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Narratives between generations: Stories of Black grandmothers and granddaughters in Soweto, South Africa

Master of Arts in Community-Based Counselling Psychology (MACC)
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A research report submitted to the School of Human and Community Development, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Community-Based Counselling Psychology by coursework and research.

Declaration

I declare that this research report, titled '*Narratives between generations: Stories of granddaughters and grandmothers in Soweto, South Africa'* is my own work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Community-based Counselling Psychology (MACC) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination at any other university. All sources cited have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references according to APA 7th edition.

Signed: 

Date: 06 August 2025

Acknowledgments

I want to firstly acknowledge my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for sustaining me through this entire journey. What a rollercoaster of a ride this was. I pray with the Lord's help that I may only live to glorify Him all the days of my life.

To my supervisor, Prof Jill, thank you for your guidance. For every nudge to think deeply about literature, myself, and the precious people who shared their stories with me. Thank you for taking the time to teach me and expand my world.

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To all my participants, words cannot describe how full I felt being in every one of your presence. Thank you for your time. I am so thankful. Kea leboha hahola fela. Modimo a le boloke.

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This research is dedicated to my grandmother, Lucy Motsokoane Serapelo. You're passing left me wondering how we could even live without you. But it is the remembrance of your life that has propelled me to continue to live and make you proud. I still hear your "halala" accompanied by a very proud smile every now and again. You nkgono are sorely missed.

Abstract

This research project explores intergenerational narratives of grandmothers and young women living in Soweto, South Africa. The study explores the ways that the past is (re)constructed and communicated (in)directly by grandmothers to the next generation(s) of young women and how the young women receive those messages and how this influences their lives in the present and future. Conversely, the study also examines how young people's experiences are told to and (mis)understood by the older generation. Guided by narrative identity and intersectionality frameworks, the study is positioned within a qualitative narrative methodology and underpinned by a social constructionist lens, attending closely to the ways in which stories are shaped by broader social, cultural, and historical contexts. Ten participants, five grandmothers aged 60+ and five young women aged 17 / 18 years old, were interviewed through open-ended narrative interviews that centred their voices, allowing them to reflect on their own lives as well as those of the other generation. Through these narratives, five key thematic threads emerged: 1) intergenerational caregiving, 2) transmission of values, 3) the notion of the "strong Black woman", 4) negotiating gendered expectations, and 5) hopes and fears for the future. This research is also layered with reflexivity, acknowledging the researcher's positionality as a young Black woman who shares certain identities with her participants. This closeness created moments of recognition but also required careful navigation of power and interpretation. In this way, the study becomes not only about what was said, but also about how meaning was co-constructed in the telling. Ultimately, these intergenerational stories offer insight into how ordinary, everyday accounts become rich sites of memory, identity, and hope—shedding light on how Black womanhood continues to evolve within a society marked by historical trauma, cultural continuities, and the desire for a hopeful future.

Keywords: *narrative, identity, intersectionality, grandmothers, young women, intergenerational caregiving, values, "strong Black" woman, hope*

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Chapter One:

1.1 Introduction

This research project explores intergenerational narratives of grandmothers and young women living in Soweto, South Africa. The study explores the ways that the past is (re)constructed and communicated indirectly by grandmothers to the next generation(s) of young women and how the young women receive those messages and how this influences their lives in the present and future. Conversely, the study also examines how young people's experiences are told to and (mis)understood by the older generation. In all human societies, the family organisation is an essential structure through which the individual's identity is developed. The family provides economic, social and psychological security and support with the ultimate hope of socialising the individual into the broader society (Becvar, 2013). Hence, it is widely acknowledged that the family plays a significant role in a child's life; in sociological terms, "family" is a primary agency of socialisation (Wyness, 2018). And this is because the family is usually understood as the first point of contact that children have with the social world, through the early attachments and relations that are formed after birth with various members of the family. In almost all contexts' parents are the early dominant forces in children's lives. Secondly, the family is the most formative influence on children as they grow up; it anchors children in all sorts of complex and nuanced ways such that family becomes a dominant frame of reference throughout the life-course of children.

In psychology, the family is typically understood within the "nuclear" framework, reflecting Western cultural values about family (Mokone, 2006). The term "nuclear family" is generally synonymous with a married couple and their children (husband, wife, and their biological or adopted children). In the South African context this definition of 'family' is contested and is variably understood and culturally inflected (Bray, 2010; Dolbin-Macnab et al., 2016; Dunifon, 2012; Mokone, 2006). In many African societies, the term family goes beyond just the nuclear family of a father, mother, and children (Dolbin-Macnab et al., 2016; Dunifon, 2012). It also includes other relatives such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, in-laws, and even non biological family members. This makes the traditional African family larger and more multigenerational, often referred to as an 'extended family'. Unlike the typical Western family structure, which focuses mainly on the immediate parents and children, the

African family system is more expansive. It involves several smaller families, perhaps in rural areas living close together in separate homes, but still forming a larger, connected network. Even where people do not share geographical proximity, this extended family network remains important. This extended family system serves as both an economic and emotional support system, helping each member foster a sense of identity and belonging (Stats South Africa, 2025).

Given this context, the notion of the "nuclear family" is culturally and politically laden, rendering other formations of family as invisible and abnormal. Makiwane et al. (2012) argue that the definition of family should go beyond the nuclear and extended dichotomy in contemporary South Africa. We know this because in South Africa, extended family forms were radically disrupted by apartheid. Apartheid brought about violent incursions in various ways and many of these incursions were experienced at the familial level (Canham et al., 2020), and its effects were experienced devastatingly by people classified as Black or African (Bray, 2010). These incursions created divisive hierarchies and fragmented living arrangements within Black families (Bray, 2010). A significant proportion of Black families were destabilised; wives and children were unable to live with their husbands and fathers, and extended families were forcibly dispersed (Bray, 2010). Amidst these upheavals, grandmothers played critical roles (Dolbin-Macnab et al., 2016). Parents seeking employment would migrate to cities, leaving their children in the care of their mothers (grandmothers), with minimal wages and reliance on old-age grants (Cloete, 2017). As a result, grandmothers became the custodians of the family role for the child (Michel et al., 2020), a cornerstone where the child could still experience a sense of family amidst the upheaval (Cloete, 2017). In the expansive understanding of multigenerational 'family', grandmothers have always played this role, regardless of external challenges to stable family life.

Thus, this research project sought to consider what narratives are passed down by grandmothers to young women or what is communicated by the younger women to grandmothers and how these dialogical interactions mutually inform their lives in the present. To unpack these realities, this study focuses on families as the primary place where the transmission of psychological legacies move or pass between generations. The families in question are the site of grandmothers and young women. Furthermore, this study will specifically examine how the stories grandmothers tell about themselves, and their experiences serve as a living archive within families, raising questions about what is transmitted, if there is

anything, from generation to generation (Frankish & Bradbury, 2012). While the “post-apartheid” state continues to shape contemporary life, the narratives of Black grandmothers remain largely absent from public discourse. This research centres their experiences, recognising how the intersections of gender and race shape both their everyday realities and their relationships with the younger generations.

Having highlighted the impact of apartheid on Black family structures, there is particular interest in post-apartheid youth and the idea that they will bring the hope of a “rainbow nation” promised. Bradbury and Clark (2012) emphasise the profound hope invested in youth, who are seen as architects of a better future, especially in a nation that has transitioned from the oppressive apartheid regime to the democratic "promised land" and “new country” and “post-apartheid” of 1994. However, this hope exists alongside an awareness of the limitations of democracy in addressing deep-rooted inequalities. This hints at the complicated and intricate landscape of our post-apartheid world, one where everything has changed and nothing has changed at the same time. Borrowing from Bradbury and Clark (2012), the term post-apartheid will be used throughout this study to draw attention to the transitional nature of South Africa and the tensions that continue to shape this ongoing transformation. Bradbury and Clark (2012) use the metaphor of the "hinge" (Hoffman, 2004) to describe how young South Africans are positioned between the oppressive legacies of apartheid and the possibilities of a democratic future. This metaphor captures the role of youth as a connection point between different temporalities, where their lives are shaped both by the echoes of historical injustices and by the expectation to drive societal transformation. Young people, while often celebrated as symbols of hope and renewal, remain deeply influenced by inherited narratives, cultural memory, and systemic inequalities that persist in post-apartheid South Africa. The authors highlight the tension inherent in this position: youth are simultaneously agents of potential change and subjects constrained by the reassertion of past discourses and material realities, such as xenophobia, gender-based violence, and economic inequality. The authors note that the narrative of South Africa’s "new" nation cannot be constructed from scratch; instead, it must be pieced together from the "scraps, patches, and rags of daily life" (Appiah, 2005, as cited in Bradbury & Clark, 2012). This imagery underscores how the present and future remain inseparably tied to the past, as historical echoes continue to resonate in both collective and individual identities.

The metaphor of the “hinge generation”, drawn from Hoffman (2004) and used by Frankish and Bradbury (2012), helps to illuminate this complexity. In the South African

context, it is the grandmothers who are positioned as the hinge generation, occupying the space between the trauma of apartheid and the lives of the younger generation who did not experience it directly. As the hinge, grandmothers carry the emotional and historical burden of the past while simultaneously mediating its transmission, or its silence, to the next generation. Their narratives are shaped by both lived experience and the moral labour of deciding what is passed on, what is softened, and what is withheld. They play a critical role in preserving memory, fostering continuity, and creating meaning within fractured family and social structures. For the younger generation, this means growing up within inherited stories, silences, and expectations that influence their sense of identity, belonging, and agency. These intergenerational transmissions are complex as they inspire, constrain, or complicate how young women imagine their futures, both by providing a sense of rootedness and by confronting them with unresolved legacies that shape their aspirations and fears. The hinge metaphor also reveals the ambivalence and contradictions in the experiences of South African youth. While they are often regarded as "born-free," unburdened by the direct oppression of apartheid, they continue to grapple with disempowering narratives and material conditions that undermine the ideals of freedom and equality. Bradbury (2020) expands on this by discussing the generational gap that arises as youth resist inherited values and forge their own imagined futures. Despite the hopes that children's innocence will offer fresh possibilities for humanity, by adolescence, these hopes are often unmet. Young people may become disillusioned with the older generation's ways of thinking, which they perceive as out of touch with present realities. This disconnect, what Bradbury (2020) describes as the "generation gap", is characterised by misunderstanding, tension, and the refusal to reproduce inherited narratives. However, Bradbury and Clark (2012) argue that young people must navigate this dual orientation, living in the present while grappling with the unresolved tensions of the past. Drawing on the Ghanaian Sankofa bird, they suggest that youth must look backward to integrate the wisdom of history while moving forward into the future. This interplay of past and future, constraint and agency, creates a complex process of identity negotiation for South African youth.

1.2 Rationale

This area of interest engulfed me the moment I stepped into my supervisor's office. There was a familiar scent in the air, one that viscerally reminded me of my grandmother's house. On that exact day and moment of nostalgia, I was transported, through memory, her warmth and rather salient lessons embedded in me, that words fail to capture but my life

portrays. The implications of tracing family stories, particularly Black family stories, contribute to the expansion of self-knowledge, familial recuperation, and exploration of theoretical frameworks for social sciences research. This research is important as black women and girls, in particular, have been historically attached to the Black male body as an extension of his existence, and the attention stays focused on him (Canham, 2014). Apartheid and patriarchy rendered black women's lives in South Africa invisible (Canham, 2014). However, their stories help push back against narratives that dehumanise them through erasure (William, 2018). Similar in spirit to Macharia's (2020) quest to uncover Black narratives free from the influence of white supremacy, I also definitely grapple with this tension. I earnestly sought stories of Black lives untainted by suffering, only to confront the harsh reality that in South Africa, Black lives are often marked by pain. Yet, amidst this, there remains a glimmer of hope that our narratives are not solely defined by suffering, but also by love, joy, and a sense of belonging. Hence the significance of delving into ordinary lives in the pursuit of understanding the nuanced interplay between pain and joy.

Feminist research challenges the traditional family model as outlined by Collins (1998), which depicts a nuclear structure with a father as the leader, a mother, and children bound by primary emotional ties of love and care (Collins, 1998; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). This portrayal idealises the nuclear family and motherhood as a sanctuary from the outside world, rooted in the notion of heterosexual attraction as the natural order. However, feminist research disrupts this idealisation by questioning the assumed naturalness or normativity of any specific family structure (Collins, 1998). Instead of starting with the monolithic nuclear family as the primary unit of analysis, feminist research directs attention to the marginalised voices within families, often represented by girls and their grandmothers, who are commonly perceived as "weak" and relegated to the sidelines of family discourse. Grandmothers, despite being repositories of familial and communal memory in African literature (Kisukidi, 2020), are seldom placed at the centre of narrative frameworks; they speak but are rarely the focus of the story.

This research project seeks to elevate the grandmother to a central political figure, recognising her pivotal role in preserving the collective memory of the family and community (Kisukidi, 2020). Her memory remains intact and unparalleled, transcending that of both fathers and mothers (Kisukidi, 2020). Consequently, this study centres on the relationship between grandmothers and young women, acknowledging them as a distinct family unit in their

own right. By focusing on intergenerational stories between grandmothers and granddaughters, this research explores the ways that the past comes to be reconstructed and communicated by the grandmothers, for the next generation of young women in Soweto, and the implications this has for navigating meaningful lives in the present and the future (Frankish & Bradbury, 2012). The stories of life under apartheid are still tacitly known, not fully uncovered, and often not told through the experiences of those who lived ordinary lives. Living memory of this recent history offers us a gateway to the past and the reworkings of grandmothers' youth actively connected to the present. The grandmothers' lives in particular are the living archives or conduits that have lived through and made meaning of apartheid. Apartheid is not history for them, they lived it, through their childhoods and youths, and entering democracy as fully functioning adults. Only they can allow us to trace back, far into South Africa's history while also seeing current democracy through their eyes. Thus, this research will focus on grandmothers as the primary site where the transmission of psychological legacies moves or passes between generations.

