1] in this area, with its own rich history positions participants in a particular way. The club is a former PSL (Premier Soccer League – the highest division of football in the country) academy. They were formerly known as Mpumalanga Black Aces Football Club. After the club sold their PSL status the academy was dissolved and renamed twice before becoming Joburg City FC. As Mpumalanga Black Aces FC, it meant that there was a clear potential pathway for players to reach professional football levels. As a result, playing for the club came with a degree of status and expectation, including expectations for behaviour and conduct as a player. The traces of these expectations still remained at the club even after the name had changed.

The participants were expected to negotiate the different intersections of their identities as a member of the football club. This often meant adapting to particular performances of identity that were different to the places where they lived in order to belong as part of the Joburg City FC academy. In narrating their negotiation of these intersections and performances of identity participants spoke to elements of class, race, and masculinity. They expressed how these elements and football constructed their sense of self in the world.

The club's rich history and being situated in Senderwood, means that they attract players from all over wider Johannesburg. As a result, a mixture of players, coaches and staff from different classes and races interact at the club. A pronounced intersection was the meeting of players from the township entering a new environment and what seemed like a new world and the class/status dynamics that were uncovered by this interaction. In some ways the interaction mimics the workings of the wider Johannesburg dynamics and the rich-poor divide and players' narratives in this project

[1] Football academy refers to a training scheme by professional football clubs that aims to scout, develop and train players to become professional footballers. When the term academy or academy football is used in the paper it refers to this level of football which is essentially a stepping stone to professional football.

spoke to the nuances within this dynamic. Within the same breath the negotiations that race and gender – specifically notions of masculinity came to the fore in participants' narratives. These are critical subjects of our time both for the wider South Africa and for adolescent boys in their negotiation of their teens and the borders of adulthood.

As such, in a time of great uncertainty in the lives of young men in South Africa, football has become somewhat of a lighthouse. Often not explicitly expressed or even known to those involved. With the rigours and false promises of academics, that can only guarantee stability for a few, as well as an ever-present temptation from the more immediately gratifying 'street life', young men have found football to be a light of hope. Hope in the present and in the distance, within an ocean of crushing pressure. Football has offered a possibility of who one can become while they are becoming, and in this way an opportunity not only to be a better self in the future, but to have their present self both be and belong. Notwithstanding its own pitfalls, football has become renowned as the "beautiful game", and this is a testament to how it belongs to everyone.

Similar to narrative and identity, the process is the event and the same can be understood of the practicing and playing of football for the young adolescent participants of this study (Hall, 2000). This is to say that with each iteration of football training, each game, each kick and all the interactions and stories that occur in between, these boys both begin and continue to change and to become (Phelan et al., 2012). Each having their own story that is both irrevocably unique but universally united. In understanding the narratives of young men from the Joburg City FC academy and how these experiences forge their identities I attempt to understand and negotiate, as they do, the self, moral and relational changes experienced by these young men both through what is said, and through what is unsaid (Squire, 2008). The context in which this negotiation occurs becomes what can be understood metaphorically as the field in which these young men play. Their fields are structured by present realities and future hopes. They are playing in a world characterised by high levels of violence, from communities where fathers are absent in many households. Playing football offers ways to belong by constituting an age-cohort community, and the hope of becoming something more in the process.

1.4 Rationale

Sport has a particularly powerful and enchanting influence in facilitating the construction of identity and the narrative of a meaningful life through participation (Holt, 2008). While the perspective of elite professional players has commanded large scale attention and celebrity status, this study focuses on the narratives of 'ordinary' adolescent boys who play football, some for recreation and some with professional aspirations (Newton et al., 2020). Seconded by Jones et al. (2018), the experiences of the youth who are physically involved in and enriched by sport has not been attended to much in the research space (Holt, 2008). Following from this, the choice of this focus is grounded in the view that sport has made far wider impacts on players than only those narrated by the media attention given to top level athletes.

The narrative has consistently been told from an outsider perspective and with the focus on individual outcomes rather than experiential narratives. As such, the narratives of youth involved in sports can engender novel perspectives on sport and its role in identity. This is an important perspective to view with reference to the role sports can play for youth development and identity construction in the present circumstances for the South African youth (Jones et al., 2014).

Being a sports player positions participants socially at various levels, intersections, and locations. This positioning is yet to be thoroughly explored within the literature on sports in youth development and identity (Jacobs & Wright, 2017). Sport may have a telling influence on gender positioning and masculinity (Carless & Douglas, 2011). This paper explores the outcomes of playing sport, with a particular focus on football. The predominant focus of outcomes has been on individual outcomes, and under a specific narrative of success, such as externally observed behaviour of youth and public awards (Jones et al., 2018). This ignores psychosocial aspects such as hope, passion and belonging that sport can provide (Bruner et al., 2017).

For some, the success that comes from playing sport is just *being* alive (a respite from the incessant pressures and struggles of poverty and being barely able to get by), while for others it is *feeling* alive (creating a life of adventure). These are elements of the meaning and impact sport can breathe into the lives of those involved (Sanders et al., 2012). Belonging and identity assist in constructing a meaningful life, a life worth

living (Carless & Douglas, 2008), which is a narrative worth retelling (Fay, 1996). As such, individual narratives that are of meaning to the identities and experiences of youth in sports are an important focus for this study.

In South Africa the narratives of adolescent boys, at this moment in time, are of critical importance. There is cause for concern about the development of South African youth in the post-Covid era. Amongst the already prevalent issues of poverty, lack of resources, a racialised economy, poor service delivery, xenophobia (Bradbury, 2020), and malnourishment in South Africa (Burnett, 2009), the issue of high youth unemployment adds further potential for young people to feel hopeless and as if there is little meaning to their lives (Gittings et al., 2021). With one of the highest rates of Gender-Based-Violence (GBV) perpetrated by men against women, understanding the narratives and identities of the future generations of men in South Africa becomes salient (StatsSA, 2021). Having to face all of the aforementioned difficulties can be traumatic for adolescents in South Africa and football may offer an intervention to manage these difficulties (Whitley et al., 2022). Additionally, a lack of autonomy over the circumstances of their lives has left South African youth with feelings of aggression and discontent. It may be the case that in this situation young men displace this aggression through GBV. Doing this may reassert their masculinity (Langa & Kiguwa, 2013) and make them feel autonomous over some aspect of their life. These circumstances highlight the need for hope and meaning amongst youth in South Africa and it is possible for sport to alleviate some of these issues in the narratives of young people's lives and offer them structure in the present and hope for the future (Fay, 1996).

Following the above rationale for this project and with the aforementioned context in mind, what follows in chapter two is a breakdown of the theoretical framework used to view and make sense of the data in the study. The theoretical framework positions the lens through which this project is interpreted. Chapter three further contains a review of the relevant literature for the project. Chapter four follows with the methodology of the project, detailing the processes with which the data was analysed to bring forth the results. In chapter five the data are analysed and interpreted bringing forth the central themes that emerged from the data. Finally, in chapter six the key results of this project are summarised, concluding with some insights about the life-worlds of the participants of this study and possibly for understanding young adolescent men and

footballers in South Africa. This chapter also includes a reflexive section which reviews the strengths and limitations of the study, the position of the researcher and what questions may be used to take the ideas of this project further.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

Chapter two below serves to ground the study within the key theoretical concepts employed to process the data that emerged. The concepts of narrative, identity, belonging, masculinity, and hope are the foundational pillars from which the stories of these adolescent boys in football can be understood. The use of narrative theory provides an open and explorative platform from which participants can express themselves in detail. Through this, participants were not as restricted in how they were expected to answer questions. As such, room was created for participants to reflect on and construct their identities through the stories they told. By exploring questions on their lives in football, they were able to collaboratively reconstruct and make sense of their senses of self through the stories of their lives and who they have become throughout that journey. Through the process of sense making and identity construction participants could further identify a sense of belonging and meaning in their worlds.

The concepts of identity and belonging offered a framework in which participants could be grounded through relationships, place, time, and their bodies. As part of making sense of their relationships with their bodies and others, elements of masculinity and how participants experienced these elements was important to the project. Finally, in understanding the lives of the participants and how they make meaning of their lives currently and going forward, hope is a concept that enabled this process. With further explanation below it can be seen how these five theoretical concepts go hand in hand to offer a rich analysis of the narratives of the young adolescent boys in the study.

2.1 Narrative theory

Narrative theory provides the primary scaffolding for this study. Squire's approach to narrative (2008) describes it as reconstructing or mirroring the human experience, which serves to offer the potential of myriad changing storylines that display the ever-changing nature of human experience. No two moments can be the same. This framework offers the ability to analyse the nature of human life from the participants subjective and personal standpoint. A standpoint from which human lives are in the form of stories even before they are told and they become restor[i]ed as they are told (Fay, 1996). In this study narrative theory will help to explore the narratives of

participants in their contradictory complexity and in their horizontal similarity, bound by both the history and context of the participants.

Narrative also enables more than just an exploration of the meaning behind stories, but in itself, and in the telling of stories, there is contained affective, aesthetic and reflexively interactive changes to the teller, the listener and the story itself (Phelan et al., 2012). As Squire (2008, p. 4) describes.

> "Narrative theory can be thought of as an experience centred approach. Critically in this theoretical framework narratives are sequential and meaningful, in that they have a temporal structure, they are definitively human, in forming an affectively charged expression of human sense making, both creating and making sense of the tellers' world".

Through this theoretical framework an understanding of the continual transformation of the participants through their narrative experience of football can be explored and its influence on their identity. Identity in this context can be thought of as a life-story (McAdams, 2001). A life-story which explores the reflexive nature of human selfhood. I re-create a story that forms me and in a similar way this offers a consideration of narrative as a world making endeavour. While engaging in narrative exchanges, participants are both explaining and (re-) creating their worlds for (and with) the researcher and for themselves. In a sense, re-creating their identities (Phelan et al., 2012).

Narratives are experiences that shape life and inform identity in the individual (Squire, 2008). It can be argued that narratives both form and express experience through the use of language (Bradbury, 2020). Language use in told narratives can allow identity to both be formed by and simultaneously form the narrative that enables the process of identity to function at any given moment (Bradbury, 2020,). Narrative allows the self, to narrate its own existence while creating said existence, within the context of the relational, locational, and social spaces in which it exists (Reissman, 2005). These aspects are therefore critical to explore within the narratives of identity construction for this study. Narrative uses past experiences as way of constructing the present identity. To understand the construction of identity in youth through sport one should investigate the youth as narrating and narrated subjects. The study, therefore, focuses

on young people's narratives as embodied, in relation to others and across time (Bradbury, 2020).

With this narrative platform scaffolding the research, the unheard stories of young adolescent football players can be broadcast, linking their experiences and providing insight into their developing identities. As such, multiple layers of analysis are enabled by narrative theory in order to engage in-depth with the life stories presented (Squire, 2008). These stories serve in a way to make sense of the past for participants, while informing their actions for their hoped for/imagined future, in the present (Fay, 1996).

2.2 Identity

Central to this study is the process of identity. Identity encompasses myriad aspects that flow fluidly between contexts. The narratives of identity for adolescent boys can be constructed on the foundation of the various concepts that influence and are influenced by each other in forming identity. With the navigation of the 'identity crisis' (Erikson, 1964) as central to adolescence, one can begin to conceptualize the use of sports in identity development (Bruner et al., 2017). Identity can be seen as an iterative process that is in perpetual motion (Hall, 1994). Identity is iteratively constructed and in motion across three primary dimensions: time, embodiment, and relationality (Bradbury, 2020). While identity is constantly changing and constructed from moment to moment, it exists simultaneously as being fixed and stable (enough) for it to be imprinted between moments in a consistent way (Baumann, 1996). Identity, as influenced by these dimensions, exists through different intersections of social relation for an individual at any given moment (Hall, 2000). Identity can occupy multiple social positions in a single moment based on these intersections.

Identity can be viewed as a temporally continuous experience of the self through interactions with the external world and with the self (Baumann, 1996). Identity is cumulative and mobile. It temporarily pins one to social positions while leaving lasting traces of these positions that spill into moments over longer periods of time which temporarily solidify identities in the social world (Hall, 2000). Temporally, identity is formed across individual life spans and across historical time. The history of Apartheid South Africa still spills out into the present, the racial divide and inequalities can still be seen (Bradbury, 2020). This impacts not only the past and present identity of South Africa(ns) but also the future. Engagement with young people's development, may

focus on hope as a reason to act in particular ways in the present, that could construct a better future (Bradbury & Clark, 2012).

The embodiment of identity emphasises that in any given moment identity exists in a physical body and is subjectively experienced through that body (Hall, 2000). In this way, physical features and experience are seen as part of what engenders the process of identity (Baumann, 1996). The embodiment of identity through race, affect and the social history of racial bodies automatically brings identity into motion throughout social interactions and in sports (Hall, 2000). The idea of embodiment is particularly pertinent to this project because of the nature of sport, specifically football. Sport is experienced majorly through the body and the body is the means with which sports players identify and express themselves within their sport. As said by Berlant (2007, p 44) " change is an impact lived on the body before anything is understood.". This explores the idea that the changes to the body experienced throughout one's lived experience are often only understood after-the-fact. In this way the changes experienced by sports players may only be understood once they are able to narrate and reflect on the stories of their experiences. Similarly, the changes to the body from sport are performed via the body and only experienced in hindsight.

Affectively, identity can be embodied through the practices in which one engages that cannot be verbally expressed but are emotionally expressed, much like the feeling invoked by laughter or gratitude (Thrift, 2004). In this affectively charged moment one is most in contact with oneself, connecting mind, body and feeling. This experience, when told, offers a dynamic experience of narrative that is expressed by the teller and imagined by the listener, stepping into the world of the other (Thrift, 2004). Identity is socially relational in that the positioning of identities happens in relation to other groups and intersecting identities, as well as the belonging that certain identifications allow. Identity connects us to and separates us from particular social spaces (Yuval-Davis, 2006), people and at times, opportunities.

2.3 Belonging

Identity informs and is informed by belonging, which can only exist within the presence of its opposite, alienation (Hall, 2000). Belonging can be described as the emotional attachment and feeling of being safe and feeling at home in a particular environment (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Belonging can be studied on the level of social locations, identifications, and emotional attachments as well as the political values it ascribes to

members (Freadkin, 2004). Across different social contexts belonging holds different value and, in this way, different levels of power. As a result of this, narrative identifications of belonging can shift and be used selectively across contexts and over time (Yuval-Davis, 2006). This fluidity in belonging allows for the oscillation between hegemonic and non-hegemonic social identifications. One such poignant social identification involves social class and socio-economic status. Belonging is often gate kept along the lines of social class and socio-economic position (Manganyi, 1973).

For young people, sport may construct a platform for belonging and create a stable environment within which to negotiate the various intersections of their identities (Sokol, 2009). The use of identity as an action of shared belonging and collective action as defined by Brubaker and Cooper (2000) can be used to understand belonging in football and team sports. When this use of identity is made manifest through collective action via the simultaneous, allied use of multiple bodies in a coherent and congruent manner, the result can be powerful. This is observable in artistic performances, collective protests of resistance and, under particular lenses, football can be viewed in this same realm. Football can equally be an experience that changes the persons experiencing it, whether just as observers or players in a team. In this way belonging can be fostered through the development of a collective self-understanding over time within a football team.

2.4 Masculinity

Connected to belonging through social relation and the body, for this project masculinity is an important concept. . Embedded in the narratives of young adolescent boys was their masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity positions men and boys in a place of social power (Donaldson, 1993). With this position of power comes socially engendered expectations such as men needing to aspire to power, status, and wealth (Langa & Kiguwa, 2013). When unable to live up to these expectations, emasculated men often turn to violent and negative means in an attempt to regain their perceived status (Langa & Kiguwa, 2013). Inherent to hegemonic masculinity is the tension and tussle in competing for positions of power (Donaldson, 1993). One may wonder then, what it means to be an adolescent boy in Johannesburg at this time in history growing into adulthood within a society in crisis. The struggles of inequality, unemployment and poverty in the current South African climate coupled by the arid economic climate left in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic appear to make it difficult to attain the

expectations imprinted by hegemonic masculinity (StatsSA, 2021), leaving what appears to be a narrative without hope.

2.5 Hope & narrative

Almost an intrinsic feature of life, hope appears to be both a commitment to growth in the potential of a tomorrow, as well as a buffer from present distress (Miller, 1988). Hope can be seen to be somewhat of a mediator of time, in bringing forth not just a perception of what is happening in the present moment but also using the memories of time past to predict, imagine and anticipate the future (Miller, 1988). So as people tend to anticipate future elements of life, the present experience of life can be carried over towards the anticipation of the next day (Bloch, 1954). It is imperative to explore the use of hope in the context of this project.

Hope is often seen in lay conversation as what Eagleton (2015,p. 12) would define as 'maladaptive optimism'. This is the expectation of a better anticipated future or prospect without reason. In this way, hope is not attached to the particular hoped-for prospect itself, nor is it attached to the self that is hoping. Authentic hope looks beyond both of these aspects towards agency and the causal opportunities for *how* this prospect can be reached (Snyder et al., 1991). Eagleton (2015) goes on to propose that authentic hope is underpinned by reason, in that features of a present experience can be identified and emphasised to render a particular future prospect as credible. This means that one has hope for the future because they are able to confront the present at its current less than ideal level. Hope is being paid forward by one's actions today, for a particular tomorrow. Hope is inextricably tied to the actions and agency of the 'hoper'. For the purposes of this project "hope is defined as a set of desires attached to strategies with which these desires are met" (Snyder et al., 1991, p287). I will also be using Meirav's (2009) idea of hope needing not to be attached to the hoped-for prospect but rather looking beyond the prospect at what else happens while going towards the prospect.

Hope is also tied to a life worth living (Scheibe, 1986), in that it opens the imagination to a better future than what is happening in the present (Bradbury, 2020). In the present South Africa, hope could be central to the narratives of young people. Without some sort of hope within the difficulties faced by youth in South Africa in the

intergenerational wake of apartheid and the more immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this highly unequal society, a narrative of helplessness and destitution can fester. Hope can be engendered in multiple ways. Hope can take place in the form of an idealized vision of escape from present difficulties or the hope for a better future (Bradbury, 2020). Hope can also be formed through looking back at history in looking at difficulties that have been overcome, like Apartheid, to motivate present action to create a better future. (Bradbury, 2020). Hope can importantly also be encouraged through sport and the narratives the sport affords young people through a life worth living (Scheibe, 1986). In this light, hope, in tandem with the aforementioned core concepts can colour the potentially dark narratives of young people in South Africa. The data from this study can be interpreted within the conceptual frameworks explored in this chapter. These concepts are tied to the literature surrounding sports development, which will be further explored in chapter three.