Frankish and Bradbury (2012) contend that comprehending the experiences and legacies of political violence among grandmothers, as well as how young women may have been impacted by this legacy, can facilitate connections between present distress and political contexts. Thus, they underscore the adage that the personal is political, urging us to not only scrutinise macro-level state or community structures but also delve into micro-level family units, particularly those individuals who can explicitly recount their family history by virtue of having lived it. This includes exploring the narratives of both grandmothers, who have directly experienced historical events, and granddaughters, who are navigating their world with a keen awareness of the transmitted legacies. This research zeroes in on how these events are integrated and narrated within black families, illuminating how stories contribute to the construction of identities in their ongoing lived experiences.

From that experience what they could have inherited in their psyche, that could have also been passed down to their grandchildren, is important to uncover. Peterson (2019) professes how narratives function in similar ways to the unconscious and therefore play an important role in mediating the "black collective psyche" in its "cultural and historical unconscious" (p. 346). It also facilitates a space where encounters of pain, anger, trauma, joy, and hope are explored as they are deposited "in the blood" (p. 346). This research seeks to explore what has been inherited from the past generation to younger generations and also how present realities are shaping the lives of both young and old.

1.3 Research Aims and Questions

This study aimed to explore the intergenerational lived experiences of Black young women and grandmothers from Soweto. More specifically, the research focused on life stories that explored similarities and differences in their life stories. Prompted by this line of thinking, the following research questions were posed:

- What are the similarities and differences in the experiences of black older women and younger women?
- In what ways do black young women and grandmothers position each other as sources of hope in their narratives, and how does this differ based on factors such as age, culture, and location?
- How do the participants position themselves within their narrative of a "strong woman", and what possibilities for the identities of black women do these positions reveal?

1.4 Outline of chapters

Chapter 1 begins by introducing the research, outlining the project's focus on intergenerational life stories gathered from the narratives of grandmothers and granddaughters in Soweto. It also sets the foundation presenting the rationale of the study, along with the research aims and questions. Chapter 2 reviews literature related to intergenerational storytelling, memory, and identity among Black women. It also discusses the theoretical frameworks that underpin and guide this study, including Identity (encompassing identity as "in process", social construction of identity, psychosocial development of identity, and narrative identity), Intersectionality, African Oral Storytelling framework, Intergenerational life/family, the Strong Black Woman construct, and Hope as narratives of possibility. Together, these frameworks provided a lens through which to understand how identity, resilience, and meaning are co-constructed across generations.

Chapter 3 then moves into a detailed discussion of the research methodology. It details the qualitative narrative research approach adopted in this study. It discusses the research aims and questions, participant criteria, recruitment process, data collection methods, and the approach to thematic analysis. Ethical considerations are also addressed. Importantly, a reflexive lens is woven throughout the chapter and carried through the entire research project. Chapter 4 presents and discusses the findings through a thematic analysis of the participants stories. The discussion is organised around five core themes that emerged from the data:

Intergenerational caregiving, Transmission of values, the Strong Black Woman, Negotiating gendered expectations, and Hopes and fears for the future. These themes are interpreted in relation to the theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter 2, highlighting how participants make sense of identity, womanhood, and continuity across generations.

Chapter 5 presents the summary of conclusions of the study, limitations of the study and offers recommendations for future research and explicitly answers the research questions posed at the outset of the study. The research report concludes the research project by providing a complete reference list, followed by the appendices that include supporting documents that have made this research project possible.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework & Literature Review

This chapter presents both empirical and theoretical material and provides the background which is necessary for my own research to follow. More specifically, the theoretical framework is established and developed through the central theoretical concepts of identity and intersectionality which are further used to tie together concepts and frameworks such as African oral storytelling, Intergenerational Life/Family, Strong Black Woman and Hope. Empirical studies that have studied these concepts are also included. Given the scope of this mini-dissertation, the full range of material related to these different concepts cannot be fully explored, however, each concept and the related studies are discussed with sufficient depth to provide a clear foundation for my own study and findings. The theory of identity discussed in this section has been used as a unifying concept throughout the research report, identifying narrative identity as intersectional, relational, and shaped over time. This research engages with how individuals construct meaning through stories that connect their past, present, and imagined futures. By honing in on this, it becomes clear that identity cannot be understood in static terms. Rather it unfolds through relationships, and more specifically for this research, across generations, influenced by historical memory, of what was and what could be which all exist in the context of socio-economic conditions, gender norms and cultural and collective values. For this research, identity is viewed as both personal and collective, shaped not only by who individuals are but by how they remember, relate and project themselves into the future and how all of this interacts with each other. And with considering narrative identity, it becomes possible to reflect on the past and how it interacts and influences an individual's future. Identity then, is not only formed in the “here and now” but continuously shaped by how one makes sense of what has come before and what lies ahead. These temporal layers of identity interact with intersectional aspects such as gender, race, socio-economic background, and age, emphasising that people do not exist in isolation but identities interact over time and through relationships. By using narrative identity as an overarching lens, one is able to explore how these intersections shift and evolve, and how identity is both lived and narrated in ways that reflect change, continuity, and complexity. Therefore, what follows then is an engagement with narrative identity as temporal, intersectional and relational (Bradbury, 2020).

2.1 Theorising of Identity

2.1.1 Identity in Process

Central to this research, and to narrative work more broadly, is the concept of identity. Although the concept of identity has been widely critiqued and even deconstructed, Hall (2000) argues that it is still necessary. He introduces the idea that identity should be placed "under erasure", a way of saying that while the term is problematic, we continue to use it because we do not yet have a better term (p. 1). In other words, identity is no longer thought of as static or unified, but we still need it to understand how people see themselves, and how they are seen by others (Billington et al., 1998). In this research, identity is treated in this way: as a concept that cannot be used in its old form but also cannot be abandoned. The word "identity" is used cautiously, always with an awareness that it refers to something shifting, contextual, and connected to power and language. This research looks at how identity is shaped, spoken, and shared through stories told between grandmothers and young women in Soweto, South Africa. In doing so, it does not rely on the traditional idea of identity as something fixed or internal. Instead, it draws from Stuart Hall's (2000) view of identity as something that is constantly formed and reformed through language, culture, and power. Hall (2000) describes identity not as a "finished product" but as always "in process" (p. 2). This means that people do not simply "have" an identity, they become who they are through ongoing experiences, relationships, and the stories they tell about themselves. In this view, identity is shaped through a process of identification and othering. We come to know who we are not in isolation, but by positioning ourselves in relation to others. Thus Hall (2000) also writes that identity is formed through "the marking of difference and exclusion" (p. 4). This suggests that individuals often define themselves by drawing boundaries, between past and present, self and other, or young and old. This means while static shifts, there are still markers that individuals attach themselves to. In the context of this research, these ideas matter because identity is being explored across two generations of women who may understand themselves differently depending on the cultural, political, and historical landscapes they have lived through. What it means to be them, women, young and old, living in Soweto, growing up in apartheid or in the "democratic" South Africa is shaped by time, place, and social roles.

2.1.2 Social construction of Identity

Billington et al. (1998) also speak to this understanding of identity. They argue that identity is socially constructed, meaning it is not something we are born with, but something shaped by the environments we grow up in and the relationships we have. According to Billington et al.

(1998) we learn who we are through a process called socialisation. This begins in early childhood, as we absorb the values, norms, and expectations of those around us, family, schools, peers, and media. Over time, these messages shape how we think, act, and see ourselves. They also influence how others see us. Socialisation teaches us what roles we are supposed to play, depending on our gender, race, age, and class. These roles can be both enabling and limiting. This is important for this research because grandmothers and granddaughters may have been socialised in very different ways. The stories they share with one another can show how identity has been passed down, challenged, or reshaped across generations. It also helps us to see how broader structures have influenced the way these women see themselves and each other. Identity, in this sense, becomes a way of understanding how people locate themselves within changing social worlds.

Billington et al. (1998) also challenge the idea of the "self-contained individual", the notion that people form their identities in isolation. Instead, they argue that identity is always formed in relation to others and in response to the cultural norms around us. This means identity is never singular or stable. People hold many identities at once, such as being a mother, a worker, a young woman, or an older woman, and these identities can shift depending on context. This fluidity is important when listening to life stories. It allows space for contradiction, change, and complexity. It also makes room for generational differences, for the ways that older women and younger women might speak about similar themes, from very different positions. At the same time, identity is not just about freedom and choice. Billington et al. (1998) remind us that identity is shaped by power. Some identities are valued in society, while others are pushed to the margins. These power dynamics are based on race, gender, class, or age. This is especially relevant with a history like South Africa where legacies of exclusion, inequality, and resistance continue to shape how people live and speak about themselves. In this way, the stories shared in this research are not just personal, they are also political (Billington et al., 1998). They show how people make meaning of their lives within structures that both shape and constrain them.

Billington et al. (1998) point to the rise of what they call the "reflexive self." In modern societies, people are more aware of how social forces shape their identities, and they actively reflect on who they are and who they want to be. This reflexivity does not erase the influence of society, but it does mean that people engage in a constant back-and-forth between internal desires and external pressures. For this research, this idea is useful when thinking about how young women today might actively reshape or resist the narratives passed down to them, while

still being influenced by them. In this way, identity is never fully settled. It is made and remade through the telling of stories, across time, between people, and within changing social worlds.

2.1.3 Psychosocial development of Identity

Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory offers a foundational lens for thinking about identity over the life span. He proposed that individuals move through eight stages of development, each marked by a particular psychosocial challenge that is influenced by both internal needs and external social contexts (Erikson, 1975). How an individual navigates the different psychosocial challenges has positive or negative consequences on one's development. If successful in each stage, certain virtues are gained, such as purpose, will, competence and love. While Erikson believed identity work begins in adolescence, he emphasised that it continues across the life course, shaped by historical changes, cultural expectations, and one's relationships with others. For the purpose of this research, particular attention is given to two stages that correspond with the lives of the participants: identity vs. role confusion, typically associated with adolescence, and integrity vs. despair, linked to later adulthood. The identity stage involves developing a coherent sense of self, answering the question "Who am I?" in a way that is personally meaningful and socially acceptable. Failure to integrate different roles or experiences at this stage can lead to confusion, uncertainty, and a fragmented sense of self (Erikson, 1975; Bishop, 2013). In later adulthood, the integrity stage involves reflecting on life and making peace with one's past. Those who are able to look back with acceptance develop wisdom, while those who are overcome by regret may experience despair. In contexts where older people are socially valued, this process can bring dignity and connection. In communities where the elderly are overlooked or disempowered, this process may be more difficult.

This process becomes more difficult when older individuals are not afforded social recognition, dignity, or meaningful roles in their communities. Without spaces to share their experiences or feel that their lives still hold value, reflection may be marked not by peace, but by feelings of invisibility, abandonment, or irrelevance (Bishop, 2013). The absence of intergenerational engagement, for example, may leave older adults feeling that their wisdom is neither sought after nor respected, making it harder to construct a coherent and affirming life narrative (Bishop, 2013). When cultural or structural factors, such as ageism, poverty, or isolation, undermine their sense of worth, the stage of integrity can instead be experienced as disconnection, disappointment, or despair (Erikson, 1975). In such contexts, rather than reflecting with pride, older participants may struggle to find meaning in their past and question

whether their lives have had significance.

2.1.4 Narrative Identity

Building on Erikson's insights into the life span development of identity, McAdams (2001) deepens the conversation by proposing a narrative model of identity. He argued that identity is not just a developmental task, but a narrative process. People form identity by telling stories about their lives, stories that give shape to who they are, where they come from, and where they are going. These stories help bring coherence to experience, especially when life feels fragmented or difficult to explain. According to McAdams (2001), identity is "an internalised and evolving story of the self" (p. 102). This story is not simply invented by the individual, it is co-authored by cultural norms, social expectations, and the people around us. McAdams (2001) emphasises that identity must be integrated synchronically, across different roles in the present, and diachronically, across time. For example, one must be able to say, "I used to feel uncertain in my family, but now I feel proud of who I am," or "When I was younger, I dreamed of one thing, but now I dream differently." These stories connect past, present, and future in ways that help people navigate change. Importantly, McAdams (2001) shows that identity is not static, it evolves, revises, and shifts over the course of life.

Bruner's (1987) earlier conceptualisation argues that narrative is not just a way of talking about life, it structures life itself. He writes that there is no such thing as "life itself" apart from the stories we tell about it. Squire (2008) builds on this by showing how narrative identity is shaped by memory, emotion, and cultural scripts. Stories are not neutral. They are shaped by what is socially acceptable, by what is remembered or forgotten, and by who is listening. Brooks and Clark (2001) also argue that narrative helps people make sense of transformation. They describe stories as connecting past, present, and future in ways that support reflection and growth. Narratives are not only cognitive but also emotional, spiritual, and social. Through storytelling, individuals explore contradictions, express pain or hope, and construct meaning. This is especially important in research with women who have lived through historical shifts, from apartheid to democracy, from township youth to grandmotherhood. Their stories carry layers of history, resilience, silence, and survival.