Chapter 3: Literature review

Chapter three is an exploration of the current landscape of literature that exists within the sports and youth development contexts. This chapter shows the value of the literature that exists in the sport and youth development domain while highlighting the space in which the current study fits. It is pertinent to begin with the following quote:

> *"I had a moment of mixed joy and anguish, … I felt that the moment of a lifetime had come. There was no pain, only a great unity of movement and aim. The world seemed to stand still or did not exist…" – Roger Bannister in Guttman (1976, p. 77).*

As described by Roger Bannister in his then record breaking first 4-minute mile, sport had engulfed him into a separate world, a world where pain ceased to exist, a moment of pure joy (Scheibe, 1986). In this moment, a moment of a lifetime, sport had breathed meaning into life, and subsequently into his identity. Sports can construct for individuals transformative experiences (Jacobs & Wright, 2017). While a single sporting moment can elicit incredible power and influence on the life narrative and identity of an individual, sport can equally provide meaning over the course of a lifetime (Jones et al., 2018). As Ronaldinho (Bell, 2007) once said: "I learned all about life with a ball at my feet". As much as these are specific individual narratives, a similar sentiment is echoed throughout the literature in sport for youth development and identity. For example, Bruner et al., (2017) proposes that sport is a vehicle for social identity and positive youth development. Similar ideas are expressed by Jones et al. (2014) as well as Jacobs et al. (2017) amongst others.

Within the literature of sports narratives, identity and youth development, there is a specific focus on identity and the sense of belonging that young people develop (Bruner et al., 2017). There is research that suggests sport can teach skills that are transferable to various life situations in ways that are beneficial and may even be essential to positive identity development in youth (Jones et al., 2018). The qualities that sport can imbue in the lives and identities of human beings throughout their development become critically important when analysed through the lens of how life and narrative reflexively construct one another (Esin, 2011). The value of sport and

sporting narratives for development appear well researched internationally, but there has been little research in this area throughout South Africa (Sanders et al., 2012).

3.1 The role of sport in education and development

As highlighted by Sanders et al. (2012), the poor relationship between educational policy and sport in South Africa has further marginalised this area of research. Traditionally, in South Africa, sport has been side-lined in educational policy because it is not academic and is thus perceived to have little benefit outside of maintaining fitness (Sanders et al., 2012). One might argue that if more research and focus is given to sport in this developmental context, sport could be used as a powerful medium of education in relation to such critical developmental aspects as social cohesion, identity, and self-worth. Sporting activity has been narrated as being able to 'make you feel good', bringing enjoyment and optimism to life (Carless & Douglas, 2011), which influences mental health, identity, as well as physical health. For many young people, sport plays a crucial role in the development of individual and collective identity as evidenced in narratives of belonging that sport induces (Carless & Douglas, 2011). While growing-up, belonging has an embedded influence on identity (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Belonging can even be viewed as a central influence on social cohesion (Freadkin, 2004). In the context of South Africa and the residues of Apartheid (Manganyi, 2013), social cohesion may guide one towards a more hopeful narrative of belonging and of identity. There exists social and political work that is performed through belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Social status, citizenship and access to places are influential on identity and are swayed by belonging. In a post-Apartheid South Africa, fostering social cohesion through sport may be helpful in mending the scars that remain.

Sport can inform the narrative of a life 'worth living', introducing elements of adventure and risk (Scheibe, 1986). The interaction and overlap between the theoretical framework above and the literature review speaks to how the five core concepts in the framework can assist in constructing lives of meaning through sport. Scheibe (1986) suggests that a life worth living comprises of risk taking and adventure, which add colour to the mundane monochrome of daily living. Sport engages participants in games that add a mystery and adventure to life narratives. These games allow for victory or defeat (or draw), and the outcome cannot be known before-hand (Scheibe, 1986). Often, there are stakes attached to these games as well as the unpredictability

of chance (weather, a mistake from the opponent) that serve to add not only high stakes to each moment but an intense thrill to which a life worth living can be ascribed (Scheibe, 1986). A life worth living becomes a narrative worth telling and because of this one is inclined to engage in these kinds of lives repeatedly.

Sport in these ways can be seen in particular socio-economic lenses because of the stakes associated with victory and defeat (Scheibe, 1986). For example, the social status and social positioning that comes with being a supporter and/or player for a particular team positions the individual in a multitude of ways. Being on the winning side of the Soweto derby between Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates means being able to flaunt your affiliation with an air of dominance in social settings (Fletcher, 2010). While for players it can mean receiving monetary compensation, which in itself improves socioeconomic status. These stakes resonate with socioeconomic positions within society and with particular constructions of gender and masculinity (Burnett, 2015). Being part of the winning team means association with success, wealth and dominance which form part of the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, in competing for the bragging rights of victory, the entertainment and stakes engender a narrative worth telling and a life worth living through Scheibe's (1986) lens. This may be part of fans' obsession with keeping up to date with sports highlights and team news or sports being a major topic of conversation in many places of gathering.

The relationship among fans in sports reflects the relational elements of identity (Bruner et al., 2017). Fans support teams because they identify with them and this community of people who share a common identity. This may create a similar feeling of identity and belonging that is experienced by the players of sport These feelings of belonging are also located in place. Sports teams are located and based in particular areas, and this mutual tie to a location strengthens the feelings of belonging and identity between teams and fans, locations and people. (Cote & Levine, 1987). When identity is experienced with others and through the body, such as in sports, it can have a powerful impact on the ever changing yet stable state of one's identity over time (Cote & Levine, 1987).

With identity in mind, sports can help narrate a life worth living and aid youth development. With reference to young adolescents and the identity crisis that often presents at this stage of development sport can create a stable environment for young

people to negotiate this crisis (Cote & Levine, 1987, P281), The adolescent identity crisis in Eriksonian terms is a period of life that must be navigated in the development of adolescents into adulthood (Sokol, 2009). The identity crisis centres on the confusion and tension experienced in adolescence between the individual's internal self and the socialized external expectations experienced by the individual (Cote & Levine, 1987). Sport can offer a stable and structured surrounding to continue their identity development in relationship with teammates often going through the same narrated life experience. Surroundings like this create important networks of belonging for young Black boys in South Africa's heavily racialised society (Swart et al., 2010). Some of these adolescent boys are also battling the alienation and violence induced by xenophobia and the struggles in belonging associated with migration (Peacock-Villada et al., 2007).

3.2 Sport and identity

Identity has been described by Stuart Hall (2008) as a continuous process that sutures one into position. Identification temporarily stitches individuals into positions in society. Importantly, identity is formed through the existence of difference and influences power relations when constructed in social spaces. Aspects like race, gender and socio-economic status encompass some of the hierarchical power dynamics that are embedded in identity (Hall, 2000). The individual is, in this way, produced in the process of becoming Hall (2000) expands on identity with reference to the ideas of Louis Althusser, explaining that identity is relationally grounded in society's "hailing" or calling of individuals towards membership with particular aspects of identity. These include aspects such as masculinity, race, and age (Hall, 2000). People behave in ways that align with the 'hailing' from society towards particular, socially hierarchical identities (Freadkin, 2004). Society's calls to identification are not linear and take places between myriad intersections. A homosexual football player is hailed through non-hegemonic masculinity by sexual orientation but still situated in the intersections of hegemonic masculinity that are perpetuated in football culture (Donaldson, 1993). Belonging and identity are important and complex aspects of a meaningful life (Jones et al., 2014). Being a part of sports teams influences belonging, behaviour and self-perception and as such influences narratives of identity (Bruner et al., 2017).

Identity can be viewed along myriad dimensions and one important axis of these is categorical identity compared to relational identity. Categorical identity may position

football players generally as part of the team they are contracted to, while relational identification explores a more nuanced exploration of who these players are in relation to one another both by looking at their self-identification, through their narratives of self and their identification of themselves by others, be it their coaches, parents, or teammates (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Self-identification informs a dialectical process between one's internal and external experiences which continually informs and alters who one is (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

In sport, an individual can express what is mental through a series of embodied physical movements that not only mirror their identity but simultaneously create it through the body (Bruner, et al., 2017). Sport is an avenue through which identity can be expressed and constructed. In South Africa, sports like all domains of social life under apartheid, was highly racialised with rugby being viewed historically as a White sport in comparison to football viewed more as a Black sport (Burnett, 2015). In other words, sports are not apolitical and have evaluative connotations for the bodies that play and relate to them. The fans of these two sports also reflect this racial divide (Fletcher, 2010). Embodiment of identity in South Africa will naturally galvanise racial tensions not least while Black bodies remain socially devalued (Canham, 2017).

In this way, the sense of community created by being part of a team can co-construct a young person's identity by influencing their behaviours and sense of self in line with a reflexive responsibility felt towards the team and their teammates and vice versa (Jones et al., 2019). With identity in constant flux in relation to subjective experiences and the social environment, the impact of the surrounding community on the development of the identities of young people comes into focus (Hall, 2000). This aspect of communal responsibility can also be seen in the larger context of team supporters, parents, and community surrounding team. In belonging to a larger community, the identity of young participants is temporarily tied to the ways of living and meaning making of the community at that moment in history (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Narratives of youth are coloured by the identification with and belonging to a community and the desire to respect, protect and uphold the values of the community, who might be thought of as a family of sorts (Bruner et al., 2017).

The possibility of being a 'winner' in sport offers the participants hope but also the chance to improve their social status, identity, and value (Burnett, 2015). Identifying

as a winner can also improve the positive self-regard experienced by the participant which would aid self-perception and self-confidence which are important aspects of development and identity (Bruner et al., 2017). Leadership development and the potential of collective identity can also be fostered through sport (Burnett, 2015). Developing the individual while simultaneously building the community through sport offers a more secure and sustainable environment for identity formation for youth development at both an individual and community level (Jones et al., 2019). Collective identity within the community generates incredible power through the feeling of belonging in a shared narrative with others (Scheibe, 1986).

Sport, when analysed critically, can encompass all aspects of the identity process (Hall, 2000). It can at any given moment involve the embodiment, temporality and relationality that constitute identity. When viewed with a more intricate lens, elements such as hope, belonging and self-development can further decode how sport can be central in identity construction with its mutual ties to locations, people, and communities.

3.3 Sport and possibilities for hope

Sport can bring meaning to the life narrative through adventure (Scheibe, 1986). Scheibe (1986) offers that sport brings 'safe' excitement to life and creates a narrative worth retelling for participants. Narratives are seen as stories of experience that we tell others to narrate our lives while engaging in the construction of one's identity simultaneously (Squire, 2008). The thrill provided by the possibility of victory or defeat, the excitement of particular aspects of the game being decided by chance as well as the often-dramatic sense of anticipation, action and impact created in sports brings not only adventure but hope to the lives of young people involved in sports (Scheibe, 1986). Participating in sport creates the hope, that victory is possible, that fun can be had, and it creates a moment of respite from the mundane aspects of daily life like poverty, violence, and struggle in the context of South Africa (Burnett, 2015). This momentary active escape may enliven in participants feelings of renewed morale (Carless & Douglas, 2011), a potential springboard for hope.

Sport offers meaningful life narratives from the perspective of action, achievement, and relationships (Carless & Douglas, 2008). Young people are offered a space in which to attain agency over their lives through action in sport (Holt, 2008). They are offered an opportunity to achieve various objectives and goals while building

relationships with teammates, coaches, and supporters – although the importance of a supportive system around the individual appears evident here (Carless & Douglas, 2008). Not only are connections with others stimulated by sports but also connection with self via expression of mind and body together, which culminates to offer life changing experiences and constructions of identity (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). The embodied physical use of the body for expression in sport has been narrated to positively influence mental health (Carless & Douglas, 2011). These experiences can form a narrative worth retelling and a life of hope and meaning for young people.

Passion can be defined as the desire to invest time and energy into an activity that is perceived as important and liked by other people and the self (Vallerand, 2007). In addition to the above, passion for sport may positively impact identity and fulfilment in life (Vallerand, 2007), offering purpose to a young person's life. Within the difficult context facing youth in South Africa, having agency to position themselves within spaces that reflect their identity can be allied with hope to instil a renewed sense of meaning to a life. Sport can offer the opportunity to alter one's narrative of suffering to that of achievement, agency and of positive relationships, and thereby form identity grounded in these positive aspects (Carless & Douglas, 2008).

Sport may offer the opportunity for youth to imagine a different future compared to the present, a future of the status, fame and finance that comes with elite sport. This may come true for the few talented (and lucky) enough young sports players (Carless & Douglas, 2011). But for those not sufficiently talented (and lucky) to play sport at an elite level, this may be a false hope or 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2007). However, the narrative of adventure that comes with engaging in sport may have a less specific formulation and colour the identity of adolescent boys with a sense of adventure coupled with the enjoyment that comes with playing sport (Scheibe, 1986). The necessity of adolescents having the space to identify with professional sport without the false hope and pressure of having to desire to be professional is important in avoiding the potential of 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2011), and subsequently disappointment in the futures of adolescent boys in South Africa. It would be cruel to the participants of sports for it to be a must that they all compete to play professionally when in fact that is impossible. Having a space where sport is acknowledged while also making room for other future endeavours to exist alongside it would assist players who 'don't make it' in having a less precarious future.

3.4 Sport and belonging

The opportunity to belong is an essential part of the narratives of youth in sport (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). In creating belonging sport can transcend barriers that are difficult to move past in other ways outside of sport. Barriers like race and language can be overcome by the belonging and mutual identification that playing sport creates (Burnett, 2009). Sports can be much like an embodied language in itself. When young people come together in sport, racial tensions interaction may be subdued, particularly in South Africa (Alegi & Bolsmann, 2010a),By the language and connection formed through sport itself. This allows belonging for previously marginalised groups (Bruner et al., 2017). Historically, there is a disjuncture between the experiences of the post-apartheid generation and the generations that lived through apartheid, particularly in black communities (Dolby & Cornbleth, 2001). With lived experiences and circumstances being so different between generations, there appears to be confusion in which direction the present youth should go. For past generations it was about dismantling racial discrimination. Currently South African youth appear to be under pressure and at a crossroads. Sport and peer group relationships may be alternative resources to assist in alleviating the pressures in this context. Football often serves as a potential conduit for the expression, relating and formation of shared group identities over time (during the whole football season each year) for young boys.

Shared narratives of belonging within clubs from supporters or players over time can engender bonds that last beyond decades. These are bonds that can endure throughout history and into the future (Fletcher, 2010). Such examples can be seen in football clubs themselves like Orlando Pirates FC and Kaizer Chiefs FC. Orlando Pirates being the older of the two was formed in 1937. While Kaizer Chiefs were formed in 1970. The two clubs unify an identification and affiliation with the historically significant and racially scarred city of Soweto. The belonging associated with the identification with these two clubs spans over the course of at least half a century (Fletcher, 2010), enduring the tension and turmoil of Apartheid. Orlando Pirates' and Kaizer Chiefs' roles as a Soweto based clubs during the Apartheid era means they are often experienced as more than just a football club to their supporters and players, Black or White (Hauge, 2007). They are parts of identity and the living memories of overcoming the Apartheid tragedy. The lingering racial meanings associated with Soweto and the uprising of 1976 are inherently tied to the clubs. Socially this may

position the identities of supporters as politically on the ‘right’ side of history because of the strides made by these two clubs and football unions in ameliorating some of the wounds of Apartheid at the time (Alegi & Bolsmann, 2010a). This sense of self-identification of who one is, in relation to the group they belong to and the social location of this group and the individual within the group deeply curates how one is prepared to act (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

Manganyi (1973) engages the ideas and experiences of “being black in the world”. These ideas offer the platform to think about sport through the lens of black bodies. Racially in South Africa football has become a platform for the positive identification and celebration of black bodies (Leonard, 2006). Football is often experienced as a space for young Black boys in South Africa to relate, express and co-create identities for themselves and each other. Football becomes an arena where Black consciousness, pride and togetherness can often be forged, while not completely closing the space off to white players bridging the chiasm forged by apartheid Conversely, this celebration of Black bodies inevitably opens the door for the simultaneous commodification of Black bodies, as has been experienced outside of sport as well (Leonard, 2006).

In South Africa’s context, the racial identity of football in the past was as a predominantly ‘Black’ sport compared with rugby, a mostly White sport (Fletcher, 2010). During the apartheid era, football influenced change in the breaking of racial barriers. By enabling Black and White players to compete against each other, segregationist policies were directly challenged by football. This inherently linked football, race, and politics. During apartheid protagonists like Jomo Sono and Kaizer Motaung pushed the racial boundaries that existed in football. Jomo Sono bought a formerly White football club, then known as Highlands Park FC, and renamed it to Jomo Cosmos FC. He did this as a statement of Black power in South Africa (Alegi & Bolsmann, 2010b).

Given these historical lineages, different sporting codes have historical affiliations with different social classes and as such, tie players to belongings related to different (racialised) socio-economic statuses. The ease of access to different sports illustrates this socio-economic gatekeeping. Compared to a sport like rugby or cricket which require more resources in order to be played, football requires little equipment and

can be played almost anywhere, like in the streets. This means that football in South Africa (as elsewhere in the world) is easily embraced by working class children. However, it must be noted, that sport is becoming increasingly non-racialised which offers young people a space in which different races can interact on the basis of a shared passion (Burnett, 2015). This offers youth more culturally diverse interactions and can foster development and tolerance of racial difference (Burnett, 2015). Sport may thus provide a forum to mediate the lingering racial tensions and suffering from Apartheid in various sectors. At the same time, it should be acknowledged how football is has also become more commercialised and as a business it seems to have marginalised the less wealthy through ticket prices and exorbitant salaries (Fletcher, 2010).

Sport also offers lower socio-economically classed schools and youth the opportunity to meet, interact and compete with youth on the opposite end of the socioeconomic spectrum in challenging the dissociation of the upper class in South Africa from the realities and struggles of the majority (Burnett, 2015). This is a narrative that has often been marginalised. Within South Africa's racialised history and present conditions of socio-economic inequality, sport may offer one of the few opportunities for Black youth from lower-income backgrounds and more affluent (predominantly) White youth from higher socio-economic environments to mix on an equal footing (Burnett, 2015). This opens the door for different experiences for youth across socio-economic statuses with potential to learn from one another and adds to the adventure of new experiences in young lives (Burnett, 2009).