At the same time, Fay (1996) cautions against assuming that life itself is always narrative in structure. He argues that storytelling is a retrospective act. We tell stories to create

meaning, but life as it is lived is often chaotic and unstructured. In this sense, narrative is not a mirror of reality, it is an interpretive tool. This reminder is important when working with personal narratives: stories help make life feel coherent, but they cannot fully capture its complexity. Therefore, this research is grounded in the understanding that identity is always shaped by context and community. In South Africa, the life stories of young and older Black women are shaped by intergenerational dynamics, shifting gender roles, and the social legacies of apartheid and resistance. Their narratives are not only personal, they are social and political. The stories shared between grandmothers and young women reflect how identity is formed across time, through relationship, memory, and belonging.

2.1.5 Intersectionality

According to Crenshaw (1989), when studying identity, it is essential to consider how different aspects of identity, such as race, gender, class, and age, interact with one another. The concept of intersectionality, first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), provides a framework for understanding these complex overlaps. Crenshaw (1991) developed the term in response to the limitations of mainstream feminist and antiracist discourse, which often treated race and gender as separate, isolated categories. She argued that Black women's experiences are shaped by the interaction of multiple systems of power and cannot be fully understood by looking at race or gender alone. Intersectionality highlights that people do not live single-issue lives. A Black woman's experience, for example, is not simply the sum of her experiences as a Black person and as a woman. These identities interlock to create a unique position in society. Crenshaw (1991) called attention to how the law, policy, and social systems often overlook this complexity, which leads to forms of exclusion that are difficult to name or address. For this research, intersectionality offers a lens through which to explore the lives of Black women in Soweto, not as a monolithic group, but as individuals whose identities are shaped by age, class, education, and lived history. This research focuses specifically on Black African women, grandmothers and young women living in Soweto. These women are not only Black and female; they are also young and old, poor and working class, educated and not. These identities do not sit side by side but are interwoven, shaping how each woman moves through the world. As Yuval-Davis (2006) explains, individuals may identify strongly with one category (such as "woman"), but their actual social location, how they are seen and treated in society, is shaped by multiple, overlapping factors like race, gender, age, and class.

Thus, intersectionality is not only about acknowledging difference, but also about

power. Acker (1992) reminds us that gender cannot be examined in isolation from other axes of inequality such as race and class. This is especially true in the South African context, where women's lives are shaped by the legacies of apartheid, poverty, and gendered violence. Makiwane et al. (2012) argue that the category "women" cannot be understood without attending to the various forms of marginalisation women may face, including being elderly, undereducated, or economically excluded. This study follows that logic, Black women's identities are understood as intersecting and inseparable, not as single labels. As McAdams (2001) notes, "life stories echo gender and class constructions in society" (p. 114). The personal narratives shared in this research are shaped by social forces, and they reflect patterns of inequality, resistance, and aspiration. Bradbury and Clark (2012) write that while narrative research holds the possibility for alternative futures, it also forces us to confront the limits of those futures in difficult contexts (p. 179). This tension is evident in the lives of many Black South African women, whose everyday realities are marked by hope, hardship, and survival. However, an intersectional lens also allows these women to define themselves. Collins (2000) argues that for Black women, the struggle for a self-defined Black feminism involves a continuous process where action and reflection shape one another. Rather than accepting the dominant narratives imposed by more powerful groups, Black women often draw on their everyday lived experiences to create their own collective understanding of the world. This self-definition is essential to survival, as Audre Lorde states "If we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others—for their use and to our detriment" (1984, p. 45). However, the ability to make these standpoints visible is shaped by unequal power dynamics, where dominant groups suppress alternative worldviews. Still, Black feminist thought insists that self-definition is not only empowering for Black women themselves but also carries universal relevance (Collins, 2000). These self-definitions are a direct resistance to the negative and controlling images of Black womanhood historically used to justify social exclusion and discrimination. By engaging in this act of reclaiming and redefining their identities, Black women participate in shaping a culture that centres both Blackness and womanhood, forming what Collins (2000) describes as a distinct and evolving worldview grounded in resistance, survival, and empowerment.

2.2 African Oral Storytelling Framework

2.2.1 Political importance of Storytelling

African oral storytelling framework is central to this research not only as method or content, but as an epistemological stance, a way of knowing, sharing, and challenging history. African

culture has always highly valued storytelling. African oral traditions consist ofmessages of knowledge passed down from generation to generation through oral forms like songs, folktales, narrations, narrative proverbs, and sayings (Osei-Tutu, 2022). The stories convey culture, experience, and values as it transmits knowledge, wisdom, feelings, and attitudes. And these stories are often told by women elders (Osei-Tutu, 2022). Thompson (2007) emphasises how African oral storytelling remains an urgent political importance in many parts of the world where women's oppression is reinforced by the silencing of women's voices and erasure in history. African oral storytelling is a tradition built around its people. It allows for history to come alive while also widening its scope. It allows heroes not just from the leaders, but from unknown ordinary people. It brings history into, and out of the community. It helps the marginalised, and especially the old, towards dignity and self- confidence. It makes for contact which can bring understanding between generations. It also reconciles shared meaning, as it gives a sense of belonging to a former home or generation (Thompson, 2017; Yuval-Davis, 2006). In short, it makes for fuller human beings.

2.2.2 Memory in Oral Narratives

In her book, "the voice of the Past: Oral History", Thompson (2017, p.54) describes African oral tradition as "talk that remained scattered in the mouths of people", which everyone repeated, from townsfolk, old women and men, even children, who one might encounter when one enters a village and stops to engage beside the road, about the weather, the season, the economy and the past. This way of talk, is typically narrative in structure, beginning with an introduction, middle, and end. More formalised traditions of African oral storytelling have among their aims the teaching and sharing of history, cultural norms, and African cultural lessons. African narrative has a communal and participatory ethic (Osei-Tutu, 2022). Thus, in the telling of the story, those who hear must listen so that they can engage with the orator. The orator can at times "perform" in order to engage and pull the listener, which will be seen in the narratives of participants, particularly grandmothers in this research. Typically, the structure moves from character and conflict development, using proverbs, parables, verbal analogues, symbols, and metaphors, toward a conclusion that imparts a moral lesson (Osei-Tutu, 2022). These stories not only invite reflection but also call listeners to carry the story forward. Critics of oral history have often dismissed it for relying on memory, framing it as unreliable and therefore illegitimate as historical source (Staub, 1991). However, Thompson (2007) challenges this, arguing that stories told by ordinary people reshape the assumptions and exclusions of official history, and instead open up new spaces of recognition and inquiry.

This critique leads to a deeper consideration of memory. Since oral stories are rooted in memory, it becomes essential to reflect on how memory operates, its fragility but also its depth. Serote (1981) warns that narratives that are reliant on an individual's memory may be unreliable. Serote (1981, p. 11) notes how it "shifts and shifts, there and there highlighting the dramatic, now and then leaving out detail". At the same time, Bradbury (2020) comments on the idea of how humans have the capacity of remembering the most obscure of details, but our brains do not function simply as a "storehouse of memory" (p. 15) or as a neutral gathering of facts. Forgetting is inevitable and remembering is better thought of as a process of what Toni Morrison calls "re-membering". The debates about memory and reliability are well-established in narrative theory (Bradbury, 2020). But rather than undermine oral storytelling, these debates reinforce its significance. Thompson (2007) argues the so-called unreliability of memory of these stories was also its strength and the "subjectivity of memory provided clues not only about the meanings of historical experience but also about the relationships between the past, present and future and between collective memory and personal identity" (p. 56).

Bradbury (2020) illustrates the emotional and symbolic power of memory through the example of elephants, who, like humans, mourn their dead. Elephants, like humans, cover the bodies of their loved ones with leaves and twigs, "burying" them and returning to their grave sites, and when given the chance, by travelling to their next destination, they pass these burials and take the time to gently turn the bones of their dead (p. 15). Similarly, the human past can never truly die or be buried as our present lives encounter our pasts and we are forced to gently turn the bones, and at times examine them, as we journey along to the future.

2.3 Intergenerational Life/Family

2.3.1 South African Family Structure

Most research, particularly in the frame of developmental psychology, privileges the structural nuclear family. It rarely ventures into the relationships that exist in extended family structures, such as grandmothers and granddaughters (Hyde & Gibbs, 1993; Bak, 2008). In this study, the grandmother and granddaughter relationship is not simply a backdrop but a central site through which identity is formed, negotiated, and transmitted. According to Mokone (2006) the extended family structure is the typical and normal family structure there is. In South Africa, the extended family structure characterised the black social structure. The extended family structure is the normal family structure whereas the nuclear family structure would be considered atypical. And this is because the extended family structure, characterised in the

black social structure, helps families share the responsibilities and resources needed to raise children. This stands in contrast to the nuclear family model, where fewer adults are available, often leading to more stress and less flexibility in caregiving (Stats SA, 2025; Goodman, 2003; Cox, 2007). In addition, in black families, "old age home" care facilities for the old are rarely afforded, and not culturally preferred, thus it is common practice that grandparents live with their children and grandchildren. Black grandmothers are particularly likely to be primary caregivers for their grandchildren (Stats SA, 2025; Dolbin-Macnab et al., 2016). Although some disparities created by apartheid have improved over the past two decades (such as increased years of schooling), many inequalities remain entrenched, and in some cases have worsened (Stats SA, 2025; Schatz, 2007; Mokone, 2006). Ongoing challenges include poverty, unemployment, and the absence of parents who have migrated for work or passed away due to illness (Muruthi et al., 2020; Roos et al., 2017; Button et al., 2018; Schatz, 2007). In response to these challenges, families have relied on multigenerational caregiving, most notably from grandmothers, as a strategy of survival and continuity (Dolbin-Macnab et al., 2016). This continuity is embedded in cultural traditions that emphasise extended family ties and view children as a collective responsibility.

2.3.2 Grandparental Caregiving

The scale of grandparental caregiving reflects this. In the United States, more than 5.7 million children live in grandparent-headed households, with 2.9 million cared for primarily by grandparents (Dolbin-Macnab et al., 2016). More locally, according to the South African Human Rights Commission (2016), 61% of children in Gauteng (the location of where all my participants are from), who do not live with their parents are cared for by grandparents. As of 2023, nearly 8 million children (38% of South Africa's child population) were living in grandparent- headed households, with grandmothers comprising 64.5% of these caregivers (Statistics South Africa, 2025). This trend highlights the significant caregiving role grandmothers assume compared to grandfathers, often extending across multiple generations (South African Human Rights Commission, 2016; Child Trends, 2014).

Dunifon (2012) suggests several reasons for grandmothers being the ones to raise grandchildren. These include evolutionary theory (maternal grandmothers are more certain of their biological connection to their grandchildren), social theory (in which females are conceptualised to be more family-oriented), and exchange theory (because women are more involved in child-rearing, their own children are more likely to involve them in the lives of their children). Additionally, the longer life expectancy of women means grandmothers are

often more available for caregiving. As a result, grandmothers, particularly maternal ones, are often perceived to have stronger and more consistent relationships with their grandchildren. However, the current study does not focus on whether a grandmother is maternal or paternal. Rather, it centres on the broader role grandmothers play in the lives of young women in South Africa. It asks what grandmothers have to say about younger women and how they engage with, influence, or support them, regardless of their biological lineage.

2.3.3 Intergenerational Care and Mutual Support

Grandparents, particularly grandmothers, have long played a critical role in the lives of their families, offering both instrumental and emotional support (Dolbin- Macnab et al., 2016; Hyde & Gibbs, 1993; Mutran, 1985). Mutran (1985) found that older women in their study provided a wide range of support, including emotional care, financial assistance, help with rent, caregiving for both children and elders, and shelter for younger relatives. In contrast, older men in the study mostly reported offering emotional support and a place to live. These contributions, especially from grandmothers, helped maintain strong emotional bonds within families.

Beyond practical care, many grandmothers described turning to prayer as a source of guidance in raising their grandchildren (Moodley & Meintjes, 2024). Levetan and Wild (2016) note that grandmothers often prayed for their grandchildren to become independent and self-sufficient adults. This deep sense of responsibility was often accompanied by the recognition that, in many cases, their grandchildren had no other caregiving options. While some of this connectedness was rooted in obligation (Mansilla-Dominguez et al., 2024), many grandmothers also described genuine pleasure in their relationships with their grandchildren. These relationships brought feelings of love, companionship, and emotional support, particularly valuable for grandmothers who may face social isolation due to limited mobility or financial constraints (Cole, 2017).

The importance of these intergenerational bonds for grandparent wellbeing and resilience has been confirmed in several studies. A close, loving relationship with grandchildren has been shown to offer grandparents a sense of satisfaction and joy (Dolbin-Macnab et al., 2016). At the same time, grandmothers often had clear expectations: they hoped for help with household tasks, errands, and other responsibilities. While such reciprocity is often considered a normative expectation in many families, grandmothers in Dolbin-Macnab et al.'s (2016) study reported feeling particularly fulfilled when their grandchildren were not only helpful, but also respectful, affectionate, and appreciative of their caregiving efforts. Dunifon (2012), drawing from ecological and family systems theory, emphasised that family

members shape each other's development. Silverstein et al. (1998) describe this as intergenerational solidarity, while Becker et al. (2003) refer to intergenerational mutual assistance, everyday exchanges that sustain family bonds. Such reciprocity enhances the status of elders and supports cultural continuity, particularly when families face disruptions such as poverty, migration, or historical trauma (Becker et al., 2003; Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1987). Dolbin-Macnab et al. (2016) similarly shows that resilience is fostered in grandparent–grandchild relationships when there is clear communication, emotional openness, and shared problem-solving. Moments of empathy, honesty, and mutual engagement, whether in resolving conflict or building on small successes, are central to nurturing this kind of relational strength. Sharma (2017) conceptualised this exchange as a form of intergenerational learning, where knowledge, emotional insight, and skills are passed in both directions, for the benefit of individuals and society.