Belonging in football is more about the social bonds created by the interaction than by the physical space itself. The meaning that football brings to community members supersedes the physical characteristics of where they are playing (Grønlund, 2021). Being a part of a community in which you regularly interact over in a shared embodied practice becomes the central focus for community members within football.

3.4 Sport and life skills transferability

Over time, sport has been shown to influence positive youth development through skills acquisition (Jacobs & Wright, 2017). These skills are transferable to life aspects outside of the sporting domain (Jones et al, 2018). Skills such as discipline, motivation, teamwork, leadership, autonomy, competence, social interacting, and enjoyment may be learned by young people through sport (Jones at al., 2018). The discipline of having

to train every day, might be transferred to the discipline needed to maintain a job as an adult (Jacobs & Wright, 2017). The opportunity to be disciplined offers the opportunity to be seen and storied as disciplined which feeds into the co-creation of identity, by the individual and their social world (McAdams, 2001). Particular identity attributes have higher social values and positions.

Jacobs and Wright (2017) say that individual behaviour can be altered because of the impact it will have on the sports team. The responsibility of individual actions affecting the team can teach young people teamwork and the skill of contributing to and being responsible for outcomes in a selfless way. This responsibility can teach youth to prioritize the greater good over themselves (Jacobs & Wright, 2017). This may teach young people empathy and perspective-taking which are important social skills outside of sport itself. (Sanders et al., 2012). The skills and experiences achieved through sport can also assist in the channelling of aggression in healthier ways. Particularly for adolescent males, at a time during their development when aggression and identity confusion is increased, a space to manage and understand their masculinity would be critical.

3.5 Sport and masculinity

Hegemonic masculinities are often sustained and perpetuated in football from the idealized idols and the perks of stardom to the aggression and toughness narrative in football (Langa & Kiguwa, 2013). This is particularly important because of the global reach that football now has. These narratives of hegemonic masculinity can even be found in the positions players play and the oscillating measures of masculinity associated with each. For example, it is widely seen that strikers in football are the stars of the team and the most desired players, but they are often seen as ‘soft’, while defenders are associated with robustness, aggression and being tough, maintaining the hierarchical and aggressive elements of masculinity respectively.

Football may also offer the opportunity to experience wide ranges of emotion for hegemonically masculine boys (Banks, 2005). Sadness, elation, frustration, and the myriad emotions that can be experienced through football matches lends space for unified emotional experience and connection (Clowes et al., 2013). Some boys may not have space for such emotional experiences in their home environments and it could be argued that football may soften their masculinities and allow for emotional expression.

However, despite doing immense good, sport may not always be entirely positive for development and identity (Burnett, 2015). Holt and Neely (2011) allude to the idea that when sport occurs in unsupportive environments the participating youth can be exposed to the overly intense pressures of competition, which for some can produce negative self-perceptions and self-esteem (Cote & Levine, 1987). During the adolescent identity crisis faced by young adolescent males in sport, toxic masculinities may emerge because of the pressures and competition around sports and the ways participants cope with these (Sokol, 2009). It is also notable that this competition and these pressures can increase substance use in adolescent male sports players. Substances are often used in order to improve performance or to relieve the young individual from the pressures surrounding sport (Holt & Neely, 2011).

An implicit negative associated with sports in any capacity is the injury risk associated with participation. Injury in and of itself can be detrimental to development and self-perception and only becomes worse when coupled with the negative mental difficulties that come with injury (Holt, 2008). Injury can sever the mind-body relationship and perceived value of one's body (Holt & Neely, 2011). Identity is embodied and therefore physical injury in sports can negatively impact identity and perceptions of self-worth in participants. Injury may emasculate the hegemonically masculine body in that injury can represent a perceived weakness or lack in the body which contradicts the social expectations ascribed to masculine bodies and influences their help-seeking behaviour (Wasylkiw & Clairo, 2018).

Finally, sport can also develop into the formation of obsessive passion (Vallerand, 2007). This is often a predisposing factor for injury for participants but also creates a loss in identity outside of the sport for the individual. This leaves the individual often isolated and unable to perceive themselves as of value outside of the sport – which can be a potentially damaging mental framework to adopt, given the potential for injury in sport (Vallerand, 2007). It is in this light that, policy and structure in sporting contexts needs to be streamlined, refined, directional and, importantly, based on research (Jacobs et al., 2017). It is clear that there are multiple systems involved in sports and its impact on identity. These systems need to be assessed critically if sport is to fulfil its potential as a vehicle for positive youth development and narratives in South Africa (Bruner et al., 2017).

An understanding of the historical, locational, theoretical contexts of the study were discussed in chapters one and two. In chapter three the current literature in the field was explored and exposed the gap that this project seeks to fill. Chapter four below discusses the methodology used in undertaking this project.

Chapter 4 - Methods

4.1 Methodology

Chapter four explores the methods used in undertaking the data collection, interpretation and analysis of the data in the study. Descriptions of the methodology, research questions and the participants form part of chapter four, while the data analysis methods and ethical considerations end the chapter. The study is rooted within qualitative research designs. More specifically, it is grounded in the constructionist paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005). This paradigm is underpinned by the notions that reality is subjective and is centred on the premise that subjective reality is constructed through both individual perception and the social and political environment in which it occurs (Ezzy, 2002). Narrative is linked to constructionism in that narrative is grounded in the idea that identity and experience is constructed subjectively by the individual and the social structures in which they exist (Esin, 2011). This framework is particularly pertinent to the study because the data collected was in the form of subjective stories told by the individual participants. This framework allowed for such data to be analysed through various data analysis methods which use narratives as the site for analysis.

Using narratives to understand the identity constructions of this group reveals important perspectives on adolescent identity in young men in South Africa. Analysing the narratives gave insights into the subjective perspectives that help construct the identities of young people involved in football by looking at the structure of and themes in their narratives (Hall, 2000). Narrative methods “do political work” (Reissman, 2005), and allow this research to analyse the racially embodied aspects of participants’ identities (Bradbury, 2020). This has the potential to re-imagine the social hierarchies of belonging and alienation, dominant and oppressed identities as well as race and masculinity. Narratives open a platform for the voice of marginalised groups to be amplified (Fay, 1996). These aspects of the research design link directly to the theoretical frameworks mentioned in the previous section.

4.2 Research questions:

How does football inform identity construction and belonging for young men in South Africa ?

How do the experiences of young football players in South Africa influence their negotiation of their masculinity?

How does football inform the self-narratives of adolescent players?

4.3 Participants

The study used a purposeful snowball convenience sample (Taherdoost, 2016) of young football players from the Joburg City FC academy. The use of this sampling method is relevant because of the time constraints faced by the researcher at the master's level of study. This sample also offers convenient access to the researcher. It is notable that a study of this kind benefits from this type of sample because the data that emerged was in-depth as a result of the well-defined inclusion criteria. This club is located in the Northeast of Johannesburg. Although participants come from and live in other areas, it is acknowledged that a sample as homogenous as this could reduce generalizability of the study to other contexts and areas within South Africa. The target sample consisted of boys aged 13 to 19, who play football at Joburg City FC and were selected within these inclusion criteria to participate in the study. Further inclusion for this sample was for participants to be relatively fluent in English in order to fully understand and be able to respond to the research questions. This age group is pertinent to the study because 13 to 19 is a stage in development where, in line with Erikson's stages of development, young people experience intense transformations in identity physically, mentally and relationally (Sokol, 2009).

The sample is relevant for this study as it offered narrative data with regards to how football is experienced in the development of these young men and how it may have given meaning to their life narratives. The ideal sample size for qualitative research is considered to be eight to 10 participants. This is partly because any number higher than 10 may hinder the completion of this research within the given time constraints, but also because this number is likely to provide good saturation (Taherdoost, 2016). The ethics of working with participants in this age group meant that the researcher had to pay close attention to the vulnerability, anonymity, consent, feedback and confidentiality within the sample. These elements will be further expanded upon in the ethics section below.

The participant information here offers insights into the participants in order to bring context into who they are throughout the analysis. All of the participants played for the Joburg City FC academy at the time of the interviews. All of the participants were of

South African nationality, although from different tribes. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of participants. The pseudonyms in the paper are in the form of novel nicknames given to participants by the researcher to protect their identities. The nicknames were chosen as links to the participants' descriptions of how they play. The pseudonyms being the participants' nicknames also serve as a way of ensuring that the reader has a closer sense who the participants are.

- Speed was a 13-year-old Black[2] Sepedi speaking boy and he was eager to be interview but presented as quite shy and timid in his interview. He did become more comfortable as the interview progressed. He responded in short answers and seemed to be a bit awkward in how he responded. He was the first participant interviewed by the researcher which may have also contributed to the length and depth of his answers. He expressed that his nickname came from being a fast player. At the time of the interview, he was doing his Grade 8 year in school.
- Action was a 16-year-old Black isiZulu speaking boy. He had a quiet confidence about himself and presented with a humble manner around the club facilities. He had a laid-back style about him and was excited to do the interview. (We briefly trained together when he joined the senior team for a few training sessions). At the time of the interview, he was doing his Grade 11 year in school.
- Worker was a 17-year-old Coloured presenting boy, who identified as Black. He was the captain of two teams at the time. He presented with a tough but humble confidence. He was proud to have been asked to be interviewed. During the interview he was calm and expressive. He was open to discuss his story and seemed to enjoy the interview. He had quite a strong accent. He was doing his matric year in school at the time of the interview.
- Chief, as he prefers to be called, was an 18-year-old Black isiXhosa speaking boy. He was sociable and expressive in the interview and seemed happy to be able to share his story. He was animated in his interview and said it felt like a stress relief to be able to speak about his life and football after the interview.

[2] The race labels included here, namely Black, Coloured and White refer to the racial demographics that participants in the study identified with.

He seemed to present as focused and confident. He was doing his first year at tertiary education at the time of the interview.

- Surprise was a 19-year-old Black isiZulu speaking boy. He presented as a quiet person but was able to be engaged and was approachable. He described himself as quiet and in the interview, he seemed to think quite deeply about questions and became increasingly animated as the interview progressed. He was doing his first year at tertiary education at the time of the interview.
- Winger was an 18-year-old White Portuguese speaking boy. He presented as a confident but quiet person. He described himself as playful once you get to know him. He was open and warm in answering the questions during the interview. He had a humble way of being in the interview and was honest in his answers despite some of the sadness that was visible as he answered questions. He was completing his matric year in school at the time of the interview.
- Striker was a 16-year-old White English-speaking boy. He had recently signed for the team (6 months before the interview). During the interview he was open with his answers, and he engaged with questions thoroughly. He had a steeliness about him and appeared confident in his demeanour. He answered questions with a lot of thought and honesty. He was doing his Grade 11 year in school at the time of the interview. He was the only player who did not have a nickname from his teammates or family and the pseudonym used here is based on the position he plays.
- Viper was an 18-year-old Coloured boy. He came across as a shy character. He was eager to speak about his football experiences although he found difficulty in expressing himself verbally. As the interview went on, he seemed to get more comfortable. At the time of the interview, he had finished matric but expressed that he had no options for furthering his studies.

4.4 Data collection

This study utilised semi-structured narrative interviews. . The questions asked in the interview were open ended and asked participants for detailed long-form answers in the form of stories. This was aimed at collecting data in the form of the participants' narratives, enabling them to construct and tell stories about their subjective experiences of their lives. These questions as well as the additional prompting

questions can be found as part of Appendix A. The questions explored topics around the participants' experiences of living in Johannesburg, playing football, relationship building and schooling.

Six of the interviews were conducted after players had finished their weekly league matches and the other two interviews were conducted before players began their first training session of the week. Four of the interviews took place in the administration office of the club while the other four took place at the club's lunch area when it was vacant and quiet. Before asking the specific narrative questions, the interviewer began with some general ice-breaking questions to build rapport and settle participants into the interview. By the end of the ice-breaking questions participants had often begun telling stories of where their nicknames came from and how their football journeys began. This offered a smooth transition into the other narrative focused questions in the interview schedule. All of the interviews ranged between 40 minutes to an hour with the exception of one interview that lasted only 25 minutes.

4.5 Data analysis

As the building blocks of narrative language is a powerful tool for constructing identities (Bradbury, 2020,). Narratives are a central means of human sense making (Squire, 2008). In making sense of identities narratives can be analysed in different ways. Hermeneutics, the area of knowledge that deals with interpretations, would say that narratives can be analysed on the levels of surface meaning and latent meaning (Josselson, 2004). Surface meaning assumes that the narrator is the master of their own subjective experience and takes the verbatim narrative of the teller as truth (Josselson, 2004). Latent meaning posits that there is more meaning to be made below the surface of what has been narrated, placing the interpreter in a position to make inferences on what the narrator is meaning on a deeper level than what has been said (Josselson, 2004). Using a blend of surface and latent meaning, this study employed a narrative thematic analysis as the method of data analysis (Smith, 2016). This method enabled the researcher to use what is narrated by participants to analyse in-depth, and on different levels, the major themes in how participants construct identity through narratives in football.

Using thematic narrative analysis in the sporting context helped explore the life experiences of participants (Smith, 2016). A thematic narrative analysis explores the dominant themes that emerge from the participants' narratives and analyse these

themes to explore their surface and latent meanings (Smith, 2016). This method analyses the meanings attached to the narratives of participants in a subjective way. The element of subjectivity provides rich and intimate details of the narratives narrated by participants while offering the researcher the ability to make inferences and make deeper meaning of what is not said explicitly but may exist in the narratives of participants (Smith & Sparkes, 2008).

During the data analysis the researcher self-transcribed the interviews in order to begin re-engaging with the data. After transcribing the interviews, the data were analysed iteratively, following both deductive and inductive approaches (Squire, 2008). Using the theoretical framework as a point of reference the researcher read the transcripts several times in search of themes linked to this framework across participants' narratives. At the same time, while re-reading the data the researcher allowed aspects of participant interviews that were common between participants to emerge as central themes. This iterative and reflexive process was repeated, enabling the clustering and organisation of the final themes and sub-themes. The themes that emerged were as follows: Self-development; Kasi (Kasi is the colloquial term often used to describe the township areas in South Africa); Joburg City FC; Constructions of manhood and the Pandemic. Each of these themes has subthemes which explore the nuances of the themes in more detail in the results section to follow.

The research offers insight into the experiences of young men in relation to one of the most popular games in the world. It hopes to offer a more in-depth understanding of what football means to those who play it at various levels but also why the game itself is so important to bringing meaning to the lives of its followers. This was done by analysing the complexities, dualities and dialectics behind the game. As is with the results below, there are incredibly nuanced complexities which overlap and blend into one another, such as the links between injury and pressure, or fatherhood and masculinity. As a result, the themes and subthemes are to serve as a guide/coach, while weaving/dribbling through the complex field of life as a footballer. This structure is aimed at assisting the reader with maintaining a coherent structure in understanding and interpreting the results. This structure also ensures that the narratives of participants are retold in a way that represents the participants clearly as individuals and as a group.

With that said, football is also a story of two sides which are in constant dialectical relation, much like life. For all the good in football, there comes with it a lot of bad. This may, in a sense, be imprinting players with somewhat of a blueprint for managing life's ebbs and flows but now in an environment that they love, with consequences not quite as severe as life and death as was once experienced by the researcher.

4.6 Reflexivity

The use of narrative semi-structured interviews offered the researcher multiple positions of analyst, interviewer and re-teller. The researcher has vast experience in sport and in this way has an insider perspective into the usefulness of football in life narratives and meaning making (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). Conversely this position may have filtered the views of the researcher within the analysis towards painting sport and football in a favourable light, although the negative aspects of sport and footballs have been expressed in the literature and explored in the results section (Jacobs et al., 2017).

As the interviewer, the researcher notes how their relationship with and position within the Joburg City FC community may have impacted the data collection. As former club captain of the first team at Joburg City FC, the researcher may have engendered aspects of social desirability bias within the community and potential bias in the participants' answers. During the analysis it was observed that participants appeared not to be overly worried about how they were perceived by the researcher but rather participants were excited to express their perspectives on football in a formal setting. As a Black male from Zimbabwe who also plays football like the participants, the researcher could have had implicit biases and blind spots with regards to interpreting the data. During analysis these blind spots were carefully looked out for through the supervision space. It is noteworthy how the relationship the researcher had with the Joburg City FC community benefited the study because rapport was easier to build with participants, which elicited more in-depth and sensitive data which was ideal for this type of study. The researcher was also better able to understand and analyse the terminology and experiences narrated by participants given their history in the sport and in the community. English was not the first language for all participants, and although they are all proficient, it did at times make it harder for participants to express an authentic narrative in English to the researcher in certain parts of their stories.

Participants did use their vernacular language at times to get their point across and these words were translated in the results section via footnotes where appropriate.

As an insider-outsider researcher, who played for the same club and shared similar experiences to a lot of the participants, the research was in some ways a personal historical experience. It mirrored something of the difficulties of navigating adolescence as a young male in South Africa for the researcher. Sitting at the time of writing being an emerging therapist and during the interviews and analysis one could not have helped but to wonder what the future holds for the participants. As the researcher had never imagined themself to be in the position of interviewer, researcher and therapist at that point in their life.

Questions that arose for the researcher during the process of the project were whether there are enough spaces to support young footballers through what at the time seems to be the unthinkable life without football? How can I, as the researcher, contribute to creating a safe landing for these young people who at times place all their aspirations into making a career out of football. At times during the interviews, I would think of asking if the participants ever thought about what would happen if they did not make it in football as they hoped. It felt like this unsaid question and feeling was always in the room when speaking about aspirations in football but it was never named. Almost as if there was an agreement between footballers on a similar journey. The unspeakable. It felt like speaking about it meant giving up on its own.

After the interviews, many participants thanked the researcher, although it felt like the researcher should have been thanking them. Participants said it felt like a relief to speak to someone who understood football and was interested in their journey. This reflected to me how lonely and difficult the football journey in South Africa can be. They seemed eager to speak about their experiences in football while making sense of their lives and what made them who they are at that point in their lives. This opened the researcher to the question of whether this is something that should be available to all young men in the country. Access to a space where they can express the emotions they are/were raised not to feel or think about and how maybe football can be a conduit in the creation of this space.

Finally, as an insider outsider researcher understanding the stories of the boys was also an understanding of myself and what football has given me, and it seems like for

all the participants that football has been a grounding force in their upbringing in the absence of fathers, structure, or opportunity. In transcribing the interviews I've learned about what football has meant to me and taught me in my life.