When thinking about the role of a grandmother, or what is imagined as the "ideal grandmother", Marhánková's (2019) study highlights how mothers often describe her as someone who contributes to the grandchild's development or provides something the parents cannot. In Hyde and Gibbs' (1993) study on grandmother–granddaughter relationships in the UK, one of the most frequent shared activities was simply listening and talking. The act of storytelling, especially through language, becomes a powerful space not only for bonding but for reflecting on and even correcting past parenting mistakes (Sandel et al., 2006). The significance of grandmothers, especially maternal ones, is reinforced across multiple studies (Hyde & Gibbs, 1993; Bak, 2008), although the closeness of these relationships can be shaped by different factors. Dunifon (2012) points out that age plays a role, grandparents tend to offer more direct care when children are younger and may shift toward mentorship as they grow older. Other factors, such as race, also matter. For example, Black grandparents are more likely to take on parent-like roles, offering discipline, guidance, and life lessons (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1992; Hunter & Taylor, 1998). Finally, where grandparents stay plays a part—grandparents who live close by are more likely to maintain frequent contact, which in turn strengthens emotional ties (Elder, 2012; Weingarten, 2010).

2.3.4 The Ambivalence of Grandmotherly influence

Grandmothers however, can, of course, have both a negative and positive influence on their granddaughters, a point supported by the finding that more than a third of grandmothers were judged to have offered unwanted advice (Hyde & Gibbs, 1993). The transmission of values and culture is not always accepted without contest. Research suggests that grandparents are less

satisfied with the grandparent-grandchild relationship as the grandchild enters the teenage years (Dunifon, 2012). Grandchildren may feel similarly, reporting a decrease in perceived support from grandparents and an increase in conflict from 4th to 10th grade. The grandparent-grandchild relationship may shift again as grandchildren grow older (Elder, 2012).

Motsa and Morojele (2012) reveal that despite the affection experienced under grandparental care, being raised by grandparents eventually proved emotionally and mentally draining for most children in their study. This is because, with old age, caregiving roles changed, and grandchildren had to attend to their grandparents' every need, including caring for them when sick and managing household chores. Additionally, the worry caused by the grandparents' ill health brought emotional turmoil for these vulnerable children. Such responsibilities and feelings were not only overwhelming but also debilitating, negatively affecting the children's schooling. Furthermore, Chan et al. (2023) found in their study that grandparents who raised their grandchildren employed harsh and aggressive discipline. However, some grandchildren reported that later in life they felt as though they needed that level of structure. As noted earlier, the good relationships these children had with their grandparents are unquestionably admirable. However, with the evolving caregiving dynamics, the children are affected in more complex ways. They experience emotional and physical strain, and the caregiving demands compound in ways detrimental to both their welfare and education (Li & Liu, 2019). Despite these challenges, the study supports the general conclusion in this field that the influence of grandparents (in this case, grandmothers) is, by and large, positive. The majority of granddaughters in the study reported that their grandmothers influenced them through their beliefs and a sense of closeness and security. However, although the influence was positive, there was little evidence to indicate that it was progressive or liberating. Thus, the influence of grandmothers sometimes appears to perpetuate rather than challenge oppressive narratives (Motsa & Morojele, 2021).

Dolbin-Macnab et al. (2016) highlights the importance of remembering that grandmothers who assume responsibility for their grandchildren face significant demands. The circumstances leading to custodial grandparenting typically exacerbate the usual challenges of meeting the physical, educational, and emotional needs of children. Some participants in Cole's (2017) study linked their physical and mental health problems to caregiving stress; for example, grandmothers described struggling with hypertension, heart problems, and diabetes, which they said were worsened by caregiving demands and a lack of time and resources for self-care. Hyde and Gibbs (1993) also reported age-related limitations, such as being too tired to care

adequately for their grandchildren. Finally, grandmothers reported experiencing anxiety and depression stemming from the responsibility and stress of raising their grandchildren.

While these physical and emotional burdens are well-documented, they do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, they point to a deeper issue of grand "mothering" and the weight of what is socially, historically, and culturally expected of women in caregiving roles. Collins' (2000) "reconceiving motherhood" tries to show how society often treats being a woman and being a mother as the same, when in reality, they are different roles. Because of this confusion, mothers as a group have become invisible and overlooked. People expect women to become mothers and believe that motherhood should come naturally, be full of joy, and involve constant self-sacrifice. But in truth, mothers often carry a heavy burden, doing the hard work of raising children in very difficult conditions, such as poverty, unstable homes, or unsafe communities. This work of "motherwork", coined by Collins (2000) however, takes a serious toll on their bodies, minds, and finances (Chazan, 2015; Hughes et al., 2007; Schatz; 2007). Thus Collins (2000) in trying to redeem "motherwork" defines it within the frame of survival, identity, and empowerment that is shaped by race, class, and gender inequalities that is often collective, not solely individual, thus taking the form of resistance against systematic oppression. Collins (2000) eventually questions the question around "why mothers are always so tired" but rather the real question should be "why wouldn't they be?". Given how much they are expected to do, with little support, it is no surprise that they feel worn out. Still Collins (2000) recognises the flexible nature of motherwork that many women feel both joy and struggle in motherwork, showing how complex and contradictory it really is.

Dolbin-Macnab et al. (2016) extends this complexity by drawing on the concept of intergenerational ambivalence, along with role theory and the life course perspective, to better understand the emotional and relational experiences of grandparents who take on parenting roles. Intergenerational ambivalence refers to the experience of having both positive and negative feelings toward family members at the same time. This can happen because grandparents are often placed in conflicting roles, being a grandparent while also acting as a parent, which creates tension (Goodman, 2003; Cox, 2007; Dolbin-Macnab et al., 2016; Bozalek and Hooyman, 2012). According to role theory, these mixed emotions can come from contradictory expectations about how they should behave, or from conflicts between how they feel and how they think they should feel (Bozalek and Hooyman, 2012). While this theory has not been widely applied to grandparent caregivers specifically, it helps explain why grandparents often describe raising their grandchildren as meaningful and personally

rewarding, a “second chance” to improve on their past parenting, but also as emotionally challenging, bringing up feelings like resentment, guilt, and self-doubt.

2.3.5 Woman on Woman Policing

These tensions are further shaped by the cultural and historical constructions of what it means to be a grandmother. In many African contexts, grandmothers are positioned as custodians of morality, tradition, and discipline (Michel et al., 2020) which are roles that are gendered and culturally specific. Chauke and Segalo (2021) argue that older women are often seen as keepers of communal wisdom and moral authority, with personhood itself being conferred not by individual identity, but by fulfilling community obligations. Failure to meet these expectations can render one devoid of moral worth (Chitando & Mateveke, 2012). Thus, grandmothers would have to uphold respectability and shape other’s behaviour in line with cultural norms.

From a young age, girls are socialised into gendered roles, often through the influence of older siblings and women in the home. Diallo (2004) notes that sex education is typically conveyed through commentary, criticism, and instruction, shaping how young women carry themselves and how they are expected to interact with men, particularly during culturally significant events like weddings. These gendered norms are passed down generationally, and grandmothers often become the enforcers of such codes. Chitando and Mateveke (2012) observe that this enforcement persists across the life course, sustaining moral regulation of women’s bodies and behaviours. These gendered expectations are also entangled with South Africa’s colonial and apartheid histories, which constructed Black women's bodies as hypersexual, excessive, and in need of control (Chauke & Segalo, 2021; Tamale, 2014). In response to this long history of surveillance and pathologisation, many Black women began to regulate themselves, and one another, as a protective mechanism (Shefer & Foster, 2001). This form of internalised regulation became a strategy of survival, passed down as something that “works” and is therefore worth preserving.

While the challenges of caregiving are well established, literature also highlights that many grandmothers express a deep concern for the wellbeing of younger generations. This concern is both emotional and practical, often enacted through everyday acts of care, advice, and storytelling (Marhánková, 2019). Her observations reflect Erikson’s idea of generativity, the development stage in later life marked by a desire to guide and nurture the next generation. Adolescents, in turn, often look to older relatives, particularly grandmothers, for support as they navigate questions of identity, belief, and direction (McAdams, 2001). This exchange is not non-directional; both generations influence and respond to one another in meaningful ways.

2.4 Strong Black Women

The Strong Black Woman (SBW) is a cultural image and identity that has historically been used to justify the exploitation and abuse of Black women. Rooted in slavery, it constructs Black women as possessing subhuman emotional and intellectual capacity but immense physical strength, supposedly enabling them to withstand extreme conditions (Collins, 2000). The term "strong Black woman" is derived from African American women's experiences in the United States. The equivalent term within the South African context is "mbokodofication". Ngcobo (2021), through autoethnography, introduces the term "mbokodofication" to describe the emotional and psychological toll of performing strength in environments that demand resilience but provide little support. "Mbokodofication" is derived from the Nguni word "Imbokodo" which means rock or boulder. On August 9th, 1956, about 20 000 women led by Lilian Ngoyi, Rahima Moosa, Motlalepula Chabaku and Albertina Sisulu marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria - the seat of then, President JG Strijdom, to protest the Apartheid government's pass laws. This was part of a decades-old movement, as Charlotte Maxeke had led women in burning their passes in front of municipal offices 43 years earlier. Black women on the front lines spearheaded this campaign, which altered the path of history for both Black women and women in general. A generation of women have adopted the term "imbokodo" in recognition of similar acts of bravery and tenacity. "Imbokodo" has come to be used as a term of honour for Black women who have served in whatever position on the actual and figurative front lines of society. Some sixty years after the 'song of the women' became not only an anthem and a manifesto for the women's struggle, but also etched into popular culture, Black women appear to have remained on the front lines, forgotten there after the protests have ended and the crowds have scattered (Ngcobo, 2021). The figure of the Strong Black Woman/Imbokodo has emerged as both an identity marker and a survival strategy, shaped by intergenerational socialisation and sustained within broader sociocultural narratives. From a young age, Black women are taught that strength often defined through emotional fortitude, independence, and self-sacrifice, is necessary for psychological resilience in the face of intersecting oppressions such as racism, patriarchy, and economic marginalisation (Jones et al., 2021; Davis & Afifi, 2019). This characterisation is not merely externally imposed; it is internalised and often embraced, offering a framework through which many Black women cultivate self-esteem and self-efficacy in navigating hostile environments (Davis & Afifi, 2019). As such, the appeal of the "strong Black woman" narrative is maintained not only through lived experience but also via its wide circulation in popular media, where it is upheld

as both a cultural ideal and a marker of value (Jones et al., 2021).

Woods-Giscombé's (2010) conceptualisation of the Superwoman Schema (SWS) further refines this narrative, foregrounding how strength is experienced as an obligation rather than a choice. Drawing from African American women's accounts, she identifies five defining features of the SWS: the imperative to appear strong, the suppression of emotion, resistance to vulnerability, a drive to succeed despite resource constraints, and a duty to care for others. These patterns, while adaptive, are historically rooted in survival strategies developed under conditions of slavery, racial discrimination, and gendered exclusion. Within this schema, the performance of strength functions as both a form of resistance and a form of protection, even as it risks compromising psychological wellness over time (Woods-Giscombé, 2010).

What emerges, then, is a paradox: the Strong Black Woman narrative functions as both a protective identity and a site of potential harm. It resists the invisibility and marginalisation historically imposed on Black women yet simultaneously restricts the expression of vulnerability and emotional nuance (Jones et al., 2021). This tension is particularly salient for younger Black women who are socialised into this framework by matriarchs whose experiences of structural oppression have shaped their own understanding of what it means to survive. However, oppressive structures are not static, they shift across generations. As such, contemporary Black women often find themselves negotiating the inherited meaning of strength with their own lived realities and evolving sociopolitical contexts (Jones et al., 2021; Porter, 2017).

In spaces marked by proximity to whiteness, this negotiation becomes increasingly complex, as the politics of representation, emotional safety, and identity are all filtered through racialised and gendered lenses. Importantly, many Black women today possess the intellectual and emotional tools to interrogate these narratives, engaging critically with the very ideals that have shaped their sense of self (Porter, 2017). While previous generations of Black women developed profound insight and resilient strategies under the weight of systemic oppression, many Black women today find themselves in contexts that allow for a more explicit and critical engagement with these inherited narratives. Increased access to psychological discourse, social platforms, and collective spaces has enabled deeper reflection on what strength has meant historically, and what it might mean now (Porter, 2017). Therefore, the figure of the Strong Black Woman/Imbokodo, then, is not static, it is actively reinterpreted, challenged, and sometimes rejected.

But rather than dismissing the role of strength in Black women's lives, current research invites a more layered engagement with its meaning. The celebratory discourse of #BlackGirlMagic, a slogan movement on trends on social media platforms such as twitter (now known as X), for example, exemplifies how strength can be re-signified as a source of pride (hooks, 1990) and cultural affirmation (Jones et al., 2021). Yet, for others, such framings feel reductive, collapsing individual experience into a monolithic ideal that may obscure personal struggle. These divergent responses illustrate the continuum along which Black women locate themselves, articulating different relationships to the notion of strength and its role in their identity and wellbeing.

Alford (2023) challenges the uncritical glorification of the "strong Black woman" archetype, not by dismissing the real and necessary endurance of past generations, but by urging a redefinition of what it means to survive and thrive today. She is careful to honour the historical context in which this strength was forged, one shaped by systemic racism, gendered violence, economic exploitation, and silence as a means of protection. For many Black women, stoicism and self-sacrifice were not just emotional postures but survival strategies handed down through generations. What Alford (2023) critiques then is not the women themselves, but the conditions that left them little room to reflect openly on their pain. She writes: "Our foremothers were not allowed to fall apart, not because they lacked emotional depth, but because the world did not make space for their breaking" (p. 91). She draws a distinction between capability and permission. These women had full emotional and intellectual capacity but were denied the context in which those capacities could be safely explored. Silence, then, was not ignorance; it was protection.

Alford (2023) characterises today's "moment" as one where more Black women are permitted (though not always encouraged) to lay down the burden of stoicism. Increased access to therapy, collective healing spaces, and platforms for self-expression has created what she calls a "rupture in the lineage of silent strength" (p. 95). This rupture is not framed as a rejection of ancestral legacy but as a necessary evolution of it. Alford (2023) writes, "When we redefine strength to include softness, boundary-making, and grief, we do not betray our lineage, we

expand it" (p. 97). In that sense, the current generation is not "more advanced" emotionally or intellectually; rather, they are more resourced and more socially permitted to question, reflect, and reimagine. This is not a critique of prior generations, but a tribute to the sacrifices made by those who endured in silence so that others might one day have the freedom to speak.

However, Alford's (2023) framing of "strength reimagined" warrants further interrogation when situated within the South African context, particularly the implication that the current generation is more "resourced" or has access to "collective healing spaces" that did not exist for previous generations. Such a framing risks overlooking or devaluing longstanding communal spaces such as prayer circles, spiritual gatherings, and informal support networks, which Black women have historically used to cope, survive, and heal. These spaces, while not always recognised within mainstream psychological discourse, have long served as vital sites of emotional refuge and resilience. To reimagine strength, therefore, should not involve the erasure or diminishment of these earlier forms of resistance and care. The current research seeks to explore the different ways Black women, both young and old embrace strength and show how polarised views (if they are polarising) represent a continuum along which Black women locate themselves, ascribing different meanings and importance to the ideal of strength.

2.5 Hope: Narratives of Possibility

This research adopts a narrative and socio-cultural lens to explore hope, moving away from traditional psychological models that reduce hope to a fixed trait or vague optimism (Pettit, 2004). Instead, hope is understood as a dynamic process intertwined with optimism, longing, fear, uncertainty, and shaped by historical, emotional, and material contexts (Bradbury, 2020). It is defined far from being the absence of despair, as hope involves navigating despair through imagination and storytelling, creating possibilities for meaning making that reflect lived experiences (Bradbury, 2020). In this way, this research views hope as an active practice and not a static quality one possesses or lacks.

Following on the work of Jerome Bruner (1986) entitled "Possible Castles" narrative can be thought of as a "cognitive tool" suggesting that people construct "possible worlds" through stories, imagining alternatives to reality that shape perception and action. Brockmeier (2009, p. 214) builds on this, proposing that narrative imagination, the capacity to see a future based on present conditions, is a critical mechanism through which individuals exert agency. This imaginative process enables individuals to "transcend" immediate circumstances,

projecting how things could be from the vantage point of how they are, thus guiding intentional behaviour toward desired outcomes (Brockmeier, 2009). Brockmeier (2009) suggests that language is not merely a medium of communication but a form of agency itself, empowering individuals to craft narratives that organise experience, assign meaning, and influence action. In this view, narrative imagination tries to bridge the temporal gap between the past, present, and future allowing individuals to reinterpret their realities. This ties in with Bruner's (1987) assertion that narratives are not passive reflections but active constructions, shaping both individual identity and collective understanding.

This framework resonates with Cattell's (1994) study of Abaluyia grandmothers and granddaughters, where narrative imagination might illuminate their evolving roles. Historically, grandmothers used storytelling and advice, narrative acts, to transmit cultural knowledge, envisioning futures for granddaughters within traditional frameworks (Cattell, 1994, p. 165). Their agency lay in relaying narratives of proper behaviour (e.g., virginity, marital roles), projecting "possible worlds" rooted in indigenous ideals (Cattell, 1994). Today, as delocalisation erodes this way of life, grandmothers were seen to adapt, narrating new possibilities of education and success for their granddaughters. Here, narrative imagination shifts from preserving tradition to enabling modern agency, reflecting Brockmeier's (2009) theory in practice.

In the South African context, hope is deeply shaped by colonial and apartheid histories, particularly for Black communities. Bradbury (2020) frames hope as future-oriented, a desire for a better future that aligns with optimism yet acknowledges possibilities beyond immediate control (p. 927). For children, who embody "the future," hope carries both material expectations (e.g., economic contributions) and abstract aspirations (e.g., social harmony), transmitted through intergenerational storytelling in families and schools (Bradbury, 2020, p. 927). For young women, once children, this hope evolves as they navigate past constraints to imagine new roles, echoing the resilience of grandmothers who pass down narratives of survival and possibility.

2.5.1 Hope Reimagined

Moreover, Bradbury (2020) suggests that hope is intergenerational, as adults' care and enculturation blend past experiences into children's futures, fostering progress (p. 927). Yet,

nostalgia for "simpler" childhoods mirrors hope, projecting idealised pasts onto future aspirations (Bradbury, 2020, p. 927). For grandmothers, this might mean weaving their own childhood memories into stories that inspire young women's futures, balancing continuity with change. However, adolescence complicates hope, as Erikson's (1968) "identity crisis" highlights youth's rebellion against inherited norms, seeking futures that align with their own visions (Bradbury, 2020, p. 927). Young women, reflecting on their childhoods, may resist traditional expectations, embodying hope through reimagined identities.

Furthermore, Cherrington (2017) defines hope as a multidimensional, future-directed emotional experience, shaped by cultural norms, upbringing, worldview, and personal experiences. Drawing on Scioli and Biller (2009), Cherrington (2017) describes hope as "a manner of experiencing yourself, the world, and the future" (p. 204), fostering agency and interpersonal engagement toward purpose and well-being. Her Afrocentric framework, similar to that of Mkhize (2018) is rooted in ubuntu, values of respect, compassion, and connectedness, and emphasises communal hope, where individual aspirations are tied to collective well-being. Unlike Western models prioritising individual agency (Du et al., 2017), this hope thrives on mutual support, resonating with grandmothers' roles in fostering shared futures for young women.

However, hope faces challenges. Bradbury (2020) notes that youth, including young women, live with systemic inequalities, racial, gender, and class-based, that persist from historical legacies (p. 928). In post-apartheid South Africa, movements like #FeesMustFall (2015–2016) reflects youth's hopeful resistance, challenging educational barriers while building on the 1976 Soweto Uprising's legacy (Bradbury, 2020, p. 928). Yet, disillusionment with democracy's limits, seen in low youth voting (e.g., 2016 U.S. election, Brexit), tempers hope, positioning young women in a contradictory space, agentic yet constrained (Bradbury, 2020, p. 928). Grandmothers, too, navigate this tension, their stories offering hope while confronting ongoing inequalities.

Additionally, we see that hope is not equally accessible. Structural barriers such as poverty, marginalisation, limited education, shape who can imagine hopeful futures (Bradbury & Clark, 2009). Cherrington's (2017) ubuntu-based hope suggests communal narratives can foster resilience, enabling young women and grandmothers to envision shared possibilities despite constraints (Cherrington, 2017; Idang, 2015). This communal approach underscores

that hope is not universal; it is tied to race, gender, class, and place, determining whose futures are valued (Bradbury & Clark, 2009).

Building on this, McAdams (2001) argues that life stories reflect social patterns, including gender and class dynamics. Hope, therefore, is a narrative practice shaped by socio-political conditions (McAdams, 2001). Bradbury and Clark (2009) note that narrative theory reveals how subjectivity, constraints, and imaginative possibilities intersect, positioning hope as a resistant act, imagining new futures despite limitations. For grandmothers and young women, this means crafting narratives that challenge systemic barriers while drawing on shared histories. Thus, ultimately, we see grandmothers and young women, as people who were once children themselves, navigate hope within systems of power, offering insight into how they articulate hopeful futures for themselves.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has synthesized key theoretical and empirical perspectives - narrative identity, intersectionality, African oral storytelling, intergenerational life/family, the Strong Black Woman archetype, and Hope - to construct a cohesive framework for understanding how grandmothers and young women narrative their lives, negotiate their identities, and envision their futures. These concepts, while distinct, are interwoven, offering multidimensional lens through which to examine the interplay of personal agency, collective resilience, and socio-historical constraints.

Narrative identity, as articulated by McAdams (2001) and Bruner (1987), serves as the cornerstone of this framework, positioning identity as a moving, storied process that connects past, present, and future. For Black women in Soweto, these stories are not merely personal but are shaped by collective histories and cultural practices, particularly through African oral storytelling (Thompson, 2007; Osei-Tutu, 2022). This tradition elevates grandmothers as narrators of communal wisdom, using stories to transmit values, resist erasure, and foster intergenerational connection. Intersectionality further enriches this framework by illuminating how race, gender, age, and class intersect to shape these women's lived experiences, ensuring that their narratives are understood as both unique and politically charged (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000).

The intergenerational dynamics of extended family structures, prevalent in Black South African communities, highlight the pivotal role of grandmothers in caregiving and identity

formation (Mokone, 2006; Dolbin-Macnab et al., 2016). These relationships, marked by both intimacy and ambivalence, serve as a critical site for the transmission and contestation of identity. The *Strong Black Woman* archetype, or *Imbokodo* (Ngcobo, 2021; Woods-Giscombé, 2010), adds complexity, revealing how strength is both a source of empowerment and a burden, passed down and reinterpreted across generations. Finally, *Hope* (Bradbury, 2020; Cherrington, 2017) emerges as a narrative practice, rooted in ubuntu and intergenerational storytelling, that enables these women to imagine alternative futures despite systematic constraints.

While existing research on identity and storytelling in South Africa offers a strong foundation, it often focuses on individual or historical stories, missing the unique experiences of Black women across generations. This study fills this gap by exploring the stories shared between grandmothers and young women in Soweto, showing how these narratives shape and reshape their identities amid challenges like gender inequality and poverty, while drawing on cultural strength. Using a framework that combines narrative identity, intersectionality, African oral storytelling, the Strong Black Woman archetype, and hope, this research examines how these women make sense of their lives, resist oppression, and imagine brighter futures. This approach aims to amplify their voices and deepens understanding of identity as a connected and evolving process in South Africa.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods used to explore the intergenerational life stories of Black grandmothers and young women in Soweto through a qualitative, narrative approach. It discusses the research aims, participant selection, data collection and analysis processes, as well as the ethical considerations that guided the study. Throughout this chapter, reflexivity is emphasised acknowledging my positionality and potential biases to ensure that participants voices and experiences are represented in a respectful manner.

3.2 Research Aims and Questions

This study aimed to explore the intergenerational lived experiences of Black young women and grandmothers from Soweto. More specifically, the research focused on life stories that explored similarities and differences in their life stories. Prompted by this line of thinking, the following research questions were posed:

- What are the similarities and differences in the experiences of black older women and younger women?
- In what ways do black young women and grandmothers position each other as sources of hope in their narratives, and how does this differ based on factors such as age, culture, and location?
- How do the participants position themselves within their narrative of a "strong woman", and what possibilities for the identities of black women do these positions reveal?

3.3 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, narrative approach. Jackson et al. (2007) emphasise that qualitative research focuses on exploring human experiences through a humanistic and interpretive lens. Simply put, it captures how people live, feel, and reflect on their lives. This method prioritises depth and meaning over generalisability, allowing participants' voices and lived realities to take precedent. The study is grounded in an interpretive paradigm and informed by social constructionism, meaning that knowledge, reality, and truth are seen as socially constructed through relationships and culture (Burr, 1995). In this paradigm, there is no one single "truth"; instead, multiple truths can exist at once, depending on one's positioning and experience. A narrative approach is therefore appropriate for this study. It gave room for each participant's story to unfold, even if their telling was fragmented, nonlinear, or paused in

moments of emotion or uncertainty. Narratives allow for the messiness of human experience to be honoured and heard. They also make space for context, the personal, social, historical, to be part of the study (Frie, 2012). As Squire (2008) explains, narrative approaches help connect individual experience with wider structures of meaning. This means participants are not only asked "what happened" but also "what does this mean to you". In this way, storytelling becomes a way to make sense of oneself, while also revealing the invisible forces shaping everyday life.

Ricoeur (1991) refers to storytelling as the very structure through which people interpret and express their world. Josselson (2004) adds that narratives are not fixed records of events, but evolving tools of identity, tools that weave together memory, hope, fantasy, and social belongings. So much of what participants shared was not just what had happened but how they remembered it, what they chose to include, and what meanings they attached to those moments. That is why, throughout the research, the idea of narrative "identity" as something fluid, such as taking a photograph of someone that captures a moment in time, while still knowing they will change at another point in time. The stories I heard were meaningful and not because they were "objective facts", but because they were held and remembered in a particular way, at a particular time, by a particular person.

Alongside the narrative lens, this study was also influenced by a hermeneutic approach, where I, as the researcher, was not just a listener but also an interpreter. My task was to listen with care and then try to make sense of the layers within each story, what was said, what was not said, and how it all related to the broader frameworks I had been engaging with. Josselson (2004) reminds us of that researchers in this position must treat participants as experts in their own lives, rather than reducing them to data points. This also means making peace with the fact that no interpretation will ever be complete or final.