4.7 Ethical considerations

The ethics surrounding this sample group paid close attention to the vulnerability, anonymity, consent and confidentiality within the sample. Parts of the sample group are under the age of 18 and as such they might be considered to constitute a vulnerable group. This ethical aspect has to be considered and their vulnerability was protected through the attaining of informed (see appendix B – Participant and parent information forms) consent from their parents (see appendix C – Consent form) and informed assent from the participants themselves (see appendix D – Assent form). Another way in which their vulnerability was protected was through thorough checking of the appropriateness of the research questions with my supervisor. Should participants have felt in any way distressed, the contact details of free counselling and support facilities for participants were provided, should they need this (see appendix B). The nature of the questions in the interview are such that they present low risk of harm to participants (see Appendix A – Interview schedule).

With regards to anonymity, the participants cannot be anonymous because the interviews were conducted face-to-face and the researcher knows the identifying information of each participant. Despite this, the confidentiality of the participants has been protected via the use of pseudonyms in the research report write up. All transcripts and identifying information pertaining to the participants will be kept on a password protected laptop to ensure the safety of this sensitive data. The research has been evaluated and approved by the ethics committee at the University of the Witwatersrand (Ethics protocol number: H22/07/41).

In further consideration of the ethical implications of the data is my 'power' over the data compared to participants from whom the data originates. In interpreting the narratives of participants, I am engaging in a retelling of the participants' ideas of themselves, in my own way, in a reconstruction process that ends with you, the reader (Squire, 2008).

CHAPTER 5 – Discussion of Results

"Football to me … it's like life man" – Action.

The results chapter to follow is an exploration and interpretation of the data collected. It is structured based on the five central themes that emerged from the data. Each theme contains between two and three related sub-themes. Throughout the presentation of the themes, threads from the theoretical foundations of this project will be drawn across all the themes. The themes will form the base from which you as the reader can make sense of the nuances and complexities of the data in a manner that represents the participants clearly and honestly. The themes that emerged were as follows: 1) Self-development – participants' expressions of how they have grown and changed through their experiences in football; 2) Kasi – the narratives participants expressed involving the meeting of class and race within football that was narrated through stories about township life; 3) Joburg City FC – this theme centred around participants' narratives regarding their lives in the wider city of Johannesburg and playing for the club Joburg City FC; 4) Constructions of manhood – this theme emerged as particularly important in relation to participants' experiences of their fathers, families and masculinity in football; 5) Finally, the Pandemic – this theme emerged as players reflected on their experiences of the COVID – 19 pandemic and a time where they could not play football as well as the pressures and anxiety they experienced from the COVID period and life as a whole at this time in their lives.



Figure 1: Themes

Figure 1 above shows how the themes are organised. Each theme has subthemes which explore the nuances of the themes in more detail. The themes are organised in this order as this was the common flow of the interviews. After the opening question of where their life in football began participants began by narrating their story of self-development through football. Following from this the themes were arranged according to a combination of the detail participants spoke with for each theme and at what point throughout their interviews that the particular theme emerged. This was done in order to mirror the structure of the participants' narratives as closely and coherently as possible in the manner that they told it. Each subtheme is a reflection and opportunity to engage with the nuance and contradiction contained within the themes. Finally, in referring to the participants of the study, the terms players and participants are used interchangeably in order to illustrate the continuous movement between different identity performances that they experience in their worlds.

5.1 Self-development

Beginning with self-development allows us to see into the participants' senses of self and how they incorporated their football experiences into their identities. This theme is the beginning of how participants began their self-narratives. The influence that football has had on the identities of the participants is tangible for them. This influence can be analysed over time, through their bodies and their location. In doing so, one can also view the influence of their football experiences through shifts in their senses of self, such as shifts in the skills they have acquired which they narrate into their life stories. Similarly, self-development for the participants came in the form of the meaning and direction they felt football had created for them through values, ethics and morals. Participants expressed that shifts in their relations(hips) and contextual/locational shifts had changed them and moulded their identities (Baumann, 1996). These three areas of self-development experienced by participants are not mutually exclusive and represent the complexity and dialectical workings of the process of identity as well as the influences football has had on the identities of the players in the study. Participants expressed the most tangible aspects of their self-development as through the skills they had learned from being footballers.

5.1.1 Skills learned.

"You have to be patient in order to achieve what you want. So, yea I'm still being patient and I'm still grinding" – Action.

Players narrated stories in which over time they experienced changes in themselves and the ways in which they engaged with their world inside and outside of football. These changes seemed to be engendered by lessons and experiences from playing football which they have applied to other areas of their lives. The idea of the lessons learned through sport has been explored by Jacobs & Wright (2017), in that players can use their experiences form the sports they play and the lessons these experiences bring up, and transpose the lessons onto other life situations, but also tie these lessons into their identities (Jones et al., 2018). This can be seen as a transfer of skills. This transferability of skills allows for what could be considered a transitional space for the players to learn relatively tough life lessons, such as loss, pain and frustration, in a safe and supportive space. A space in which there are both people going through the same things (teammates) and people that have gone through those things before

(coaches and parents). This is all whilst doing something they enjoy – playing football. This is part of the thrill of creating a life worth living explored by Scheibe (1986).

A central skill that players from this study spoke to was discipline. Scaffolded by the structure of training days and the consistent regularity of being able to play football daily, players seemed to organise their lives around the training schedule. They would do whatever they needed to do when they weren't training in order to ensure they had the time (and permission) to be at training whenever they needed to, but also to be at training whenever they could.:

> *"Like especially in, in the club side of things, the discipline, the discipline its brought for me is gang[3]. Because I know how to balance now. It's like I've been doing this thing since I was in grade 5. I was like 11,10,10, 9 years old, since then I've been knowing how to manoeuvre, to go to training knowing that I have homework, I come back to the homework, if I have chores as well, do those as well. So, I could manoeuvre around those things. Even now, I have a social life now, it's bigger than the life I was having before, like I can go out, knowing the next morning I need to set a time period where I can actually go out, then I'll come back in time so that I can actually rest for the game tomorrow. Or something like that. So, I think that has allowed me to get disciplined. Football has really given me a lot of discipline" – Chief.*

Above, Chief explains how being involved in football has helped him gain discipline and use it in multiple areas of his life (Sanders et al., 2012). More than this it was also that he expressed learning to be able to balance of priorities in his life a sentiment that was expanded on by Surprise:

> *"Eh! No, that balance is not easy because like I said in the beginning it was fine, I could afford to not study and still like do very well in a test but then as you go, you know this, as you go you need to study, you can't just wing everything and ja, I then had to make sacrifices, like especially prioritizing." - Surprise*

Being able to prioritize is a skill which can be beneficial for all elements of life in the narratives of young adolescent men. Particularly at this important time of their lives in which these young men are working through the identity crisis of their adolescent years (Erikson, 1964). Prioritizing applies when choosing a positive life path or choosing between substance use or the engaging in street activities such as stealing as express by participants further in this chapter. Discipline is also important in maintaining hope and following through on their actions consistently on a daily basis. The ability to have

[3] Gang is a slang term used by groups of young people in South Africa as an expression of abundance and multitude. For example: 'I have gang money' would translate to I have a lot of money.

discipline and to prioritize is a valuable life skill. In addition to this, by training almost every day, the players were able to re-story themselves everyday as both disciplined and able to manage their time (Jones et al., 2019). Subsequently, each day offered players the chance to stich these skills and the structure offered by training into their identities as they grow.

Part of being a player who trains almost daily and gives so much of themselves to football is the need to show up each day, at the minimum. Players referred to this as having resolve. For the players in the study, even those who were more reserved personalities, this positioned them as leaders in some way. Some were leaders of their teams from a young age, and carried these traits forward, while others became leaders by example to their family members because of their dedication to football and the path they have walked despite its challenges. In this way leadership was a key attribute that players storied into their identities through the narratives of their experiences in football. Worker goes on to express that he grew into leadership because bravery was all he had to offer when he began playing football.:

> *"Yea. I think, in the beginning that's all I could offer, if I'm being honest you, because I had heart, I think the heart has always been there, and I could run. Like at the time was still much quicker than all the other players so I used to play as a box-to-box midfielder and attack, and my father would scream "go defend!", then I run back and I'm defending, so that's what I always offer for the team, but as we got older I realised that I've got that type of leadership in me…. " – Worker*

In this excerpt Worker speaks to how he both used leadership to keep up with his more naturally talented peers in the football circles but also how he nurtured a natural talent of his own using football as a medium. In as much as football may not be his line of work forever, he appears to have experienced a platform in which his leadership could be both nurtured and recognized. Having gained particular skills from their experiences in football participants said that they were also able to have new experiences of the world through football. They linked the skills they learned and the new experiences they had to making their lives more meaningful.

5.1.2 Meaning

"Yoh, well if you do something every day it becomes a part of you. So, you can say football is life, I can say football is life, I've been doing it since I was eight so there's

nothing that I can say… It's kind of like a religion to me. It becomes a part of you, it becomes you so, ja." – Surprise

The idea that football has in the past given participants incredible experiences that they would not have gotten elsewhere, feeds into their desire to continue playing and training on a daily basis. These experiences allude to Scheibe's (1986) idea of a life worth living because of the adventure and thrill new experiences bring to one's life narrative. In the present, participants felt able to propose to themselves a better future, all while enjoying the present. This was done with the hope that football can take them even further than they have been before. It must be said that this hope is a tight rope suspended in tension. These players may be running towards a hoped-for fantasy but in equal measure they are running from a seemingly destitute reality and this is one of the nuances of the participants' narratives.

> *"It was when me, and two or three of my friends at Sporting, we got called to play at the Joburg tournament and when we went there, we got booked in, like all the players got booked into like a hotel, and then this is the night before. We got booked in and then there was a pool, like I think it was a 4-star hotel that we were booked in, and there was 4 players in a room. There was a pool there was food as we got there there was food, in our rooms there was, and then next, then I think even in the morning I think there was loads of food, fruit, oats eggs, bacon, it was a nice experience, ever since then I've always wanted to go back there and do that again." - Viper*

Despite having new exciting experiences players expressed living in a reality with little perceived agency in other areas of their lives. The contrast between the agency football provided in being able to develop and grow compared to the lack of agency experienced during a confusing adolescence emerged as a conflict for participants. On one side were the echoes of those who have slipped between the large cracks of South African adolescence while on the other side participants hoped that the new experiences from football would pave the way for a meaningful future for them (Berlant, 2011).

The players reflected on this sort of escape-like hope, which offered an escape from a difficult present reality, in different ways. For some, football was their only hope of getting out of their present, contextual handcuffs and to a better future as expressed by these extracts:

> *"It started in Eldos[4] in the street. I always used to play football there with my friends when we come from school. There… that was… that was the escape. I don't know how to say it but ja… Football like (stuttering), always helped us from where we come from. It's the escape… I don't know how to say it… it's our happy place. It brings out the best of us. It, it helps us make friends. Ja. It's hard but I think of it, I think of my family. I want to do better for me and for them. And for the young, my sister, my brother and my other small cousins because they look up to me. I want to show them that there is a way out." – Viper.*

Viper both expresses how football has been a space of hope for him in being able to buffer him from the distress and difficulties of his present living conditions but also a hope in that he has agency over his present. With this agency he hopes to be able to forge a better future for himself and his family. During this process he himself had to be a leader and an example of hope to those younger than him which was a similar reality for the participants (Meirav, 2009). Being able to face his present difficulties and having agency over the direction which his life goes and has gone, and the role football has played in this, was made strikingly clear when he added:

> *" …because ja, if I look back neh, if I wasn't playing, and we never moved out of Eldos neh, I would've still been with my friends that side, smoking, drinking, killing people and that. Robbing Ubers because it's what all my friends are doing. So, it's my way out. Some never make it out, because you fall into that drug, selling drugs and all of that." - Viper*

In this way football became a safe space in which he could train and cultivate the hope filled seeds of a better future for himself. He did this while paving the way to guide his younger siblings away from the dangers of their home living environment (Gittings et al., 2021). The conflict mentioned above was a difficult negotiation for participants because the street life has an intense pull and stronger masculine status because of the sense of dominance and risk that it entails (Langa, 2015). Football can be seen in these instances as a protective factor in the lives of the young adolescent participants because of how it shifted their focus away from a more destructive way of life (Burnett, 2009).

For other players, football was also a hope almost in retrospect in that it had galvanised them to reach a better version of themselves currently compared to who they were in the past, and their hope for the future lies in the ability to be able to continue playing the sport that already gave them so much. This speaks to how participants felt that

[4] Eldos refers to Eldorado Park which is an area in the south of Johannesburg. A township area.

football had given their life an increased sense of meaning. It had given them adventure (Scheibe, 1986), agency and desire to develop themselves:

> *"I was always like overweight, and like always looked at like, you know that kid that they put in goals, like you know that kid, I was just looked at that I can't really do anything. So, because of my love of football, I said that it's got to change, so I lost all my weight, and it was all because of sport, like you know they say, 'you don't play sport to get strong, you get strong to play your sport'."*
> - Striker

These expressions of hope are echoed in the work of Bradbury (2020) in thinking of a backward-looking hope. This is a hope that looks at the ways in which past obstacles have been overcome and uses this to inspire further action and anticipation of improvements and hope in the future prospects of life (Bradbury, 2020). Looking at this idea of hope in isolation, hope can look unjustified and without reason, much like /maladaptive optimism. This is because what has gone cannot create what is to come (Meirav, 2009). However, in this case hope is expressed through the agency the players found in being able to work for the change they were able to create in the past, grounding their hopes for future prospects in reason because they intend to work for future development again in the present. Critically what these boys have expressed is not only a hope for a future prospect but an acknowledgement of how the process of working towards this hoped for prospect of playing football has changed who they are, positively. The self-development participants experienced as expressed above also expanded to how participants related to others in their world. Their changes in themselves, naturally, afforded the opportunity for changes in relationships and social interactions as well.

5.1.3 Relationships

During the complicated changes and negotiations of the adolescent identity crisis, social support and social interactions are critical in the positive outcomes of this phase of life (Côté & Levine, 1987). A common theme amongst the players was a development in their social skills, ability to interact with other people in their lives and form relationships. The players expressed that football helped them gain skills in terms of being able to interact with people from different social backgrounds and in some cases learn more about people from different parts of the world. Being able to both

learn different ways of life and engage with people that they may not have otherwise been able to meet outside of football:

> *"To actually like socialize with people, because I'm able to like socialize with anybody and everybody now. No matter anything, anything, whatever language you speaking, whatever, I can literally gel with anybody and that's from football. Most of it is from football because like, social life we didn't really care about it until like a few years back, 5 years back, that's when we actually started to care about it, like "yoh, how am I gonna make friends, am I in this crowd", like so yea I think from football that all came from that. We had to socially interact in different circumstances or go trial for other teams, there's different people and you had to mingle so that you can understand them. Like if I use this person, I could actually pass [to this] person and this person will give me an opportunity he will pass me back and that's all through socializing." – Chief*

> *"It taught me patience and how to like, adjust with people and get to know people and like create relationships." - Action*

In this nuanced way players felt able to use the social experiences and lessons learned from playing that they have transferred into other spheres of social engagement. Football begins to serve as a safe foundational platform for social engagement, an opportunity which for some, in their home contexts becomes much riskier. As previously expressed by Viper, making friends with people where he lived exposed him to the allure of stealing and substance use. On a potentially global scale participants were also rewarded with the opportunity to socialise not just outside of their areas of living but outside of the country. Through a football opportunity, multiple players were able to see new and different parts of the world, socialize with different people and learn about new ways of living:

> *"My greatest experience in football is probably when I went to Spain hey. I went to Spain to play a tournament. Mundialito. Like it was a great experience, the football there is different compared to this side, but we managed to play but it was a great experience. To see how different people play from different countries and yea. Learning how to move the ball quicker and adjusting to a different type of surface and all of that. Yea. Football gave me an opportunity to see the world, and it gave me an opportunity to show the world what South Africa has." – Action*

Players gained experiences that they imagined to be beyond their lives and, in their own way, these adventurous and new experiences brought meaning to the lives of the participants who were able to experience traveling through football. Most participants believed that these experiences were not within their reach without football and expressed that these experiences changed how they saw themselves but also who they believed they were. Other relational changes experienced by players were in the

form of close bonds to teammates, coaches who became family members to the participants. These relational ties are explored in the Constructions of manhood theme further in this chapter. In line with the idea of the relational development participants experienced teamwork was an important element in their narratives. The idea of thinking of how they engaged with those around them and who they had to be to form meaningful relationships with those around them seemed to help players develop relationally.

Teamwork asks players to think beyond oneself and to see the self as part of a system, but football also asks players to think of themselves selfishly in search of better opportunities at the same time. On their own, as young men, negotiating these dynamics is complex. They are balancing the needs of others with the needs of the self, all while being part of a system. With this in mind the bonds formed and unity of experience in football is, for many participants, a way of being connected to others and can potentially engender values of empathy and understanding in their relationships:

> *I'm so connected to them, and it's the training sessions and all of that, that got us connected because at training sessions we can talk about what we like. It's like you've got to learn your players, like you must know that this one likes the ball to feet, this one likes going long and so then at training sessions you get to work on that – Action.*

As much as Action is speaking about the football aspects of learning about his teammates and empathizing with their strengths and weaknesses, underneath this is something of how one has to learn and understand one's teammates as human beings in order to work as a cohesive unit. In learning about your teammates, their strengths, their weaknesses and how best to work with them, players could apply this to other areas of their lives in learning to understand the people in their lives in a similar light. This could then enable participants to be able to empathize with and build an understanding of other people in their worlds. Additionally, participants had to achieve this while also understanding and fulfilling one's own individual role in the system for the benefit of the system.

Within the lives of the participants exists the contrast of simultaneously thinking of the team and how to better benefit those around you while also thinking in ways that may

be viewed as selfish. Players often need to go against the desires and or needs of the team in order to reach for better opportunities. This is done for various reasons, in order to themselves get better or to seek out new opportunities.

> *"My coaches at that club didn't want to let me go. Because they kept trying to convince me to be like, "ay, let me talk to your parents man, because Black Aces is not the place to go, I can get you where where where how", so I kind of used that injury to be like "huh-uh, I can't". I can't play and then to get an opportunity to go trial elsewhere, because they didn't want to let me go. " - Chief*

Relational shifts are often observed in cases where players were presented with opportunities to better themselves as footballers with the cost of having to leave environments which they had formed strong bonds and where they are valuable members of the team. It has been shown how socializing and relational dynamics are critical at this age where identity becomes a psychosocial engagement (McAdams, 2001), that provides a degree of purpose and unity in social spaces for the participants. The severing of these relational bonds in order to reach for opportunities was a painful and difficult experience for participants. In some ways it meant that players frequently had to adjust the ways in which they engaged with people within different settings. Having to shift between different parts of their identity in order to adapt to new environments. Subsequently participants' relationships to themselves, people and their environments changed in the process of playing. The process of adapting and almost moving between two worlds is explored in the following Kasi chapter, where players, many of whom were from the Kasi had to adapt to academy football.