Reflexivity was a crucial part of this process. As a Black young woman myself, I shared many similarities with the younger participants, such as our age, cultural reference points, our ways of speaking, and experiences of being raised in post-apartheid South Africa. I could connect with them in a way that allowed for more ease and openness in our conversations. But this shared identity also brought challenges. Being slightly older, studying at Wits, and "doing research" on them placed me in a position of power. I had to confront the possibility that I was projecting my own experiences onto theirs or favouring their stories because they were more familiar to me. I also had to be honest with myself about the biases I brought into the room and how those shaped the analysis. At the same time, the grandmothers saw me through a different

lens. Some seemed to look at me and think of their own granddaughters, hoping they might also end up in university, respectful, articulate. In some ways, I became a kind of symbol in their eyes, which possibly influenced how they chose to speak to me or the kind of advice they wanted to pass on. In these moments, I had to recognise that I was occupying both insider and outsider roles, sometimes simultaneously. The fluidity of this positioning made me constantly ask: how am I being seen, and how does that affect what is being told?

This is where McDonald's (2013) idea of having what he calls "queer reflexivity" becomes important. He warns against assuming that shared identity labels, Black, woman, working class, automatically mean shared experience. I had to realise that similarity in appearance or background does not mean sameness in how we live or feel those identities. My access to higher education, the way I spoke, even the kind of questions I asked, these things marked me as different. Sometimes I felt like an insider, sometimes I did not. Sometimes I felt both at once. And sometimes, I felt completely out of place. That reflexive awareness also shaped how I interpreted their stories. It reminded me that these narratives were not "truths" waiting to be uncovered, but meaning-making processes shared between participants and myself, shaped by the dynamic of our relationship and the spaces we occupied together. Reflexivity required me to sit with the discomfort of not being a neutral researcher, but a person with her own assumptions, projections, and blind spots.

In the end, this methodology allowed me to centre the voices of a group of Black women, both young and older, whose stories are often overlooked in research. It allowed me to treat their words with care, to hold space for their contradictions, and to interpret those stories in ways that did not flatten their complexity. Most importantly, it reminded me that narrative research is not about fixing people in place, but about tracing how they move, between generations, between histories, and into imagined futures.

3.4 Participants

Purposive and convenience sampling were used to select participants for this research. A total of ten participants were interviewed, five grandmothers and five young women. The criteria were kept simple: for the young women, they needed to be Black, live in Soweto, be 18 years or younger, and have someone they considered a grandmother, whether biological or not, whom they could speak about, along with reflections on their own lives. For the grandmothers, the criteria required that they be Black, aged 60 and above, and able to speak about their own lives as well as their granddaughter(s) or young women in society more broadly.

While the idea of including actual grandmother-granddaughter pairs was considered ideal, it proved difficult in practice. One of the challenges, for example, was that a young woman might be eager to participate, but her grandmother either lived outside of Soweto or was not interested in taking part. Out of the ten participants, I was only able to interview one pair, a grandmother and her granddaughter. However, they were not biologically related. Similarly to all the other participants. Therefore, a combination of convenience and purposive sampling was used to recruit individuals who were readily available and met the criteria.

In addition, I also used a snowball sampling approach. For the younger participants, recruitment took place through the Youth of the South (YOTS) programme, which operates in a secondary school in Soweto. YOTS is a youth-led initiative founded by Phethile Zitha and Hayley Haynes-Rolando in 2015 to explore the lived experiences of young people in Soweto and support their development through a collaborative research process (Youth of the South, 2021). It is affiliated with the Narrative Enquiry for Social Transformation (NEST) research project, which anchors itself in participatory-action research focused on the intergenerational exploration of self-narration, public history, and the experience of identity across age. Through NEST, I was also able to access the grandmothers who were part of the Greater Dobsonville Heritage Foundation (GDHF), a collective of grandmothers and grandfathers over the age of 60. So essentially, there were two participant groups: Black young women between the ages of 17 and 18 & Grandmothers aged 60 and above. Each group consisted of five participants, giving a total of ten. This number is considered sufficient for narrative research, as supported by various qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The focus here was never to generalise, but rather to understand the experiences of these women in depth, amplify their voices, and contribute to a broader conversation in the social sciences, one that challenges their historical erasure by centering their stories.

Below is a table illustrating how this study refers to the participants throughout the analysis. Pseudonyms have been used to protect their identities.

Table 1

Profiles of Participants

Pseudonyms	Generation	Home language	Occupation	No. of Grandchildren	Intergenerational Co- residence
Lucy	Older generation	Sesotho	Domestic helper	2 grandchildren	Lives with grandchildren
Matshidiso	Older generation	Sesotho	Factory worker	2 grandchildren	Lives with grandchildren
Mpho	Older generation	Sesotho	Domestic helper	3 grandchildren	Lives with grandchildren
Grace	Older generation	Xhosa	Factory worker	3 grandchildren	Lives with grandchildren
Lebo	Older generation	Sesotho	Bank teller	1 grandchild	Lives with grandchildren
Lerato	Younger generation	Sesotho	Grade 12		Previously lived with her grandmother
Mamello	Younger generation	Sesotho	Grade 12		Previously lived with her grandmother
Thato	Younger generation	Sesotho	Grade 11		Lives with her grandmother
Karabo	Younger generation	Sesotho	Grade 11		Lives with her grandmother
Botlhale	Younger generation	Sesotho	Grade 12		Previously lived with her grandmother

[1]Grandmother Mpho is Mamello's grandmother. They were the only family pair in this study.

[2]Note: All of the grandmothers are currently retired

3.5 Data Collection

Narrative interviewing was used as the primary method of data collection in this research. Narrative interviews offer a more flexible and participant-led approach to gathering data (Frances et al., 2009). While I used an interview schedule as a guide, the open-ended nature of narrative interviews allowed participants to introduce unanticipated topics and reflections. Even when participants raised issues that didn't seem immediately relevant to the research aims, these contributions were valuable, they offered a glimpse into their current realities and

what they were grappling with in the moment. Narrative interviews also allowed participants to speak in their own language and in their own way, giving them the space to construct and express meaning on their own terms (Ricoeur, 1991).

This approach produced richer and more textured data than what may have been gained through structured interviews or focus groups (Frances et al., 2009; Williams, 2018). All interviews were conducted individually and audio recorded. Once initial concerns around recording were addressed, participants spoke freely, some even boisterously. Conducting individual interviews was important for this study, as its focus was on personal narratives that reflect broader social dynamics, rather than collective ones.

All ten interviews were conducted face-to-face. The young women, recruited through the YOTS programme at a Secondary School in Soweto, were interviewed in a quiet, private room provided by the school. This space allowed for uninterrupted and comfortable conversations. For the grandmothers, interviews were conducted in their homes, primarily for their convenience, comfort, and accessibility. Many could not travel to the YOTS site, and home interviews allowed for deeper trust and openness. Access to their homes was facilitated through a leader of the Greater Dobsonville Heritage Foundation (GDHF), who introduced me and vouched for the project. Many grandmothers shared that they agreed to participate because of their trust in the GDHF and because they felt proud that I was "doing something with school."

Given the potential sensitivity of the grandmothers' stories, it was important to ensure their comfort and confidentiality throughout the interview process. At the beginning of each interview, it was clearly explained to participants that if they experienced any distress during or after sharing their stories, they could access support through the mental health resources I provided. Fortunately, none of the participants appeared emotionally distressed during their interviews.

As expected, some participants required more prompting, while others were eager to share at length. The transcription and translation process reflected the linguistic and narrative realities of the participants. After collecting the audio recordings, my supervisor asked me to

begin by transcribing one of the grandmothers' interviews. Initially, I transcribed it directly into English based on my own understanding, for instance, translating "Ke ne ke batla bana ba ka ba ye skolong" to "I wanted my children to go to school." I did not include the original Sesotho, thinking it would streamline the process. However, my supervisor advised that this approach risked losing important linguistic and cultural nuance. As a result, a professional language transcriber was brought in to transcribe and translate all five of the grandmothers' interviews, capturing both the Sesotho and the English translation for accuracy.

In contrast, the five young women conducted their interviews in English, making the transcription process more straightforward. I transcribed their interviews myself, focusing closely on tone, pacing, and how they expressed themselves in the moment. Interview lengths varied, ranging from 17 minutes to 1 hour and 18 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded, as handwritten notes alone are considered unreliable in qualitative interviewing, researchers often miss valuable points when writing during conversations (Jamshed, 2014). Audio recording allowed me to be fully present during the interviews and supported accurate, verbatim transcription afterward.

3.6 Data Analysis

Using Braun and Clarke's (2017) six-phase process of thematic analysis, the data was analysed systematically to capture patterns of meaning across participants' narratives. The following steps outline how this was done;

Step 1: Familiarising myself with the data

After completing the interviews, I transcribed each recording verbatim and read through the transcripts several times to ensure accuracy and immersion in the data. However, since the grandmothers' interviews were conducted in Sesotho, a professional transcriber translated and transcribed these interviews in both Sesotho and English to preserve linguistic and cultural nuance. Initially, I had planned to do the translation and transcription myself, but after discussing my first attempt with my supervisor, it became clear that translating directly from Sesotho to English risked losing important emotional and contextual meaning. Therefore, to ensure the integrity of the data, I transcribed only the young women's interviews, which were conducted in English. The process of reading, listening, and re-reading allowed me to gain a deeper sense of each participant's tone, rhythm, and emphasis. I noted early impressions and recurring ideas that appeared significant to the participants' experiences of identity, care, and intergenerational connection.

Step 2: Generating initial codes

During a detailed, line-by-line reading of each transcript, I identified and labelled meaningful segments of text that captured important ideas or emotional moments. Coding was done manually in tables created for each participant, noting key phrases or expressions that reflected patterns such as caregiving, strength, or aspirations for the future. This helped retain the narrative integrity of each story while beginning to identify shared meanings across participants

Step 3: Searching for themes

Once all transcripts were coded, I reviewed the codes across participants and began grouping them into potential themes. Codes that spoke similar ideas or experiences were clustered together. For instance, codes related to support, guidance, and discipline were grouped under "Intergenerational Caregiving" while those about perseverance and emotional endurance contributed to the "Strong Black Woman" theme.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

At this stage, I re-examined the themes against the original transcripts to ensure that they accurately represented the participants' narratives. Some themes were refined, combined, or separated to ensure clarity and coherence. I also checked whether the themes reflected both generational perspectives equally and whether they aligned with the research questions.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

After confirming the themes, I refined their definitions and named them in ways that best captured their essence. Each theme was described in relation to the broader narrative of identity, hope, and intergenerational life stories. This step required deeper reflection on what each theme revealed about the ways grandmothers and granddaughters position themselves and each other in relation to care, strength, and hope.

Step 6: Producing the report

In the final step, I bought together the themes and participants' voices to present the findings of the study. This involved weaving my interpretations with direct excerpts from the interviews to show how the themes were grounded in participants' lived experiences. I also engaged with the theoretical frameworks throughout this process, constantly moving between the participant's' narratives, the relevant theory, and my own interpretations to make sense of the data. At times, this process felt overwhelming, as I had to hold multiple layers of meaning, what the participants said, what it meant in context, and how it connected to broader concepts

of identity, care, and intergenerational life. However, this reflective engagement helped with producing a coherent narrative that stayed true to the data while offering theoretical insight. Through this process, five key themes were identified: *1) Intergenerational Caregiving; 2) Transmission of Values; 3) Strong Black Woman; 4) Negotiating Gendered Expectations; 5) Hopes and Fears for the Future*. These themes will be explored in depth in the following chapter.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct research with learners in Soweto was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education (due to identifying information the document is not included in the appendices). Ethical clearance was also granted by the Human Research Ethics (Non-Medical) Committee at the University of the Witwatersrand (Appendix A). For the younger participants, consent was obtained from their parents or guardians (written in Sesotho and English) (see Appendix B & C), and the young women themselves were given individual assents and information sheets (see Appendix D & E). Informed consent was obtained from the older women (in Sesotho and Zulu) (see Appendix F & G).

One of the key ethical considerations in this study involved the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. While full anonymity could not be guaranteed, as I was physically present with participants during interviews, confidentiality was upheld throughout. Pseudonyms were used during transcription and reporting, and any identifying details were removed from the data to protect participant identities. Permission to record audio was explicitly requested and documented in the participation information sheets and consent forms.

Participants were also informed that the audio recordings would be transcribed and that only I, as the researcher, a transcriber and my supervisor would have access to these transcriptions. Another important ethical consideration was ensuring that participants would have access to support should they experience emotional distress while recounting their stories. To this end, referrals were made available to free counselling services, including Lifeline Pretoria's 24-hour line and SADAG. These contact details were provided to all participants through the relevant consent and assent forms. However, none of the participants made use of these services during the research process. Finally, the interview schedule (see Appendix H) was carefully formulated to encourage the sharing of rich and detailed narratives, while remaining sensitive to the emotional well-being of the participants. The questions were designed to draw out meaningful reflections without causing harm or distress

3.8 Reflexivity

This study is deeply shaped by my own positionality and sense of identification with the participants. As a Black woman of a similar age and background to the young women in the study, I often found myself relating more closely to their narratives than to those of the grandmothers. There were moments, for instance, when I sat on a grandmother's couch listening to her speak about the younger generation, and I felt an urge to defend the young women or found myself disappointed by some of the older women's views. At times, my questioning even reflected this alignment, for example, asking, "Why do you think we do that?", which may have contributed to a greater sense of comfort and relatability with participants. However, this closeness also complicated the analysis. It made the process more personal and emotionally layered. I had to engage in continuous reflection and introspection to avoid letting my own biases compromise the depth and fairness of my interpretation, particularly when making sense of both the older and younger women's narratives. As Squire (2008) reminds us, complete reflexivity is never fully attainable, but I have tried to engage with it as thoughtfully and honestly as possible.

I also recognise that despite shared points of connection, a distance still exists between myself and the participants, one shaped by the inherent power dynamics in the participant-researcher relationship. This distance has proved useful in helping me maintain a sense of respect and objectivity. I approached each participant as someone with a unique life history and perspective, and I worked to treat them as the experts of their own lives, even when their views diverged from my own. Etherington (2007) cautions against allowing the researcher's desire to overshadow the participants' autonomy. Her reminder, that participants must not be reduced to vessels for the researcher's ideals, has stayed with me. Stepping into the lives of both the young women and the grandmothers required me to critically examine my own responses, not to suppress or rationalise them, but to remain aware of my position throughout. In doing so, I have tried to hold space for complexity, contradiction, and care in both the research process and its interpretation.

Another example that stood out involved a grandmother who, mistakenly believing I was a social worker, shared personal details about her ongoing struggles raising her grandchildren and fighting a custody battle with the children's biological mother. Although I had explained at the beginning that I was a university student conducting research on women's life stories (a description I used informally to build rapport), I now realise that I did not clearly

communicate the limits of my role.

Ethically, this blurred the boundaries of my role. Despite receiving formal consent, this experience reminded me that informed consent is not a one-time event, it is ongoing and must be reinforced throughout the research relationship. I later discussed this with my supervisor, who helped me reflect on how my positionality, being a young educated Black woman who perhaps resembled someone the grandmother could trust, may have contributed to her expectations. This moment underscored the power dynamics at play in research with marginalised communities. When participants carry heavy burdens, they may project hope or authority onto researchers, especially if they feel seen or heard in ways they are not elsewhere. Failing to actively counter those assumptions risks reinforcing the very power imbalances I sought to challenge.

This experience has pushed me to become more reflexive, more transparent about the limits of my role, and more attuned to the stakes behind the stories participants choose to share. While I could not intervene in the grandmother's personal situation, her story remains a powerful part of this research and a reminder that these narratives are not just data, they are people's lives.

At the same time, this moment affirmed the importance of creating a space where participants feel comfortable enough to share what matters most to them. Even though I had a guiding interview schedule, I intentionally allowed the participants to lead the direction of the conversation, which meant unexpected themes could surface. Being open and receptive in this way allowed for deeper engagement and a richer understanding of how participants transitioned between topics, which parts of their stories they lingered on, and how they made meaning of their experiences in real time.

Chapter Four: Analysis and Discussion of results

The following chapter presents the analysis of all participants' interviews with a focus on the following thematic narrative strands: *1) Intergenerational caregiving; 2) Transmission of Values; 3) Strong Black Woman; 4) Negotiating Gendered Expectations; 5) Hopes and fears for the future.* These themes were identified based on recurring patterns across the interviews and their alignment with the theoretical framework of this research. Both inductive and deductive methods were utilized. Deductively, particular attention was given to themes that directly corresponded to the research questions and aims, while inductively, specific attention was paid to how participants articulated their experiences in their talk. Thus, broad themes have been identified through thematic analysis methods, with focus on specific narratives associated with these themes, providing a nuanced understanding of both collective and individual experiences within their socio-cultural and historical contexts.

The first thematic strand focuses on generational shifts or changes and the ways in which participants spoke about their own lives in relation to that of the older / younger generation. The analysis draws on data from both grandmothers and young women, highlighting common experiences, tensions, and contradictions within their families. The second thematic strand discusses the transmission of values within and between generations, focusing on how grandmothers in Soweto instil moral lessons in their granddaughters through language and sometimes silence (Frankish & Bradbury, 2012). The third thematic strand discusses how grandmothers and young women define and negotiate the Strong Black Woman (SBW) identity, highlighting generational differences in their stories of resilience, vulnerability, and self-definition. The fourth thematic strand discusses how grandmothers and young women negotiate gendered expectations revealing how societal rules about women's roles, cooking, caregiving, or behaving "properly", shape their lives and how the young women (in particular) challenge these roles. Finally, the fifth thematic strand discusses how grandmothers and young women express hope as agency for the future, tempered by fears, highlighting generational dreams and tensions in their stories and the possibility of alternative identities within their narratives.

4.1 Intergenerational Caregiving

The following extracts are drawn from the narratives of the participants, most of whom share a common feature within many South African families: being raised within an extended family unit, often with the presence, and significant influence, of grandparents, especially grandmothers (Hyde & Gibbs, 1993; Mokone, 2006). Mokone (2006) describes the extended family unit as a typical family in South Africa. This theme explores how intergenerational caregiving is experienced in contemporary South African families, through the experiences of older women (grandmothers) and younger women. What is mainly highlighted in this theme is how grandmothers are biological and non-biological caregivers and therefore assume caregiving roles and are consistently referred to as such, regardless of blood ties. And this theme is organised under three sub-themes which are, “grandmothers are practical anchors”; "grandmothers are emotional anchors”; and “intergenerational communication”. These caregiving characteristics are not isolated but often intersect and co-exist as we will see in the different narratives.

4.1.1 Grandmothers are Practical anchors

This sub-theme emerged within participants’ narratives particularly around their upbringing and how their childhood family homes were experienced. These narratives depict grandmothers at the centre of their homes being practical caregivers, whether due to parental death, parental absence, migrant labour, low wages, or various socio-economic challenges. We see consistently grandmothers continuing to assume the practical role in caregiving for their household stability. Participants narratives revealed grandmothers who were experienced as “practical anchors” provided physical safety, housing, food and emphasised the importance of school (Mutran, 1985).

The first extract is from grandmother Lucy who shares how she came to live with her grandmother, following the death of her mother;

Grandmother Lucy: So my father once told me that he sent me to live with my granny, because he didn’t want me to get used to the place we were staying at because it’s like this place wasn’t nice
Naledi: What was happening?

Grandmother Lucy: It’s like he actually didn’t want me with any other person but with granny only and my granny didn’t have a child. I was her only child.

From the above extract, grandmother Lucy is relocated after her mother's death. Her father's decision appears emotionally motivated as he does not want her to grow up in an environment that he does not deem safe. This marks a shift in caregiving responsibilities and reflects what Cloete's (2017) describes as the adaptability of African families in the face of trauma or disruption. Grandmothers often assume the role of custodian and cornerstone, offering children a continued sense of family amidst loss or disruption (Michel et al., 2020; Bray, 2010). In grandmother Lucy's case, her grandmother becomes her primary caregiver, and she becomes her grandmother's "only child", highlighting the central and stabilising role her grandmother played in her life. This is consistent with Dolbin-Macnab et al. (2016) observation that in many African contexts, caregiving extends beyond the nuclear family, with grandmothers frequently stepping into parental roles.

Similarly, we see Thato (below extract), a young woman, who also lost her mother at a young age. Her family had initially tried to reallocate care to her through her uncles, and staying with her siblings, however, due to anxiety about rising rape cases in the area at the time, it was her grandmother who she describes as *"not my grandmother by blood"* who took her in and assumed primary responsibility for her;

> *Thato: Then, in 2016, my mom passed away……. I was 9, in grade 4. At that time, my uncle…who hadn't been living with us…came, took my younger sister, and went to live in the Free State, while I stayed and lived with my brothers. In 2018, my older brother left for his first year at varsity, so I stayed with my other older brother and one of my uncles. Then, in 2019, my grandmother—the one I live with—is Xhosa, so she grew up in the Eastern Cape. She's not my grandmother by blood, and came to take us to live with her at her house.*

From the above extract, we see how the role of a grandmother is not bound by biological ties but by care for those they consider vulnerable. This older woman steps in as a grandmother to Thato and provides physical safety at a time when gender based violence was rising in the area. Despite not being related by blood, her 'grandmother' becomes a steady and practical presence, offering both protection and a stable home environment that supports Thato's development as a young woman (Mutran, 1985). This relationship illustrates what Dunifon (2012) refers to as "selective investment" wherein grandparents, especially in contexts of limited resources, choose to devote greater care to children experiencing crisis such as parental death, unemployment, illness, or incapacity. Furthermore, the bond between Thato and her

grandmother also reflects cultural values, particularly the traditional emphasis on extended family within African kinship networks (Dunifon, 2012). Within these networks, caregiving is a collective responsibility, where extended family members are expected to step in during times of hardship (Dolbin-Macnab et al., 2016). Their relationship also reflects the African proverb "it takes a village to raise a child". Thus, even though Thato's grandmother is not biologically related to her, her caregiving role is understood and validated within this cultural framework. It is a lived example of how caregiving is guided less by formal "blood" relationships and more by a shared sense of collective responsibility.

This pattern continues with Grandmother Grace who in her narrative reveals shares she was raised by her grandmother in an extended family structure, as her mother worked as a "*kitchen girl"* so those at home could afford to live;

Grandmother Grace: I was raised by my grandmother, I was always playing and I grew up with my uncles and aunts.
Naledi: Hmmm

Grandmother Grace: Yes, so it was nice growing up with my aunts and uncles but I was calling them my sisters and brothers because I couldn't understand what, my mother was a kitchen girl, so she would come maybe twice a month on Thursdays…

In grandmother Grace's narrative, we see how the migrant labour system affected her life. Her mother had to work away from home as a "kitchen girl", so she was raised by her grandmother. According to Stats SA (2025), millions of grandparents across South Africa have stepped in to raise their grandchildren. Whether due to poverty, parental challenges, or migrant labour, many children now rely on their grandparents as their main support system. Despite these challenges, grandmother Grace described her childhood with a sense of nostalgia. She also saw her aunts and uncles as siblings, showing how caregiving roles often extend across generations. Her narrative reflects what Stats SA (2025) describes: that intergenerational caregiving within extended families helps share the responsibilities and resources needed to raise children. This stands in contrast to the nuclear family model, where fewer adults are available, often leading to more stress and less flexibility in caregiving.

Similarly, we also see grandmother Matshidiso in the below extract share that she too was raised by her grandmother within an extended family unit and we also see her raising her own grandchildren too;

Naledi:Okay, so granny was the one raising the kids? Grandmother Matshidiso:Yes.
Naledi:Okay, now you are raising children as well. Grandmother Matshidiso: (Laughing).
Naledi:You are raising them as well.

Grandmother Matshidiso:Hey, I'm also raising some who don't listen.

As she nurtures her grandchildren, grandmother Matshidiso shows herself to be a practical anchor. In what Mokone (2009) illustrates as a cyclical pattern, her story illustrates intergenerational caregiving as it moves from generation to generation. Grandmother Matshidiso, for example, was raised by her grandmother at one point and is now raising her own grandchildren. She admitted this, albeit reluctantly, as I had to probe her. This shows us that although intergenerational caregiving might be seen as a normal rite of passage in African culture, it is passively inherited, and thus it is not always easy.

To expand upon this further, grandmother Mpho's narrative illustrates how even though grandmothers can show up as practical anchors, the practice of it can be emotionally taxing and require one to endure;

Grandmother Mpho: we have to support the children, how do we support the children when we are also struggling? ….it is very painful shame…..But what will we do, they are my son's children. We won't leave them on the streets or give them away to other people while we are here. They must go to school and be able to stand for themselves, it is very painful shame.

Even though grandmother Mpho expresses a sense of moral duty and responsibility towards her grandchildren, her narrative reveals the emotional toll of caregiving in a context marked by scarcity and strain. She repeatedly describes the experience as "painful", capturing the exhaustion that many older participants share, feeling overwhelmed, under-resourced, and stretched thin. Yet, despite these challenges, she firmly asserts that she would never abandon her grandchildren, even in the direst situations. Her commitment reflects what Mansilla-

Dominguez et al. (2024) identify as a sense of generational obligation. In their study, grandmothers described caregiving not just as a social expectation but as a moral debt, a reciprocal duty rooted in their own histories, particularly when their mothers had helped raise their children. This moral continuity fosters a strong ethic of intergenerational support. However, this caregiving role is not without conflict. As Cole (2017) argues, grandparents can hold competing feelings about their roles. Feelings of grief and loss may arise as grandparents put their own lives on hold in order to fulfill the caregiving role. The stress and responsibility of functioning in multiple roles may be exacerbated by overlapping parental roles (i.e., birth parents are in and out of the picture) (Goodman, 2003), role overload (i.e., grandparent is required to play parent to both adult children and grandchildren) (Cox, 2007), and role confusion (i.e., grandparent is unsure of how or when to play grandparent vs. parent) (Dolbin-Macnab et al., 2016). Grandmother Mpho narrative also reflects a core component of intergenerational caregiving in African families; where care is not contingent on whether the task will be easy or not. Her commitment mirrors that of grandmother Matshidiso, who, despite feeling that her grandchildren *"do not listen",* still takes on the responsibility of raising them. As Levetan and Wild (2016) notes, for many grandmothers, caregiving is a responsibility that is not always glamorous, and is shown through tangible support such as shelter, food, and guidance with the ultimate hope that their grandchildren will eventually become self-reliant and be able to "*stand for themselves".*

The narratives of grandmothers Matshidiso and Mpho illustrate intergenerational caregiving as a culturally significant yet emotionally taxing practice. Their form of caregiving is rooted in the concept of ubuntu which reflects a cultural duty to nurture grandchildren and sustain family continuity in a context that is often marked by poverty and apartheid legacy (Cherrington, 2017; Mkhize, 2018). Research highlights their role exacts a heavy emotional and physical toll (Cole, 2017; Ngcobo, 2001). Grandmother Mpho's repeated lament of "it is very painful shame" and grandmother Matshidiso's frustration with her grandchildren not listening to her reveal the psychological strain of caregiving, often compounded by financial and social burdens. Cole (2017) describes this as "loving in a time of hopelessness" (p. 15), where labour persists despite feelings of overwhelm. Similar to this, Chazan (2015) emphasises the emotional weariness of South African grandmothers who must balance caregiving with little resources, while Hughes et al. (2007) point out that ageing and the physical demands of childrearing increase feelings of stress and loneliness. Grandmothers Matshidiso and Mpho are

forced to be strong, practical anchors who persevere despite adversity because of these loads, which are made worse by a lack of institutional support (Dolbin-Macnab et al., 2016).