5.2. Kasi

This theme focuses on the participants' experiences of moving between and adapting to different environments. All the participants began their careers at smaller clubs, many in townships, and moved on to playing football at a higher, academy level at some point in their lives. For some their first taste of academy football was at Joburg City FC and for others it had happened prior to them joining the Joburg City FC. However, for all the participants having to adapt to new ways of playing football was common. Below the surface of this adaptation though, there exists the nuanced complexities of where the players come from and how the different parts of their

identities held different senses of value in the different locations they played and lived in. Beginning with how players adapted to academy football, this chapter will then look at the dynamics of race and class that are embedded in the differences between Kasi football and academy football and how players navigated moving between these worlds. Throughout their process of adapting to a new environment, participants also continued to develop and to transform. Participants became able to engage with the world and with themselves in the world in different ways.

5.2.1 Adapting to difference and changing circumstances.

Adapting to the style and culture of academy football was a change for players. This process meant that they had to engage differently with themselves and with the ways they played football. This process came both as a shock and as a point of excitement for participants. Having the opportunity to play at a higher level contrasted by the potential limitations of the ways they could express themselves football-wise was difficult for them to negotiate.

> *" Yeeaah, the tempo is different you know! And the quality of the coaches and the players. It's very different it's like new environment, that you have to get used to. But like as time went, I got used to it so ja" – Action.*

> *"It's nice because you get to … you get to experience different types of people. Some are arrogant, some are not, some are fine, and there's nothing you can do about it, you just have to take it. You have to adapt, because if you can't it's going to be a problem and you gonna start fighting and all that." – Viper*

Above Viper and Action explain how they needed to adapt to the new environment that they were in once they reached academy level football. For participants this process of adapting meant that they adjusted to new circumstances and needed to mediate between aspects of their identity and the identities of others, in order to avoid conflict and to fit into the new space that they were in.

Being in a new space, participants described the initial stages when they arrived at Joburg City FC as an escape from reality into what feels like a space where they were living their dreams of professional, high level, football. They felt they needed to adapt to keep their dreams as a potential reality. They felt that their dreams were being made real with the concrete steps that training and the club provided. It is relevant to leverage the idea of hope here, as in the process of adapting and changing themselves, players hoped that it would bring them closer to their ideal future. Part of

hope is the element of not having a particular attachment to the prospect itself but rather to an in-between of something separate to the prospect on its own and separate to the individual. This hope exists and is attained through the *attempt* at reaching for the prospect (Meirav, 2009).This process, in itself, is a reward separate to the hoped-for prospect of professional football. In a sense the process is the reward. What separates hope from maladaptive optimism is that maladaptive optimism refuses to acknowledge the potential of failure, in fear of that potential reality (Eagleton, 2015). This denial of the potential to fail can be seen as not being grounded in reality and in this way be antithetical to hope itself which is necessarily grounded in reality (Eagleton, 2015). This sentiment of hope grounded in the reality of potential failure is exemplified by Striker and Winger when they said:

> *"I signed with an agency in 2020/2021 and ever since then they were the ones who took me to America, I mean Spain, and I was supposed to go to America with them, and their whole goal is to take athletes to America for like a scholarship, so like 50% football and 50% academics and that just like is my goal. To get a scholarship to America to play football and study a degree at the same time, that's what I want to do with my life, because it gives you a degree in case football doesn't work out in the future. So that's what I want to do with football." – Striker*

> *"I have these dreams written actually on my wall, and I look at them when I wake up and I always tell myself that one day we will do it, there is always a possibility, and then the man above will support you, it's his time and it will only happen in his time so and I'm not in a rush because I know his plans are going to do right for me. It might not be football, I actually hope its football, but it might not be football, but if it's not and he's supporting me, then I know it's going to be fine" – Winger.*

These extracts represent a clear hope for football to be their profession in the future, but both acknowledge that this may not be how their lives turn out and as such they are prepared to acknowledge the reality of this alternative future too. In this way, their belief and life become securely grounded in hope (Bradbury & Clark, 2012). This is the hope that the work they put in, day-in day-out, will lead them to the future they so deeply desire. These extracts also explore the idea of how academics and football can go hand in hand, which is an idea not often desired and presented to young footballers traditionally. The hesitancy to explore this pathway from the position of football stakeholders is related to how footballers are in a sense a commodity for the club (Swart et al., 2010). If the player can put all their focus into football, they may end up being a better player and able to be sold for a higher fee to wealthier clubs. Essentially

school is a distraction from this perspective. However, this perspective does not consider the players wholistically and does not adequately prepare them for life without football or life after football. Which has left many former professionals living destitute lives after their careers. An even worse situation for young players that cannot make the grade at the professional level and have not had the pathway to be educated.

> *"so it actually became a problem when … because I was used to playing club football and we would train twice a week, and then now I'm playing academy football so it's now 4 times a week, so most of your time is now put into football and you get home and some days you're tired and you don't feel like doing any school work and you're supposed to and just doing your homework isn't enough you know, you need to also put in the hours to study" – Surprise*

Surprise goes on to speak about the state of despair that many professional footballers in the country go on to face because of not being educated for various reasons:

> *"Because if you look at our country, most of our footballers don't look very smart, most of them aren't very smart yabo, most of the players, due to a lack of education they've survived through their talent, which is soccer, but then most of their decision making, you can see that it lacks a bit of … you know, brains" - Surprise.*

In direct contradiction to what all the players expressed as hope comes despair. Despair could be thought of as being the other side of the same coin as hope (Berlant, 2011). This is because despair, like maladaptive optimism positions the hoped-for prospect as the only outcome, but in this case, it is the only outcome that can save one from their present and lesser circumstances (Du Toit, 2003). Despair seemed to creep into the reality for players in that they feared acknowledging the potential of football not being a part of their futures, and expressed that for them football was the only way they could make it out:

> *" People always ask me what you going to be doing after school and all of that and I always give the same answer. If it's not football, I don't want it. And imma push myself. Even if its 30 I'm gonna keep pushing myself, I'm gonna push myself to become a footballer. That's what I've always wanted to be, a professional footballer, and that dream is not gonna change"* – Viper.

What Viper expresses above shows the complexities and interwoven expressions of hope for the players who participated. All of them playing football with the idea of an imagined better future but from different contexts (Snyder et al., 1991). Viper above refuses to acknowledge a life outside of professional football and it may appear like a sense of hope on the surface but without acknowledging failure or alternatives he may be clinging onto despair. Which is part of the reality for many young players who feel

they have no other way of building a future. For the players in this study, hope in its various forms, was expressed in a “narrative of overcoming” (Bloch, 1954). Coming from circumstances that were less than ideal, such as high unemployment, poverty and crime, the players used football as a bridge to overcome their circumstances and improve their lives. They achieved this by adapting to a new environment with the hope that they could change their lives. This was done while enriching both their identities and their lives. The participants journeys formed for them a story worth telling, and making a live worth living (Scheibe, 1986).

5.2.2 Class and Race

The above process of adaptation can also be conceptualised across broader socio-political contexts. Players expressed navigating the socio-political dynamics within football through class and race relations. The class dynamics were expressed through the idea of the Kasi. Football in the Kasi was experienced by participants as remarkably different to football in the academy. This difference again meant participants had to adapt and what also emerged was how participants were othered by virtue of their place of origin, their race as well as their bodies. The othering experienced by participants meant they had to mute parts of themselves in different environments and perform particular aspects of their identities in order to be a part of a particular brand and level of football.

Participants experienced and performed different identities as they engaged with different spaces. The different class brackets that they came from enabled an experience of social mobility. Moving between different social spaces meant that their experiences of belonging could be split along the lines of location, being where players came from. Participants with experience of “the Kasi” and “Kasi football” expressed just how different things were for them being in a new location that was worlds apart from where they grew up and learned to play football:

> *“Like in this situation, with a lot of the gents this side, I can’t relate to them, because we come from a different background, that sort of thing. So, when you come to training there’s a lot of groups, like we not, we haven’t become that “one” type of unit type of thing so, you get a group there, group here, group there type of thing… I think, I’ve learned to, to relate to more of the gents from*

the township, that, that's basically what I have been exposed to, like from experience." - Worker

As much as the participants were selected to be a part of the Joburg City FC team, it is clear that even within the team there are separate groups to which players belong. Within and between these groups exist power dynamics that delineate who matters and which groups get to own a narrative that 'matters'. Worker goes on to add that:

"Yoh, hai, its different. Different, different, different. You get here, a lot of people have their parents involved, and then in the township, no one's father comes to the game, so it's a thing of, you make a mistake and everyone is on top of you. You get here and his dad might get angry at you, you see. So, you have to stay away from that type of thing." - Worker

This narrative speaks to something of the spatial politics of being in the football environment that players must navigate (Thrift, 2004). In this geographical context of the Joburg City FC academy, participants from the Kasi recounted narratives of being censored because they did not belong. Being unable to fault a player who is (supposed to be) an equal because of the fear, unlike in the Kasi, that his parents may intervene. This dynamic severs the connection of the team in a way that resembles those who have and those who have not, because of the location and context in which the game is being played. Coming from the 'Kasi' as a footballer comes with particular perspectives, ideologies and expectations both of the self and of football. To a degree, academy football may feel like a rejection for players from the Kasi. This is because players from the Kasi are asked to perform a different identity to who they are able to be in the Kasi. This partially inauthentic performance can serve as a continuous reminder of what they do not have, may never get and may never be. This is a jarring juxtaposition for players that make the journey from Kasi to Academy football. The academy at times felt like a space in which they did not fully belong.

Similarly on a more systemic level, the ways in which football is played in the different settings is another line in which othering and belonging took place for participants. For some, academy football was a dumbing-down of their expression in order to play football in a more "proper" way:

"Kasi football and academy [football] its two different things ha! Its two different things and you have to adjust, you have to know when to do what." - Action

"It's different, because in the street its more of a free style, like you can do anything. But here… it's also like a free style, you're just more limited." -Viper

Kasi football is experienced as freer in its nature and more expressive. Participants felt censored in the ways they were allowed to play after joining the academy. Historically, Kasi football has not been seen as a commendable engagement, at least through the lens of mainstream sports. Only recently have Kasi games become presentable to television audiences, yet every Easter and Festive season there are sand pitches brimming with Kasi spectators and players. Another demonstration of the power dynamics and othering within football, regarding whose narratives and experiences matter (Canham, 2017). Participants felt forced to adapt their Kasi selves, in order to continue on the path that they believe would take them towards their hoped-for prospects. Being able to adapt in one way was a sign of strength for participants and positioned them to be able to include resilience into their narratives but, adapting may simply be reinforcing the narrative that only the narratives of players who make it to the television or play in the academy matter. At times this power is enforced violently on to those who do not conform to the expectations of academy football and instead express the aspects of their Kasi identity while playing:

> *At Callies[5] I used to play centre back, so I had to be that rough player, so, so I didn't have much pace on me, but I had some pace, like enough pace to recover a ball and stuff like that, so we were, like we would play kasi gents, which were actually skilful and you'd get to the point where you're actually annoyed by their skill. And so, we would kick! And then fights would break out, but we had kasi gents also at Callies so it would be like if a fight must come then a fight must come – Chief.*

In these situations, being from a particular location for participants, meant you embodied something that othered you. Being from the township and displaying your 'Kasi flavour' somehow evoked rage in the other. A statement of 'how dare you do skills against me'. This action reinforced a power dynamic that says those from the Kasi are not equal to the rest. A statement that says football from the Kasi, does not belong here. In this dynamic, participants walk a tight rope which moves through the intersectional ties of social status, belonging and location. These ties continuously tug at players in different social situations. The ties are tugging players in different directions, hailing participants into particular performances of identity in different contexts and othering them within the academy structures (Hall, 2000). There is a

[5] Callies refers to the football club Robertsham Callies in the south of Johannesburg. It is an amateur football club.

disparity that exists between living in or being from the Kasi and playing in the academy. This disparity split participants into different groups of belonging. Players were often forced to adapt if they intended to move towards their hoped-for dreams. In some ways this mirrors the ideas from Crankshaw (2007) and Murray (2011) in their explanation of the disparities that exist between different parts of Johannesburg.

The make-up and dynamics of Johannesburg largely exist on the back of the Apartheid era (Crankshaw, 2007). The southern areas of Johannesburg historically bear the most weight of the unemployment and poverty related challenges in Johannesburg (Murray, 2011). As a result, this feeds into the exploration of race dynamics. Participants in the study experienced racial power dynamics within their football experiences (Alegi & Bolsmann, 2010b). In thinking of whose stories matter and which types of players have room for their narratives, racial lines may be drawn too:

> *then the coach told me that, he told me no, he said that I'm not, I'm not built, I'm too short uhm and he said like we have too many white people in the team. So like, that just killed me, because it was like how can you judge someone just based off their colour and not their football ability, just based on what they look like you're going to tell someone no – Striker.*

Striker narrates how, in particular football spaces, his body itself, had been denied, on multiple levels. In essence for simply being, in the space of football he was told that he did not belong (Hauge, 2007). This was a shattering experience for him, and at times players do not recover from such othering, given the early age at which it happens. The interaction expressed by Striker opposes the historical racial power dynamics between Black and White players in South Africa. In the cases of the participants, they often took any moments of being othered and weaved them into their narrative in the form of resilience and not giving up on the sport that they love or on their hopes of playing football professionally. Winger went on to say:

> *"Because not every kid or player has that, those surroundings because now you see players, they go out at a young age, they give up too soon because they think they not making it, and that's the problem, they give up too soon because they think they are not making it." - Winger*

This should not exclude some of the voices that we may never hear from, who no longer play football because of similar othering experiences that they experienced

during their formative teen years Thinking of these experiences of othering and gate keeping on a macro level it can be seen how spaces in football and different bodies are automatically stitched into particular positions. Black bodies often seen as Kasi skilful players, and White bodies as being excluded in some footballing circles (Leonard, 2006). Players are often perceived in particular racial and class positions before a ball is kicked.

The pattern of Kasi players being seen as skilful and of White players experienced as excluded goes against the hegemonic tides of the related racial power structures (Burnett, 2009). Kasi players are positioned as a lower socio-economic status group than most middleclass people in the Senderwood area where Joburg City FC is located. As a result, other players may feel the Kasi players have no right to be there, let alone perform better than those players who 'have more' than them. As Chief demonstrated, often the response to this hegemonic imbalance of power is violence. To destroy that which should not be better than me. In a similar way, the reversal of racial roles within South African football can be understood. Black players to a degree are often seen as more capable but also the othering of White players may be seen as trying to hold on to what is a historically Black sport in the context of South Africa's apartheid history (Dolby & Cornbleth, 2001). This conundrum often leaves players having to negotiate their positions in football, and at times whether or not they belong. However, despite players coming from different locations, classes and races, what they all had in common was their affiliation to Joburg City FC and what this meant for them as young people who live in Johannesburg and were asked to represent their city.

5.3 Joburg City FC

Participants were able to reflect on the nuances of othering, race and belonging that they experienced. Narrating their stories asked them to reconfigure their experiences into their identities. Despite all of the above, and in between the othering that occurs in the different football spaces, there exists a powerful sense of belonging that the participants also experienced from being a part of the Joburg City FC academy. The belonging felt by participants served to shine over the shadows of shame cast by the othering they experienced. Participants narrated stories and feelings of connection,

joy, brotherhood and family that they experienced through football. The club, Joburg City FC, offered the players a place to belong that was different to other places in their lives.

5.3.1 Place and positionings

The experiences of belonging that players narrated alluded to the importance of experience a place in which they held a particular position. A position in which players felt reflected who they are and a place where they felt they belonged. The idea of positioning existed literally and figuratively for participants. This is to say that on the field they played and took up positions that they felt resonated with their identity and ability. While figuratively being positioned as a player for Joburg City FC mean they felt like they were a part of the place in which they were living. In thinking further about the geopolitical aspects of belonging, being part of Joburg City FC meant that participants also acknowledged what it meant for them to be living in Johannesburg at this particular moment in time and how this impacts who they are and who they are becoming:

> *if I had to stay in South Africa, I can't imagine myself elsewhere, than Joburg, to stay. I mean Eastern Cape is home to me, but there, there the economy is like hai. There's no progress, to a certain extent there's no progress. But it is home, but I mean I don't see myself actually living there……. because eh man! Joburg lifestyle is top! It's too top! Its active! And that's what I love, the activeness! Like we grew into the activeness that kune-sphithiphithi everywhere! So, I like that, I like that a lot. I like being around people, like being around, like I can't even explain it, Joburg is just top man. It's really just where it's at. But we'll see it in the future. But right now, to move out of Joburg? I can't see it. Definitely not. – Chief*

Being part of and belonging to the city of Joburg brought up an array of meanings and influences for participants. As Thrift (2004) notes, cities have affects, they evoke and perpetuate feelings for participants. In this way, the city of Joburg imprinted particular ways of being and ways of viewing the world for participants. In the above it can be felt how for Chief and many others, Joburg means being busy. It means action. *Sphitiphiti*[6] This feeling became a part of him and who he is, and in the same way that

[6] Sphithiphithi is a Zulu word that refers to the idea of 'hustle and bustle'. It is used in this extract to describe the perceived feeling of Johannesburg as a continuously busy place where something is always going on.

he became somewhat of a representative of the city, the city also became a representation of him. Being a part of the Joburg City FC team meant for participants that they could physically represent an emotional and spatial experience of what it means to be a part of and connected to their surroundings.

As much as it felt like something enjoyable, this experience existed dialectically for participants. In many instances they experienced an intense pressure when representing Joburg City FC, for similar reasons to those that made them feel like they belonged. Being tasked with the representing the city was no mean feat because it comes with expectations from the people that you are representing. Action elaborates by saying that:

> *So, yea, that was the nickname I had koKasi. And that was important to me, because it felt like I had to do something, and not disappoint them [the fans] you know, give them what they want – Action.*

Needing to give the people who he is representing what they want, on a large scale is a tall order and naturally comes with pressure as well as excitement and these are the dialectical negotiations that participants made throughout their journeys and narrations of themselves. The importance of representing Joburg through Joburg City FC can be seen by these extracts. As previously mentioned, there are power negotiations, alongside race and class negotiations that came into the field of play for participants when narrating their belonging to Joburg. As Crankshaw (2007) explains, Joburg has a contrasting nature. The contrasting nature of living in and being a part of Joburg as a city was put into perspective by Worker:

> *Uhhhh, I think I've experienced both sides of Joburg. I've experienced the more, the less privileged side and the more privileged side. Luckily, I've been more in, part of the boys the few boys that have, what we consider a better type of life. So, yea. My mother and my father, both parents have worked hard to get us out of that type of environment. I have a lot, basically all of my family, I don't have any family that are up there, my family come from the townships. So, yea, when I go there, it just brings me down to earth. So, I think that on its own, I think, how do I put it? I'm able to relate to both sides basically and just that constant reminder that you not better than anyone. Because if I'm making fun of someone who is less privileged, my family is the same – Worker.*

Above Worker speaks to the dualities of living in Joburg as a young male. He also describes how he is positioned as being able to go between the two worlds of the more and less privileged parts of Joburg. This extract further engages the historical aspects of Joburg and how the traces of racial and classist divisions still separate places in Joburg today. This division in turn influences how and where young people feel they belong.

In engaging with the footballing politics of belonging on a macro scale, the city in which participants played their football was an important aspect of their identities and their feeling of belonging. With the backdrop of Johannesburg's history and Joburg City FC's history participants felt a sense of pride and honour at being able to represent the city in which most of them grew up (Freadkin, 2004). Thrift (2004) described affect as a continuous state of becoming in which a set of embodied practices which are able to narrate the world in a unique way both in body and in thought. Once affect is geographically located it then also exists with reference to a particular place. Similar can be said for the experiences narrated by participants in feeling connected to their teammates, fans and their team Joburg City FC. They narrated an experience charged with affect. Participants were able to use their bodies as a performance of affect and belonging to an historic football club and an historic city. On representing the Joburg City FC team Striker and Speed said:

> *Like it's a lot more than just yourself. Like scoring my first goal for Joburg City meant a lot to me because it meant that now I'm part of the family, I'm part of something a lot greater than me, and a lot bigger – Striker.*
>
> *It feels like a really big opportunity, because like not everyone can play at this team. It's not so easy and you can easily get dropped down, so not just anyone can play in the team. - Speed*

This extract is a demonstration of the power with which belonging to Joburg City FC hailed one into a particular identification with Johannesburg as a city and Joburg City FC as a team (Thrift, 2004). What brought pride and meaning to participants in being part of Joburg City FC was, in part, its history as a former Premier Soccer League club and academy. This offered a hope to participants that, in being in a space that was once a professional football team in the highest division they too could become a player in the highest division. It seemed to connect participants to the idea that they

belong to an historically powerful entity and that they can now embody what it means to be Joburg City FC. This brought forth a sense of responsibility and understanding of the self in relation to the city. Similar can be said for the way players related to their positions on the field of play:

> *I play as a centre back. As a defender. So, it means you are the spine of the team you have to protect the team. Yea. Just to help the team. - Speed*

Knowing where you belong positionally on the field mirrors aspects of the feeling of knowing one belongs to a particular city and the positive shared experience with others from the same city that comes from this. It is a statement of the responsibilities that one has to the team in which they belong. In thinking of the city, there is a similar sense of responsibility that belonging to a city may engender. This idea exemplifies the concept of belonging.

5.3.2 Belonging

The team and location-based nature of football gives it an inherent relation to belonging. In every match there is an "us" and an "other. While in the lives of participants there is and us, who play football and an other who does not. The dynamics of and feelings associated with belonging are negotiated by participants on a daily basis. Football meant that participants were both able to belong and othered at different points in time. Belonging can be understood here, and above, as emotional attachments and identifications with social locations that are dynamic and time-bound and have ethical and political values and power relations (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Belonging exists only in the presence of its opposite, being "othered" and this contrast is experienced strikingly in football by the participants. Through their narratives of belonging or "othering" it can be seen how football impacted on their identities and shaped their views of the world.

> *"Football brings people together. It brings people together, so football is more than just a game. Like you can learn a lot with a ball at your feet." – Action*

The above speaks to how football brings people together and connects people. In this way it is an opportunity to connect with other people, share experiences and be a prat of a collective engagement. Participants expressed this sense of belonging through their use of nicknames that they received from fans, teammates and coaches.

Receiving a nickname made players feel like they were part of the team and that they belonged to a collective group (GrØnlund, 2021). It often made players feel wanted and valuable. Nicknames could be seen as a recognition of the qualities and strengths that players had:

> *“I would always score, and that’s the nickname I got because of that. I liked it. That time I was still young, I was 10, and that time Viper was still playing for [Manchester] United and he was big. So, I was happy, I was excited every time we played! “Call Viper, call Viper”, so it made me happy. That was nice. You feel good inside." - Viper*

> *“Well, I used to play high as a right winger and I was really fast and I had speed, so they just started calling me that.” - Speed*

The feeling of affiliation and connectedness that these experiences in relation to others provided for players was integrated into who they saw themselves to be. Throughout the participants’ lives in football they engaged in myriad experiences that seemed to shift and mould their internal worlds and enable them to identify themselves in different ways. Throughout this process they changed as people and in essence their identities underwent change. Their new positionings meant a new relationship with themselves and new relationships with their surroundings, in some ways even new identities. While the changes in participant’s identities occurred individually, the changes influenced to whom and where they felt they belonged and this influenced their notions of family and how they constructed their ideals of manhood.

5.4 Constructions of manhood

As discussed above, football exposed participants to new environments and new ways of relating to themselves and others. These new ways of relating also applied for the people already in the lives of participants like their mothers and fathers. These new ways of relating also influenced their perceptions of manhood and their masculinities. Through football the bonds in these relationships changed for participants over time. Participants further expressed the feeling of creating new familial relationships through the close bonds that they had with their teammates and coaches. Through their experiences in football players had found family. For some participants the team was the only stable sense of family that they had. Participants expressed losing family members to various situations including death, drugs or violence. The belonging they experienced through football allowed them to internalize something of a family system and togetherness with people that shared the same love of football as them (Bruner

et al., 2017). Almost what Hall (1994) describes as a cultural identity, in which a shared history and frames of reference create a collective true self for the group of young players. For players this created sense of identity which is both in and beyond the self. This chapter will look at the familial bonds players formed through football. It will further explore these familial bonds in relation to the participants' male bodies and the conflicts of masculinity that this engenders.

5.4.1 The roles of parents and brothers

In male football it is clear that the shadow of masculinity is etched within the very fabric of the game. For any "man" masculinity is a difficult terrain to navigate, and the same can be said for the adolescent boys in this study. Along their different paths participants embodied masculinity through various contradictory narratives. The elements of fathers being found, mothers, football as a space to express emotion in a masculine way and violence were all part of the narratives for participants (Donaldson, 1993). In speaking of their experiences, participants reflected on what being in a male body, in this day and age meant for them.

Present in the narratives of all participants were stories of fathers. In these narratives expressions of masculinity emerged for what it means to be a father, absent or present and what it means to be a male body in the world. Football allowed players to forge deeper connections with their fathers in ways that may not have been possible otherwise. For most players the traveling time to training and the conversations around football created a space for them to bond with their fathers that, according to them, would not have existed, and did not exist, outside of football:

> *"My father… my father, like he understands the game, so it helps him to relate to me basically. Like he knows the importance of training, he knows the importance of going to games, things like that. Like he tries to balance it, saying things like "Chief, you need to make your mother happy, do your boo-, like get on top of your books" get that out of the way, so that when it's time for football, it's time for football." – Worker*

Worker explains how it was through football that his father was able to relate to him. For many fathers after having lived through the terrors of Apartheid, emotional

softness and the ability to become close to their children has for the most part been replaced by the need to instil discipline, strength and resolve in their children (Clowes et al., 2013). These are traits that these fathers so badly needed to survive their past. In this way it can be imagined that relating to their children in present times is a troubled task. In this way football provided a segue to begin to bridge the gap between distant fathers and yearning children. Layered in this case with the pressures of hegemonic masculinity participants and their fathers were able to come closer, in a space that felt safe for everyone and managed the pressures of hegemonic masculinity like being "overly emotional" (Banks, 2005).

Similar can be said for the ideals of physical touch for the young male adolescents in the study. Often something as simple as getting a hug, through football, meant players were allowed to be connected in socially acceptable ways compared to the regulations of hegemonic masculinity (Banks, 2005). If one needed a hug while playing football they can get it, whether it is while greeting the team on arrival, during a celebration or after the game. Football also kept participants close to their fathers for the mere fact that football served to keep their fathers alive mentally and spiritually because physically they were no longer alive:

> *Yea, like that is true, like I'm playing it for him, and it reminds me of him, but also I'm playing football because ever since my dad passed away my mom has been a single mother for her whole life now, and she has three kids and financially she is also not the strongest she is struggling and also she has also been a father to me, she's a mother and a father. So I also want to pay her back for all the things she's done for me … especially with my uncles, they help me with my mindset because, to be honest, because my childhood and my life hasn't been easy for me as well, for a 18 year old that hasn't been with his father for, for so many years and it has been hard because you need that father to like teach you things, but I'm also grateful that I had coaches and my uncles because I look at my coaches like father figures and I look at my uncles as father figures*
> *– Winger*

Fathers who had passed on left a father-sized void in the narratives of participants and in how they constructed their senses of self. For many participants this void was made fuller by playing football but in addition to this, the mothers of participants stepped in to be both mothers and fathers. This demonstrates the importance of father-figures via "social fathers" alluded to by Clowes et al. (2013). Consequently, participants were

asked to negotiate their masculinity in a way that meant more collaboration and learning from their father-figures, mothers, football and the family members that supported them. Participants expressed their gratitude to their mothers and to the coaches in their football teams that they felt had also taken the role of being father-figures to participants in this context.

Participants all expressed feeling part of a family at football and for many this was the only example of something close to a family experience. This explores the importance of how, for various reasons, mothers and football became 'fathers' for the participants and helped form something of a family structure. The impact of a lack of father figures is explored in Langa (2015) in its full effects on adolescent boys. In the present study connecting to father figures through football opens up an avenue which could be explored in more depth for future research in this domain.

The shame, pain, rejection and anger of missing fathers festering in adolescent boys is in some ways restored through the experiences in and structures of football. By having coaches present, participants felt fathered but also being able to channel their anger into a physical manifestation of their complex emotions allowed a sense of catharsis for participants. Football being a physical sport, meant that their catharsis was done in a way that was acceptable for them in their maintenance of hegemonic masculinities (Carless & Douglas, 2011). In thinking of the experiences of the participants' fathers, those who were present, they were able to connect with their children in a way that was safe enough for fathers to "care" for their boys within the confines of hegemonic masculinities.

Part of the maintenance of hegemonic forms of masculinity includes dominance and competition. Despite being part of the same team and feeling like brothers, players need to challenge each other for places in the team. As such, the differences and rivalries between players for places in the team opens what might be thought of as a rupture in the collective identity which may leave players experiencing themselves within their own team as 'the other'. This in itself means there is the existence of difference alongside the continuity of the collective identity. As players make sense of these similarities and differences, they are suspended in an experience of both creating and transforming their identities along the lines of where they stand in the team (Hall, 1994). Some being inspired by not playing to become better, while others

are asked to reproduce standards they have set for themselves to stay in the team. This is an identity that can be changed week by week as expressed by the players. In this way, players are stitched temporarily to a role by their actions and experiences during training (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000):

> *especially with football, you create a lot of bonds with teammates they're your brothers, and with me, when I play at a team, my teammates, I will fight for you, I will die for you on the field, and like, it's a family, it's a brotherhood, you push each other, you fight with each other, you swear each other it's the same things that happen at home, they happen in the field. – Winger*

For Winger, coming from an unstable family home meant that football became a family home for him. A place where he felt at home and able to work alongside people he considered to be his brothers, even if they were competing with each other. Yuval-Davis (2006) proposes that these emotional ties and feelings of safety are an important aspect in belonging. Despite the changes in social standing in the team players may experience, there is something of belonging, to/in football in particular, that transcends geographical location and even language for participants:

> *"Mmmmm, I just like what it does for me, as a person. So, it's just like, where a group of boys come together, we don't care where you come from, and all of our focus is on one thing, the ball, and we, we play football with the objective of winning, and enjoying, just for that 90 minutes." – Worker*
>
> *"In this environment, football kind of talks for you, like when you are all doing the same thing and you are able to connect and to relate" – Surprise.*

This transcendence offers emotional connection, moral values, and in essence, belonging that moves with participants throughout their lives and within their self-narratives and allowing them to live the stories that they told (Fay, 1996). In cementing the idea of belonging in football, participants narrated that football created enduring bonds in their lives, many to the extent that they considered people that they met during their football journeys as family. A place where they felt at home and that they could be connected to themselves and those that they cared about:

> *"it wasn't really difficult meeting new people and making new friends, because at the end of the day football is football and you guys connect and you bond and you make your way and communicate through football and then as time goes by, you end up becoming those friends through football and you just… because there's still people I talk to that I played with maybe 5 years ago" - Surprise*

Participants experienced strong feelings of kinship and attachment to their teammates, who became friends and even family. Similar feelings of family were expressed about coaches and, in this way, players allowed their identities to shift and expand along the lines of belonging to the club. Belonging felt like a sense of comfort and safety but there also exists a pain when this tie needs to be severed because of the idea of your personal goals. The idea of being together, when playing against other teams but simultaneously being on your own as an individual player when you need to move to a new team is difficult to manage for players (Peacock-Villada et al., 2007). Even though participants play together, each player is equally on their own and their own individual with their own path, their own history, their own experience and their own narrative. This aloneness becomes clear in situations of leaving previous clubs for better opportunities, being replaced or during injury which will be explored in relation to the Pandemic in the section below. The idea of cutting ties with people who have become family rang true for participants and the ruthless individual based underbelly of football becomes clear to see:

> *It's like I still have my football family ko kasi, and at Alberton so like leaving them behind was tough, but it's something that had to be done. I mean, it had to be done, it was a tough move but it had to be done. In order for me to be where I want to be I have to move. - Action*

In these instances, despite feeling like they belong, and feeling like they are part of something bigger, any opportunity that algins with their dreams meant that participants left their 'second families' and went off to start elsewhere. This extract also alludes to the previously mentioned tension between the kinship with ones Kasi community and individual progress. This serves as an illustration of the complex and contradictory forms of belonging and othering that occur within the lives of young football players but also the terrain that participants have to navigate, make sense of and integrate into their self-narratives as they continue living. The abrupt need to leave a group one has formed close ties with comes with a certain violent rupture of the relationship. The violence with which players move from football families is one of many instances of different forms of violence that occur within the masculine frameworks of the participants' lives within football.

5.4.2 Violence and aggression

The means with which players are able to express themselves in football is through the body, and their performance with their bodies. Their use of the body means navigating the body's gendered meaning and fragility. With this fragility comes different forms of violence and the acceptable masculine responses to violence. Players expressed violence in different ways which maintained their sense of masculinity in the different spaces which they existed. Some players inflicted violence on themselves and their own bodies, others on the bodies of opposition players and some players had their emotions and childhoods silenced by the violence they witnessed in their home environments. Violence can denote the bravery and risk inclined nature of the dominant forms of masculinity (Kiguwa & Langa, 2013). As a result, participants felt the need to show that they were dominant over different circumstances and people. Players chose to play through injury and in this way aimed an expression of dominance and violence over their bodies, be it in the hope of reaching their dreams or as a masking of the fear of the opposite (Carless & Douglas, 2011). Similarly, players enacted violence on their opponents to exert dominance and maintain a feeling of superiority and success that goes hand in hand with masculinity (Banks, 2005). Chief narrates that:

> *I remember at training there was this guy, uhhmm who would always kick me, like he would always kick me, he was one year older than me and he would always kick me, he was skilful, to a certain extent I thought he was envious of me and he would always get into my head, he would always try to get into my head. So I used to be rough with that, that was one guy that I was ready to get rough with like nah I want to kick this boy, because he was the person that's like ok, everyone is scared of him, like they don't want to get kicked, so when they get the ball they'll be like "ahhh this guy is coming to kick me ahhhh". So, then I was like, ok I'll match that, let's go. So, then I started kicking him at training, I started back chatting him at training, there was a time where we actually fought at training so, I had to be rough and that came out in games. So, like now it's like if this person is trying to get into my head, I'm like let me get into their head as well, let me nibble them, let me stamp them, you know what I'm saying – Chief.*
>
> *Yea, a few times. Like I think it was at Mondeor, we almost ended up in a fist fight, with the coaches because of players fighting and swearing each other in the field and that, so it moved on to the coaches and then the refs stopped it. I've only seen a few. Players fighting with referees, ja. - Viper*

In the extracts above the layers of masculinity can be seen unfolding in the stories that the participants tell. Participants often felt the need to assert their dominance through the body, if it was not dominance through football performances and winning, it was through kicking opposition players to keep them "in their place". This is one of the ways in which masculinity and violence became interlinked through football. At a further distance to participants were the violences that they witnessed in their home environments and while playing football. These experiences often left them with emotions that were not able to be expressed in words and were often repressed by participants:

> *Mmmm, Bosmont[7] again, someone got killed while I was playing actually. He stole something in a shop, he got chased from there into the pitch, the whole community came, and they beat him to death, while we were playing. So, it was just , that type of thing. And the thing that shocked me was that it was normal for them you know people laughing, and other people shouting, "hit him, hit him". So, yea, it's just that, I just got shocked if I'm being honest with you. – Worker*

He continued to say:

> *Ahhhhh…. I mean, to be honest, at that time I didn't know how to feel, if I can put it that way. It just hit me like quickly. Then other than that, it's just people being shot. A lot of the times when I'm in Eldorado Park, people being shot, while we sleeping, things like that. And it happens very quickly, by the time you go look outside everything's done, everyone's gone, and the person is just lying down. So, yea, that's about it. - Worker*

Worker speaks matter-of-factly here and with little verbal expression of emotion about the violence he witnessed playing football in his neighbourhood. In the room the intensity of the emotion was palpable. It seemed to be something of a mutual agreement that those feelings which may emasculate him not be named, despite being felt. Such is the negotiation of the dynamics of masculinity for adolescent boys in football. The complex dance between being authentic to the self while performing, in football and their masculinity, means that they are required to write the narratives of their identities within a particular field of play. This field in which they narrate themselves is dictated by the dynamics of football, fathers and fatherlessness. As a result, participants were asked to hide their emotional and mental fragility in the name

[7] Bosmont and Eldorado Park are areas in the south of Johannesburg. They are some of the township areas in Johannesburg with high incidences of unemployment poverty and violence (Murray, 2011).

of performing masculinity and in the name of performing to a high standard as a player. This extract also spoke to the experiences of trauma that players have in their lives. Some of these traumatic experiences are related to football and others are not. What is common for participants is that playing football served as an intervention in mediating their various experiences of trauma (Whitley et al., 2022).

At the same time, while their non-tangible emotional fragility can be hidden, the emasculation that comes with being replaced in the team and being a commodity, rather than a human, in football cannot be hidden. Participants often struggle with the idea that there is always someone ready to take your place in the team and that at any point it can be decided that you are surplus to requirements and the pressure that comes with this. Meaning that your very body in which your identity inhabits can easily go from a highly valued asset to a surplus to requirements adjunct. Subsequently, participants engaged with their bodies in violent ways that meant that they pushed their bodies through injuries. Playing through pain in order to defend their place in the team or to gain superiority over another player by getting their place in the team:

> *it was October, around these times, October, September. He was like "come through, and theeennn we will see what the coach is saying and what not". Sooo the knee is still sore and swollen but then I was like hai, voetsek, if these boys really suck then we'll see what happens. Got there, trialled, for like three weeks with the injured knee, - Chief.*

Players pushed their bodies past their breaking points and played through injury in order to fight for a place on various teams. This act can be considered a form of violence on the self. Their bodies broke down but in order to achieve their hopes and maintain a sense of success, players continued to hurt their own bodies, even when they were already in pain.

5.4.3 Injury

Identity is performed, created and mediated through the body (Hall, 2000). Football as an embodied practice allows for players to use and form relationships with their bodies. Through their football narratives participants were able to continuously reiterate their physical sense of self and in doing so create their identities within the discourse of team dynamics, location and time. Different aspects of the body have been explored above such as race and belonging. The section to follow illustrates how the violent

nature of injury and aspects of how the body is used in football means that players (per)formed different identities across time by being able to use or not use their bodies. Being a footballer and athlete formed a large part of the social identities of participants (Newton et al., 2020). The psychological impacts of injuring the very body that enables you to do that which you perceive to give your life meaning was narrated as torturous for players. It often made them doubt their sense of self and self-worth.

As much as there is immense good in the positive aspects football has had on the identities of the players in this study there are also underlying negatives. Negatives that often creep under the radar but can also be cause for concern in the identity development of young players such as football becoming more than just a passion but an obsession (Vallerand, 2007). With football as an obsession there exists the dangers of an identity based and built solely on football which can be harmful to players, especially without the correct support structures outside of football (Newton et al., 2020). Consistent with all of the participants in the study were the trials and tribulations that came with injury. As a result of their sense of self, identity and narratives being intertwined with football and the bodily nature of football, participants needed their bodies in order to perform their identities. So, in moments when they were injured, they often felt, not only that their bodies failed them, but that they themselves were failures (Holt & Neely, 2011). Participants reflected on how quickly their narratives changed when they were injured. From feeling a strong sense of belonging and confidence in themselves and who they were to the extreme opposites of loneliness and worthlessness throughout their recoveries:

> *"I got injured, I think it was 2019, playing for Chiefs, I was out for I think about 12 to 15 weeks, and that was also, that was one of the worst times of my life, that period nje[8]. Because at the beginning it didn't look like I was going to heal because everyone that I was consulting seemed like they had a solution but then when I get back onto the field, it turns out I'm not fine yet. Yoh, well for lack of a better term it was hell. Yoh, yea, because I first consulted a chiropractor right. He knew what the problem was, but he couldn't fix it" – Surprise.*

He goes on to say.

> *"yoh, seeing my teammates progress and then some of them getting promotion … playing, yoh yoh yoh, it wasn't nice because that's all I wanted to do but I wasn't able to do and the longer it took the more frustrated I got, and then now*

[8] Nje is a Zulu word for 'just'. Used colloquially to signify the end of a phrase while emphasizing what was said.

> *you come back obviously and your position has been, you've been replaced and now you must work to build everything back up and then even worse if the coach doesn't like you or hasn't seen you play so then it's like eish yea, that period nje aiy.– Surprise*

This narration from Surprise explores how participants struggled through injuries in their careers and how it impacted their view of the world but more importantly their views of themselves and their identities. Injuries left participants feeling less valuable in the world and in many ways othered them from their teammates. This created an experience of loneliness and frustration in their lives. Having to endure the recovery process in isolation from teammates and family meant that players were often left in a space of not belonging. Adding to this frustration was the feeling of helplessness that participants felt when they were injured and often did not know how to recover or were unable to wait through the long recovery time that the injuries often took. All of these factors ended up leading to a loss in confidence in one's physical body and a loss in, part, of one's identity:

> *Yea, with the injury, with the injury it was a big negative impact on me, because actually, it was at a stage because I popped my kneecap, Uhhhh out like 6 times in a few seasons and I thought I was done, because it was a big injury - Winger.*
>
> *Yes! Exactly, yea, because there is a lot of fear now and doubt and you scared to do certain movements again because now maybe it will cause the same injury again and you have to believe that you're fine now and that your body can handle it. So eventually it happened, it took a bit of time. – Surprise*

Often what came after the injuries for players that continued was a sense of resilience, self-belief and increased gratitude for their bodies, as well as a sense of detachment from their football identities as being their whole identities.

> *"Recovery, like hit an ice bath or something like that, eat something healthy just to get my body back, hydrate and yea. Get ready for the next training session." – Action*
>
> *"So, like now I appreciate my body and now I know I have to take care of it because I need it like and also not wanting to endure pain again" - Surprise.*

Despite being able to add resilience and endurance into their identities post injury, the loss of belief in the capabilities of the physical body is a major change, and adjustment to one's identity. This is because of the performative nature of identity. Participants expressed needing to rebuild their identities and their sense of self after injuries. As

alluded to by Surprise, a key feature of injuries was having to acknowledge the commodification of his body and with that is his replaceability.

Physical injuries also served as injuries to the masculinity of participants in multiple ways. Injury meant that their physical bodies were not strong enough, it meant that they could not compete or gain a sense of mastery over their body or their opponents. It also meant that participants were simply replaceable. Injury positioned participants in contradictory places to the place of hegemonic masculinity's ideals. They were no longer strong, no longer competent and no longer successful, and in a sense no longer masculine (Wasylkiw & Clairo, 2018). This performance of masculinity came at the expense of their bodies because of trying to play through injuries or overtraining in order to improve their ability in order to avoid the shame and anxiety induced by the presence of performing masculinity in the space. Being easily replaceable creates both a pressure and anxiety to continually perform and to push your body and identity to the limits. Participants described this pressure as welcome in football and as part of the process but they also spoke to a deeper level of anxiety and pressure from the outside world that football seemed to make temporarily disappear for them. Given the precarious state of the world since the COVID-19 pandemic, players highlighted this period as a source of worry and anxiety.

5.5 The Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unexpected circumstances to the whole world. For many it increased worry about health as well as economic security. The world had to change the way it lived throughout this time. The same can be said for the young footballers in this study. Suddenly they had to stop playing football and be locked up in their homes indefinitely. However, in hindsight, the pandemic may have been a serendipitous opportunity to understand what football brings to and means in the lives of young players. This period exposed the world to circumstances that could not be predicted and caused everyone to change. This theme explores the ways in which the players experienced and lived through the COVID-19 pandemic as well as what it meant for them in football. This period was linked to an increased level of worry and anxiety for participants. The anxiety they experienced over this period enabled them to speak about the anxiety they experienced in their everyday lives regarding the

direction of their lives. Players negotiating adolescence and what their future might look like as they get closer to being adults. Players expressed the need to continue private training during the pandemic in order to ensure that they were able to perform once football did resume. Players also added that they experienced a sense of pressure in this regard, within football and in their daily lives. Below is an exploration of the identities of the football players interviewed and how they were affected by the ramifications of the pandemic.

5.5.1 Anxiety

Players expressed below just how much not being able to play football impacted their lives. This impact changed them forever and possibly gave them an idea of what their lives may be like without football. The question about life without football brought up indecision and uncertainty for the players. A life without football for many of them was imagined as a life not worth living (Scheibe, 1986). Yet in the time of COVID this was their reality. Some players saw it as an opportunity to look at things differently, while for all of them it was also a hinderance to opportunities that could have materialised. For all of them a life without football felt like a story of sadness and frustration:

> *"I actually stopped playing before everyone else did, my aunt died, my aunt passed away, my father's sister. So, I couldn't play the last game before. So, they were telling us there is COVID, that's when the first outbreak came, that's when they told us that ok, there might be a lockdown and what not and all that stories. But we were still allowed to play so we had like one game against Jomo, and I told them I couldn't make it, I actually wanted to go after the funeral, but it would be it would be a problem, so I just left it. Straight after that, after the funeral actually, Monday training got cancelled, from there nothing! Uhhhh, I think I used that time to train you know. But I gained (laughing), I gained a lot of weight. In terms of playing, being comfortable on the ball that's where I grew. I think that's also where I grew the importance of training on my own. Ja, I missed the field , but ja." – Worker*

> *"But it was hard without having your friends or teammates." – Speed*

For Worker, Speed, and other players, despite the frustration of not being able to play football as they were used to, they reflected on the COVID period as a time where they were able to improve individual weaknesses as players. Although they were not able to socialize with teammates, which is an important part of the game to all players who participated in the study, most of them were also able to use this setback as an opportunity to improve in some way or the other. All of the participants made sure to

stay as close to the game as they could, which may have given them something positive to do during the time in lockdown, making sure to stay fit for when football did eventually come back. The secondary gain in this may have been that still training alone may have helped players cope with the mental and physical difficulties the world experienced during the pandemic (Jones et al., 2014). For other players, the impact of the pandemic was a lot more negative:

> "*So, lockdown for me was like the hardest point of my life, because I couldn't see my friends, I couldn't see, I couldn't play football, I couldn't go outside. I just kind of lost motivation for everything, to do anything, because me, I live on social relationships, like socializing and being outdoors is my life, without that I don't think I am who I am without that, like that's who I am so I need to do that. So like, it was hard for me because I couldn't see my friends, I couldn't go outside, I couldn't play sport and I didn't, it was bad because I didn't find any other ways to entertain myself physically, like sports wise or fitness wise and I would just sit there and play PlayStation the whole time and I would eat when I wanted to and I wouldn't really take care of my nutrition at all and I wouldn't really, and it just took its toll on ,me, and I was gaining weight and gaining weight and gaining weight, and I came out of lockdown really overweight and I thought my football dream was over because I didn't think I would be able to get out of it but this, this whole idea of me wanting to , like I always had that, like football was the one thing that kept me going and I knew that it was my dream and I had to change to be able to chase my dream still, I went and I lost all my weight" – Striker*
>
> *"You weren't seeing people like this, you weren't outside like this, like when could you come down, on a Sunday, with your team, to play a game and all be one for 90 minutes? And that was just taken away from me and that is what I live for. So, it was just really hard during lockdown because there was none of that. Yeah." – Striker*

Striker's story above highlights just how difficult the pandemic was for a lot of people and players, and just how difficult things became for him without the structure, socializing and enjoyment he experienced from football when he was able to play (Jacobs et al., 2017). Although in its own way, this period for the players highlighted and allowed them to narrate themselves into a story of resilience. Players were able to come out of the pandemic and either be better at football than when it began or have to come back from the difficulties the world experienced in order to get back playing. This narrative of resilience in itself is linked to the identities of the players. It is something which they are able to look back on and hold on to as a part of who they are going forward in their lives. Through this they may engender more belief and confidence in themselves, both through survival of a difficult period world-wide, but

also through a sort of backward hope, that they have overcome an immense difficulty in the form of the pandemic, meaning they can overcome other obstacles in the future.

The pandemic alerted participants to the meaning of football in their lives and the function it served for them. In what feels like an under studied area within the field of sports and development is the degree to which young football players may be anxious in this period of history. The results of this project allude to how football seems to have helped participants alleviate their anxiety despite the pressures that surround football. All participants in some way or another alluded to being generally anxious people in the current climate of Johannesburg and the high unemployment and poverty rates (Murray, 2011). Players reported worrying about their futures, their lives at home, their families and becoming who they want to be:

> *"it helps me, like it helps me relax and my stress out, because uhm I've been stressed for many years, like as a young kid uh, I been stressing and I've been to doctors and they say it's not good to be stressed as a young age, so like I've also had issues with myself like with stressing and that because of the things happening at home and uhm with football and schooling as well, but when I come down to football, it takes my problems away, it takes 99% of my problems away, but that 1% problem is always winning, even on the football field, but at least it takes that 99% away" – Winger*

> "No, as long as I'm playing football. Like if I'm on the field, like everything that happens at home and everything that happened it all goes away. And it's a place for me to express myself. With my friends." – Viper

In terms of what football meant for participants they described football as something of a release from their worries and anxieties. Players expressed being able to express themselves and their emotions in football. This may be a protective factor in help male players manage their emotions in a healthier manner. As such this study proposes that football may be a way for anxiety to be released and managed for young male players in a way that feels more authentic and acceptable in the context of their masculinity. In a parallel sense, there are also merits of football towards the hegemonic masculinity. Players are often recognised for their abilities and this serves as an achievement and makes them feel successful when being part of Joburg City FC. Being recognised as a good player has social value and increases their sense of status but also conversely adds pressure regarding their performance as a player.

I can be said that the level of anxiety and stress for young football players and the ways in which football alleviates or adds to that stress would be an important avenue to explore both in terms of the identities of young players and how football shapes them. It would also be important to explore this space in trying to improve the mental health of young adolescents during a period of time where largely the world is in a state of precarity. Themomentary relief and respite that football offered participants on a day-to-day basis may have been enough to quell the pressures and anxieties of day to day living in 2023. Despite players worrying about their futures, being in the football space seemed to give them hope for their futures. In the context of South Africa's high suicide rates, crime rates and poverty rates (StatsSA, 2021), sources of stress are easy to come by. However, having safe, affordable and potentially rewarding spaces for young people to come together, connect and find relief from the pressures of living will be important to find in helping young people find hope for their futures.

5.5.2 Performance, pressure and being a commodity.

Participants narrated how much pressure they experienced throughout their football lives and how this may have helped them with pressures in different spheres of their lives but also how sometimes it crushed them. A common thread throughout all of their narratives was the anxiety that came with the pressure of needing to perform in the footballing world. This pressure paled in comparison to what participants described as a crippling anxiety that they experienced in their daily lives. Be it from school, the uncertainties of home and street life or the fear of what looks like a bleak future for a lot of young South Africans (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005).

There are myriad layers to the sources of pressure that participants experienced both internally and externally. They narrated a situation with little reprieve from some sort of pressure to perform and to maintain a sense of identity that was aligned to football. For players with less privilege in terms of school opportunity, players with single parents or players who had financial difficulties, football appeared to them to be the only way out of these difficult situations and sometimes the only thing that they were good at. To some players, their lives hinged on football.

Yea, its life, like I'm not just playing it for myself I'm playing it for my family and the people that believe in me, and also, I'm playing for the doubters and the haters that didn't support me and that didn't believe in me. To prove them wrong. So, it's not only for me, yes, it's my career, but it's also to help my family out. but there is pressure everywhere in life. But with football there is a pressure because like firstly you put pressure on yourself because you want to make it and then everyday you don't know if your careers going to end or if they are going to release you and then there is also pressure coming from back home, family friends, and you want to show them that you can make it and because they believed in you. Same with family because they have so much belief in you, so it is pressure - Winger.

For participants, football was as much an opportunity for fun as it was an opportunity to make ends meet and provide some sort of contribution to the home environment. The stipends that players received for some offered welcome relief to their home finances. In a sense for participants football was not just an exercise in performance but also and exercise in survival, that hinged on their performance and the perception of their coaches. Being in this position came with a lot of pressure for participants and meant that there was not a day that they could afford to be off. Similarly, it is narrated by participants that the pressure from football at times became too much but because of the by-products of the game, they often pushed through this discomfort to find and become different versions of themselves:

It's too much pressure. Especially being at centre back. You must be the cleanest [player]. It's like the guy I play with at the back now, he leaves me alone at the back sometimes because he goes up and down and he doesn't have confidence. - Speed

Football has really given me a lot of discipline. And this year was a year where I thought about actually quitting, like this thing is becoming too much for me. The injuries, not being chosen for Engen, not getting game time, I was like hai, let me leave this thing. So, I spoke to my rents about it, I was like "hai, I think I'm gonna leave this thing next year because I don't think it's for me" and they said "nah dude, why you doing that? You getting discipline from this thing. The discipline is coming from this thing – Chief.

Tied to this discipline that Chief speaks of is the responsibility that came with it. Participants had to mediate their school schedules with the demands of their football desires. This balance came with a great deal of pressure as historically, and in the time that participants exist, good school grades appear to offer more security than

attempting to play professionally. Football may offer them only a moment of release, and what is life, besides a series of moments itself. Life is lived thorough moments. Participants narrated needing to take control of their lives and through the discipline of training they achieved the perception of agency in their lives. The feeling of agency reduced the anxiety of feeling helplessness in their home environments for participants. Participants were also able to feel like they could control their bodies during adolescence, where bodily control is more complicated given the changes that occur (Erikson, 1964).

This sense of agency found from playing football is contradicted by the difficulties that come with being replaceable in football. Players are almost seen as a commodity to the clubs they play for and once they are unable to serve the clubs purpose, they can easily be replaced. This adds pressure in the lives of players because if they do not perform, or are unable to perform, they risk being replaced:

> *"playing for like Chiefs, my goal was like to play for their reserve side, and I did till uhm, I got injured I popped my knee and then they cut me from the reserve squad and then they put me back to u19s and then I got better from my injury and I carried on pushing to get back there but unfortunately they didn't uhm, promote me to MDC, that is reserves, and then uhm, unfortunately they also released me… because… I don't think I was bad to be released or like I wasn't good enough, I just think they didn't give us, give me opportunities to play" – Winger.*

> *I was a starter, and then I got injured and then I didn't start playing well, and they had to get a replacement, so they got an older boy to replace me, so then game time was gone, we playing the big teams and I'm not getting game time* and all of that. – Chief

The competition for places in the team was always tough for participants and it was compounded by the even larger pool of players outside of the football club who are hunting for the positions the participants have. Be it through injury or poor performance participants experienced a crippling pressure because of their replaceability. After an injury Winger was simply replaced and released. The club has to continue to reach their targets. As a result, players become second priority as there are many players out there that clubs feel they can develop. Players are then always looking over your shoulder because of this. Participants expressed that they always felt like they needed to perform, or risk being replaced by the thousands of other adolescent boys reaching for the same goal. Players felt a confidence and status that came from performing

well as part of Joburg City FC. Players expressed that they felt confident because of the experience of being part of a football academy with a rich history, playing well but also from improving themselves in the sport that they love. This confidence spilt over into their lives outside of football as Striker and Surprise elaborate on below:

> *"Off the field you just have confidence, like a lot more confidence in yourself because in your head you know you've done it, but you have to work harder because you know your place isn't set in stone, it can always change. So off the field you like, you just become a more confident person and a better person because you start appreciating things more in life, because you know what you have but what you have isn't permanent and it can just go at the end of a season, or at the start of the season or in the middle of the season, it can just go like that, if you don't step up to the plate and that just makes you better off the field because you set yourself to different standards with your work, with your friends with family or whatever it is, so because of your football, your whole lifestyle goes up and you start having a lot higher expectations of yourself, It is a good thing, and a bad thing, but mostly a good thing. The only reason it could be a bad thing is like, you don't think of yourself as worth it [when playing badly], but it is a good thing because you start living up, and doing things that you never thought you could do before, even with your family and you just become a better you and so yea." – Striker*

> *" … well obviously as a footballer you always have to believe in yourself and your ability, so it wasn't a shock or surprise that "oh I'm here" it was more like I deserve to be here" – Surprise.*

This story of improvement and confidence from Striker and Surprise highlights what Jacobs and Wright (2017) allude to in their paper. The confidence in themselves that players gained from playing their sport bleeds into other aspects of their lives simultaneously becoming part of who they are. It is notable however, that this is a delicately balanced scale because as much as confidence can be added into one's identity from playing football, particularly when football forms a large part of one's life, so too can the opposite happen (Bruner et al., 2017). This can be a difficult process to work through during the difficulties of adolescence. As mentioned by Striker above, the bad side of football can be in a loss of confidence. This loss of confidence can be seen in moments such as getting injured, being replaced or poor performances. Football's fickle nature becomes evident in this context because of how, almost instantaneously, one can go from feeling full of confidence to feeling worthless, when such a big part of your identity is taken away. These sorts of painful experiences offer both the opportunity for resilience but also a moment in which a lot of players leave football in pain.

The results above are an analysis of the lives of participants and their experiences in football. The pressures they experience and the ways in which football has influenced their lives. Often described as the world's most popular sport, football as a sport is incredibly complex and nuanced. At all levels of the game there are different byproducts and ways of living that football stitches onto the people that play, watch and follow the game. The dominant narrative centres around the elite professional players and how much money they earn, what sorts of controversies they experience but little is known of the stories of those who are not at that level and do not reach that level. Contrastingly, the dominant narrative centres around what is actually the minority of football players. This study is an attempt to explore the narratives of those who play football and have not yet been heard. Some who play for fun, some who play for an escape and all who play for the love of the game. In uncovering these narratives and the influence football has and has had on the identities of young adolescent males in Johannesburg South Africa, particularly Joburg City FC, we can better understand the influence football has and the ways in which it can be used to help and nurture young people in a world that is currently in despair and at a crossroads.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions

In concluding this project, this chapter aims to offer a summary and synthesis of the key findings of the study and what they mean for the lives of the young people involved in the study. Before the key findings are explored, this chapter will present the strengths and limitations of the study as well as suggesting future research that may be important in this field and for this population group.

6.1 Strengths, Limitations and suggestions for further research

In the study, saturation was achieved throughout the interviews given the sample size, but it is important to note that, despite saturation, the study is limited to players from one club, in one city of South Africa. As such, there is limited generalisability that can be applied using the results of the study, and this was in trade off for richer information. Despite the rich data, an avenue to explore for future research would be to gain an understanding of the experiences of young footballers on a macro scale. This would be beneficial for informing football-based youth development programs. It will be important to gain a better understanding of how football can effectively be used in youth development. The use of football as a conduit for male adolescent emotional expression could be a key contribution towards helping direct young South African men away from more risky coping mechanisms. However, the gender of the players is also part of the limitations of this study and it would be beneficial for future research to look at the growing number of young women in football and the impacts that football has on their lives. As previously mentioned, the depth and richness of the data in this project was one of its strengths. This enabled participants to give detailed explanations of their experiences which ideally gives readers a more nuanced and holistic picture of their experiences.

6.2 Central findings

The key findings of this study are related to four central categories: Self-development; Place, race and class; Fathers and masculinity, and Precarity and hope. These findings are expressions of the key elements that emerged from the project.

6.2.1 Self-development

Participants attributed multiple changes in their sense of identity and sense of self to their participation in football. Participants reflected on the routine practices of training and the way this structured their lives. In each and every moment they play, they story themselves in the world, and find ways to express themselves. . These shifts culminate over time in a more tangible sense of self as both more stable and developmentally changing over time. Participants reflected on the multitude of skills they gained through their experiences in football. These skills spread into their lives outside of football and, in the same vein, enabled them to merge these skills into their identities. Being social, confidence and discipline were key aspects that participants felt able to add to their self-narratives. These changes spoke to internal identity shifts as linked to the external shifts and experiences that they had in the form of traveling, new experiences and improved physical health.

This process also entailed developing imagined future selves. They felt closest to this idea of themselves momentarily during the training sessions. For the “lucky” few, this future self will exist for the rest of their lives. As seen throughout the data, football helped players change across the time, their bodies and their environments, exposing them to different means with which to explore and expand their identities. The stability and frame of practicing daily seemed to offer something similar to a therapeutic frame. As with patients, this frame offered participants structure and a safe space to express, discover and become themselves. Langa (2015) leans on a similar idea that psychodynamic theory can be a helpful lens with which to look at the worlds of adolescent males. In football, participants are exposed to many life experiences, positive and negative, and to a degree ego identity is formed in the football environment during in a critical stage of adolescence in conceptualizing the self (McAdams, 2001).

Finally, being recognised is a critical part of the human experience and in the formation of identity. Through football and through the interviews participants explained that they felt seen in a way that they had not experienced before. All of them expressed that this was their first time being asked about their football lives. It also served as the first time they were able to reflect on themselves in football. This allowed them to recreate themselves through narrative and make sense of their lives. Reflexively recognizing

and reconstructing one's sense of the self is the pivotal developmental 'crisis' of adolescence (Erikson, 1964). Interestingly, the opportunity to talk about their experiences provided participants with scope to consolidate the value of football experiences into a coherent narrative of identity.

6.2.2 Place, race and class

A segue between identity and belonging was the locational dynamics of the football club. The geographical location of the football club enabled players to speak on their experience of Johannesburg and what it meant to be a part of the city and a club that represents the city. Being part of the club gave players a sense of belonging and family. Contrastingly, it also served to 'other' them when it came to playing against other teams, or when a potential move to a new team was on the horizon. Representing the club gave the sense that what players are doing is bigger than just them and gave space for their collective identity (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). It is notable, however, that the participants' experience of Johannesburg was variable and nuanced.

Living in Johannesburg at this point in time, it emerged that players experienced a split in the dynamics of the city. This split was based on where in Johannesburg players came from. Being from the Kasi came with connotations of inferiority in the city-based academy football space. In township football, different forms of expression and skill are more highly valued than in the academy space. This meant that players had to mediate and shift between different worlds. Players shifted their expressions of identity in football based on their location and played different styles of football as appropriate in different places. The idea of players' identities being expressed differently in different places mirrors how the complexities of Johannesburg demand inhabitants to be fluid in their representation of their identities in different areas of the city. It also speaks to the divide and tension between the Kasi and more affluent parts of the city (Murray, 2011). Players had to negotiate these dynamics throughout their lives and fledgling football careers.

Kasi football is also less recognised on a commercial and global scale of football, despite the quality and skill of the players (Alegi & Bolsmann, 2010a). This reinforces a particular narrative of whose voice and story matters. Participants did find

recognition in the form of nicknames received from fans, teammates and coaches. Nicknames made players feel like they belonged. During the interviews the way players eyes lit up when narrating how they got their nicknames showed immense pride. It was a signifier of how they are identified and made to be special in their environments, a way for them to belong to the places they came from and the club they were in. This was an important part of participants' identities in their lives and made them feel desired. Striker did not have a nickname from his teammates, fans or coaches like the other participants, which shows how in the same vein that nicknames made players feel a sense of belonging, they could equally 'other' players.

Each engagement in football requires participants to position themselves in particular ways. Although not always overtly, every training session entails engaging the embodied sense of self in terms of race and gender. Traditionally a Black sport, in comparison to cricket and rugby, football is positioned and positions participants in particular ways historically. Academy football is often seen at times as a colonised version of the football that players, often from the kasi, love and adore. This posits an inherent power dynamic between players who are from the Kasi, and usually Black, and players who grew up in the academy structures, usually white (Alegi & Bolsmann, 2010a). In this sense the socio-historical position of football in this current day and age becomes a nuanced space for further exploration. In the above analysis (Black) participants expressed struggling to adapt to the academy setting from the Kasi, having to change themselves as well as a sense that they, at times, did not belong there. This feeling of non-belonging is, however, not a one-way street as conversely, the one white player in the research cohort was sometimes excluded from the strong family sense of the team.

Although race is pertinent, it interesting to note that it is difficult to delineate the races of the participants solely through their narratives and the data presented in analysis chapter. Without the races being disclosed in the methods chapter, one may not be able to figure out players' races. This is noteworthy as it posits how there is a strong thread of shared experience in football and tentatively suggests that sport may contribute to nullifying some of the racial tensions that exist in the dynamics of participants' lives. With football being the common language, it emerged that players felt comfortable relating to each other beyond racialisation.

6.2.3 Fathers and masculinity

A core theme to emerge from participants' narratives was about their fathers or father-figures. Football and fathers were interlinked for participants, be it through their biological fathers or social fathers (Clowes et al., 2013). This brings forward the ways in which fatherhood is performed for the participants and for young males in South Africa. Participants expressed a sense of feeling closer to their paternal figures through football, regardless of the actual context of their biological fathers. In a context in which fathers are often absent, literally or emotionally, it is worth noting how football offered a way for fathers and young adolescent males to connect to each other. This happened through the amount of time football enabled participants to spend with their father-figures.

Fatherhood is inherently linked to the performance of masculinity and the way participants performed masculinity in the football space. The use of the physical body to compete and dominate in football led participants towards hegemonic forms of masculinity and allowed them the space to perform this. Less spoken about though were the softer forms of masculinity that can be found in football. It emerged that players were able to have more gentle conversations with their fathers. Players also had space to hug and connect to each other in football, be it through goal celebrations or changing room exchanges, which despite not being explicitly mentioned make up a big part of the experience that the participants live. In addition to this, a common sight in football is the emotional expression of anger, despair and joy. These emotions can be seen etched on the faces of fans and players. In this way, football offered participants a space not just for physical expression but for emotional expression. In a society that feels pressured for masculinity to operate in a particular fashion, a space for emotional expression can be critical for the emotional, physical and mental health of participants. With more research, football may be a segue for opening spaces for men's emotional and mental health to take more precedence in the perspectives of society and men themselves, rewriting the hegemonic narratives of masculinity.

6.2.4 Precarity and hope

One of the most novel findings of this study is the level to which young football players reported being anxious. Although performance pressures played a role, pervasive generalised anxiety also appears to stem from sources external to the game. It was reflected that football actually helped ease their anxieties. More research on the prevalence and epidemiology of this anxiety as well as the impact football has, specifically as a means to manage anxiety, may be helpful in future. In describing what football meant to them, participants frequently expressed that it made them feel joy which cannot fully be described. They reported that it also makes them feel at peace and less anxious. This brought into focus what seems like a high level of worry and anxiety in the lives of the young adolescent males in the study. Given the climate of South Africa and the world at present, a high level of anxiety would not be surprising.

Participants spoke to not having spaces where they could work through their anxiety and daily worries, but that when they were at football their anxiety disappeared, even if just for that period of time. If taken in the context of psychology football serves as a form of therapy for the participants and a way of managing their anxiety. Football itself comes with its own pressures that the participants spoke of, but none of them seemed to compare with the relief that football brings them against the pressures of life. The extent to which participants reflected a general sense of anxiety and the frequency with which this sentiment came up amongst participants was surprising and will be an important space for future research.

Football may help with managing anxiety for the players through the idea of hope. In line with Bradbury (2020) participants often leveraged their hope on the successes (and difficult circumstances that they overcame) in the past. This laid the foundation for them to feel a sense of ‘backwards’ hope directed forwards, in believing that they could achieve again and again. This not only enables participants to identify with a positive self-perception, but it also offers them an opportunity, even momentarily, to experience agency and a life that feels worth living for them.

Players had an underlying worry or concern about their lives. Being able to story happiness and joy for even a few moments in the lives of participants is a privilege that some people never get to experience. As such, understanding the terrain within

which so many young adolescent males spend their time may help foster positive outcomes of growth for young men in South Africa.

These interviews gave participants the opportunity look at themselves in football for the first time, which allowed them to story themselves into the present but also recreate the stories of their past that formed their ever-changing identities. As the present changes, so do the narratives of the past and the key narratives were expressions of resilience, overcoming and purpose. Participants storied themselves into positions which allowed them to anticipate and hope for a better future for themselves. However, these may be false hopes for football fame and success creating a painful reality of unfulfilled promise. In conclusion, participating in football brings imagination and possibility into these young men's lives, and a hope that they could one day be something more than they are now.

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Appendices

- Appendix A: Interview questions/schedule
- Appendix B: Participant information sheets
- Appendix C: Consent form
- Appendix D: Assent form
- Appendix E: Ethics form
- Appendix F: Statement of principles document

Appendix A:

Interview schedule:

Questions to be used as a guide towards gaining narratives from participants:

Greetings and explanation that the interviewer will ask general open questions, in the form of a conversation, and would like the participant to share as much information about their lives as possible and as they feel comfortable. To debrief participants the interviewer will explain the aims of the study and go through what is discussed in the participant information sheet.

Ice breaking and identifying questions (short answers):

- What position do you play and what does it mean to play this position?
- What is your jersey number? (How did you choose this number?)
- What teams do you support? (How did you come to support them?)
- What is your nickname in football? How did it come about?
- What do you like the most about being a footballer?
- What don't you like about being a footballer?

Core Narrative questions:

1) Can you tell me about your family?
2) Can you tell me about your life at school?
3) Can you tell me about growing up and living in Joburg?
4) Can you tell me about your life? Start wherever you feel comfortable.
5) When did you start playing football and what was your journey to get to Joburg City FC?

Prompting questions:

- What is the story behind why you play football?
- Tell me about the most memorable match that you have ever played and why that match is memorable to you?

- How are your relations with other boys in the team? Can you tell me about any significant memories you have with them?
- How do these relations also play themselves out in terms of one's nationality or location of where they live in the City?
- How do you use football to as part of your identity, including what it means to be a 'real' boy?
- What does it feel like to have grown up in this day and age (of COVID)?
- What does it mean to you to play for Joburg City FC?
- What are your dreams and hopes about being a footballer?
- Can you tell me about what it will mean to you to sign your first professional contract?
- Have you ever not been able to play football, can you tell me about that time?
- If you weren't playing football, what do you imagine your life would look like?
- What is your favourite experience in football?
- What is your worst experience in football?
- What are the daily routines of football players?
- What does it feel when you win? Can you tell me about matches or cup games has the team won? And when you lose?
- Are there any moments of violence while playing football? If yes, how are such moments being addressed?

Appendix B:

Participant information sheet:



Good day,

My name is Obert Takudzwa Rukato and I am a Masters student in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating narratives of identity in football for youth development in South Africa. The aim of this research project is to find out how you experience playing football, why you like it and how it matters to you.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview. This activity will involve a conversation and is likely to take approximately one hour. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview using a digital device. The research will take place at Joburg City FC training grounds at 7 Civin Drive Senderwood.

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research. There are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. None of your identifying information will be used in the final research report. The information you give to me will be held securely on a password protected device and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time. If you need some support or counselling services following the interview, these are available free of charge at Lifeline - 0861 322 322; or Wits Community Psychology Clinic - 011 717 4513.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which

will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. The data will be anonymized and stored on a password protected laptop. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

An assent form confirming your informed participation in the study is attached for you to complete and sign.

Yours sincerely,

Obert Rukato

Obert Rukato

Email: Obert8@gmail.com

Cell: 0847600278

Supervisor: Prof Jill Bradbury

Email:Jill.Bradbury@wits.ac.za

Tel: 0117174515

Participant information sheet for parents:



Good day,

My name is Obert Takudzwa Rukato and I am a Masters student in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating narratives of identity in football for youth development in South Africa. The aim of this research project is to find out how your child experiences playing football, why they like it, how it has shaped their identity and how it matters to them.

As part of this project, I would like to invite your child to take part in an interview. This activity will involve a conversation and is likely to take approximately one hour. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview using a digital device. The research will take place at Joburg City FC training grounds at 7 Civin Drive Senderwood.

Your child will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research. There are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. Your child may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if they do not want to. None of your child's identifying information will be used in the final research report. The information your child gives to me will be held securely on a password protected device and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your child's participation in my final research report. If your child experiences any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume at another time. If your child needs some support or counselling services following the interview, these are available free of charge at: Lifeline - 0861 322 322; or Wits Community Psychology Clinic - 011 717 4513.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. The data will be anonymized and stored on a password protected laptop. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

A consent form confirming your informed consent for your child's participation in the study is attached for you to complete and sign.

Yours sincerely,

Obert Rukato

Obert Rukato

Email: Obert8@gmail.com

Cell: 0847600278

Supervisor: Prof Jill Bradbury

Email:Jill.Bradbury@wits.ac.za

Tel: 0117174515

Appendix C

Consent form:

Title of project: Narratives of identity in football for youth development in South Africa.

Name of researcher: Obert Takudzwa Rukato

I, ……..., (name) agree for my child…… (name) to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my child's participation will involve.
Please circle the relevant options below:

I agree that my child's participation will remain confidential	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes. in his research report	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that the information my child provides may be used anonymously by other researchers following this project.	YES	NO

…… (guardian signature)

…… (guardian name)

…….. (relationship to child)

…… (name of participant)

…… (date)

Appendix D:

Assent form:

Title of project: Narratives of identity in football for youth development in South Africa.

Name of researcher: Obert Takudzwa Rukato

I, ……..., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. Please circle the relevant options below.

I agree that my participation will remain confidential YES NO

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes. in his research report YES NO

I agree that the interview may be audio recorded YES NO

I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously by other researchers following this project. YES NO

…… (name of participant)

…… (participant signature)

…… (date)