As practical anchors, grandmothers provide stability and daily care. However, participants, mainly the younger women, also revealed that there are moments when grandmothers are unable to continue in this role.

In the following extracts, we are introduced to Mamello and Botlhale, who both share that they were raised within an extended family structure but more specifically by their grandmothers. However what makes their extracts particularly interesting is that, although their grandmothers initially served as stable caregivers, they both had to leave their grandmothers' homes, but for different reasons. These transitions demonstrate the limits of intergenerational care and how caregiving roles can shift over time. The following extract is first from Mamello;

Naledi: so tell me where did you grow up? Mamello: In Limpopo
Naledi: Okay…so when did you live in [Location in Soweto]

Mamello: I came in grade 5 because from when I was 1 year six months I lived with my grandmother until grade 5
Naledi: 1 year six months?

Mamelloi: until I did grade 5….I think I was 10

Naledi: mhmmm so why did you come this side? what happened for you to come this side?
Mamello: it's because like there was a situation where I always was getting sick…like before exams or tests or something like that so my grandmother couldn't take care of me anymore so they decided to bring me this side
Naledi: why couldn't she take care of you?

Mamello: she was getting older and she couldn't… and she was bothered by her feet and even now they still bothering her and her eyesight she lost it and never such things would I understand so they decided to bring me to my mother

Mamello lived with her grandmother until grade 5, and did not want to leave her even to move to stay with her mother. However, she had to move because she was getting sick more consistently, and her grandmother's own deteriorating health made it difficult for her to continue providing care. Literature supports this reality as grandmothers often serve as practical

anchors in their families, but age and health-related challenges can limit their capacity to continue in this role (Schatz, 2007; Hughes et al., 2007).

Now shifting towards Botlhale's narrative extract below;

Naledi: Okay, so tell me about the situation at home?

Botlhale: I won't say it's bad but it doesn't satisfy me as a person. Because like sometimes we have ups and downs at home. I used to stay with my grandma……I couldn't get time to study and I would always be busy like doing house chores - you see? And now I am doing matric so like I could not find the time, every time she would call my mom that I do not want to do anything at home and things like that so like I thought of moving - cause there was inequality there at home. I have two cousins. One is a boy and the other is a girl. The girl one is almost the same age as me - I am 18 and she is 17.

For Botlhale, she was the one to initiate the move out of her grandmother's home. For her, the household responsibilities were overwhelming, especially during her matric year when she needed time and space to focus on her studies. Her experience echoes findings from Motsa and Morojele's (2021) study, in which some grandchildren described being raised by grandparents as emotionally and mentally draining, particularly as they got older and familial expectations increased. The tension in the home, particularly around the perceived inequality of expectations between her and her cousins, further influenced her choice. And although her grandmother was a practical anchor within the family, Botlhale did not feel supported by her. Here we see an example of the complexity the caregiving role grandmothers often hold and the relational implication that can arise, especially because they are often seen as central figures of support in the family (Marhánková, 2019).

This sub-theme highlights the important, often overlooked, role that grandmothers play within the extended family structure, especially in caregiving. We see the transition of primary caregiving roles are as they shift, particularly to the grandmother in response to various circumstances such as loss of a parent, orphanhood, illness, and migration of labour system (Schatz, 2007; Muruthi et al., 2020; Roos et al., 2017; Button et al., 2018). Many of the participants' experiences illustrate an example of how "black social structure" is expressed in intergenerational caregiving family relationships (Mokone, 2006). The act of practical caregiving by the older generation women in African contexts is seen as ordinary, familiar, and

grounded in kinship (or non-kinship) networks of families. However, at the same time, some participants' narratives reveal that the role of grandmothers as practical anchors is not always sustainable or without its complexity. Thus, while grandmothers' caregiving is valued (by those they care for), it is not without its labour and is not always in line with the needs of those in their care.

4.1.2 Grandmothers are emotional anchors

The data, particularly in younger women's talk, consistently pointed to how central grandmothers are, not only as practical anchors but as emotional anchors in many participants' lives. For the young women, they often would position their grandmothers as emotional anchors when comparing them to their mothers or reflecting back on a difficult situation they had to navigate. However this subtheme also revealed emotional complexities, with grandmothers usually idealised and experienced as nurturing but conversely, at times being emotionally unavailable and critical. We also see how younger women negotiate this ambivalence between admiration and disappointment and reconcile their experiences in relation to their grandmothers.

The following extract is from Lerato, a young woman, who offers an account of how grandmothers may be experienced as "emotionally safe" during moments of vulnerability;

> *Lerato: I don't know…I had to tell my granny first...we were coming from church yahhh and then I went to the bathroom and I felt something was off…first things first I called my grandmother…and my grandmother explained to me what's happening to me…She just said "my child you have entered your time…[laughs]...shame I will never forget that one…*

Lerato's narration centres around her first menstruation, which is a significant biological milestone for many young women. This experience can also be emotionally jarring, as Lerato expressed. And while both her grandmother and her mother were physically present, it was her grandmother she called out to, signalling who she trusted in that vulnerable moment. Her grandmother's response to what was happening to her brought a sense of containment and explanation, even though it accompanied traditional cautionary messaging about boys. Nevertheless, in her moment of fear and confusion, she chose her grandmother to comfort her, protect her and guide her. Through this narrative we see how grandmothers' roles extend

beyond practical caregiving into what Michel et al. (2020) describes as “affective labour” that involves making meaning of various situations and offering emotional interpretation.

A similar affective tone is found in Mamello’s narrative, where her grandmother is described in relational terms, demonstrating her as an emotional anchor;

Mamello: ..she was the only person, she was my best friend I did not have friends but I could speak with her and everytime she would try by all means to..like now there are alot of friends when I am at school they speak and I don’t take them to head but when I get home I rethink them and stuff like that and… she would try by all means to just stick them in a good way and don’t look at them in that way so like…
…because my mom hai..my mom is a very strict parent, such things nje she doesn’t understand them…

When we were having our conversation, Mamello became emotional and cried when she spoke about her grandmother. There is a sense that Mamello relies on her grandmother and not only does her grandmother care for her, but she also deeply cares for her grandmother. She describes her grandmother as her “best friend”, someone who truly understands her, even more so than her mother, whom she experiences as strict and often dismissive of her feelings. In contrast, we see from her narrative that her grandmother not only validates her experiences but also helps reframe some negative thoughts, especially those stemming from conversations with friends at school. This echoes Michel et al. (2020) view of grandmothering as not merely material practice but one that involves emotional availability.

However, this idea of grandmothers as emotional anchors is not affirmed by all participants as they have had different experiences of their grandmothers. This shows the nuance of the archetype of an “emotional anchor”, particularly in young women’s lives. For example, for some participants such as Thato, this role is contested and negotiated. In her narrative, her grandmother emerges as someone who is her disciplinary and at times emotionally injures her:

Thato: Now, with my grandmother, there are days when she can be really strict and mean. She even involves the family, saying things like, 'That's why your family has left you.'...For example, one day my phone ran out of space, so I had to delete a lot of stuff, which took longer than expected. I got home around 8….she

swore at me, she's a real swearing person…even kicked me out and told me to go back home…and I joked, 'Where do you want me to go?... sometimes think maybe she's trying to teach me with the way she speaks I went back to her and told her
I didn't like what she did, and that I needed some counselling. She didn't understand why I wanted it.

Thato's narrative reveals that at times there can be emotional volatility in intergenerational relationships. While her grandmother may intend to teach or protect, particularly in light of gender based violence cases in the area, her tone and language however appear to wound rather than constructively confront. According to Bozalek and Hooyman (2012) the influence of grandparenting practices on children seemed to be mixed mainly because of the impact of role theory. Dolbin-Macnab et al. (2016) extend this idea by drawing on the concept of intergenerational ambivalence, along with role theory and the life course perspective, to better understand the emotional and relational experiences of grandparents who take on parenting roles. Intergenerational ambivalence refers to the experience of having both positive and negative feelings toward family members at the same time. This can happen because grandparents are often placed in conflicting roles, being a grandparent while also acting as a parent, which creates tension (Goodman, 2003; Cox, 2007). Thato recognises this duality when she says *"I sometimes think maybe she's trying to teach me with the way she speaks"* but at the same time while she recognises that her grandmother may be trying to teach her something, she also rejects the tone in which she is being communicated to and asks for counselling. Thato is not outright rejecting her grandmother here, but her role as an emotional anchor is conditional and actively contested.

For other participants, the role of their grandmothers being emotional anchors is outright rejected. For example, Botlhale's narrative surfaces similar tensions to that of Thato but her stance is more clearly marked by rejection:

Botlhale:…But I feel like my grandma is not someone who I would see and say "ohh this is my grandmother" the way she raised me - that lady gave me a tough life…Because even for my grandma to exclude us as her daughters' children I feel like it is a good thing she is teaching me how to grow.

For Botlhale, she does not seem to ascribe the role or feelings of emotional anchor to her grandmother. In her narrative, there is little nuance or warmth in how she describes their relationship. Instead her words reflect pain and exclusion. She recounts feeling like her grandmother showed favouritism toward her other grandchildren, which left her feeling as though she does not belong. The absence of an emotional anchor, particularly in her grandmother is significant. As Yuval-Davis (2006) notes, the politics of belonging are not only about inclusion but also the pain of exclusion. Bothlale's above extract ultimately reveals that grandmothers are typically expected to be emotional anchors and when they are not, the experience can be hurtful and exclusionary. However she still concludes that her grandmother is *"teaching me how to grow"* despite their strained relationship. This acknowledgment suggests that, despite the absence of emotional warmth she still derives unintended lessons of resilience and self-reliance from her grandmother's harsh treatment. Chan et al. (2023) found that some participants raised by grandparents who employed harsh or even aggressive discipline reflected later in life that they had "needed" that structure, recognising it as formative. Thus Botlhale's reflection reveals a reframing of this pain as a formative experience. By choosing to interpret her grandmother's actions as a lesson to growth, she "transforms" the strained relationship into a source of strength.

The research findings for this subtheme revealed that while grandmothers were often considered emotional anchors, this role was not uniformly agreed upon by participants. Participants such as Lerato and Mamello positioned their grandmothers as emotional anchors who offered guidance, support and containment in various situations. In contrast, participants like Thato and Botlhale who had a hard time reconciling this notion of "grandmothers as emotional anchors" revealed the ambivalence that can be associated with this role. But for both Thato and Botlhale their narratives also reveal that young women still expect or hope for emotional support from their grandmothers particularly when they do not receive it. This tension speaks to what Mansilla-Domíngue (2024) describes as grandmothers are often expected to be nurturing and emotionally available figures in their grandchildren' s lives, a role that is ingrained in cultural narratives around caregiving. However, these expectations do not always align with reality. Thus, what becomes important in this subtheme is the recognition that grandmothers, as emotional anchors, are not experienced in a fixed or universal way. Rather, their emotional presence, or absence, is shaped by each young woman's context and is often actively negotiated, revealing both the complexity and variability of intergenerational relationships.

4.1.3 Intergenerational communication

Across the data, a pattern emerged of intergenerational communication within the broader theme of intergenerational relationships. There is care that is present in the grandmother and granddaughter relationship, however it is not always communicated in ways that are easily understood or received by both generations. Younger women frequently have to reinterpret or decode the meaning of their grandparents' messages, especially when those messages are conveyed using a tone or reasoning that is based on the ideas or norms of an older generation. Grandmothers, on the other hand, frequently feel that modern reactions to their caregiving are disrespectful, particularly when younger people contest or reject the type of discipline displayed. This pattern speaks to a broader intergenerational gap in emotional expression, values, and interpretive frameworks, even within otherwise close caregiving relationships.

For instance, Lerato's narrative, for example, highlights a recurring theme in the data: the reinterpretation of grandmothers' messages through modern lens. Lerato talks about having to process the implications of being advised to avoid boys since "sitting with them" could result in pregnancy:

> *Lerato:...so I would ask myself that sitting with a boy how..do I become pregnant? ...and as I am learning in Life Orientation (school subject), I ask myself really what did my grandmother mean when I bond with a boy I will fall pregnant and stuff?...ohhhh she didn't want me to maybe sit with boys because yhooo I used to bond with boys…*

Although Lerato initially received her grandmother's advice, she received it with a grain of salt as we see her try to make sense of its meaning. She ultimately interpreted her grandmother's warnings about boys as a form of care. This demonstrates how younger women have frequently reinterpreted their elders' statements using what they now understand to be true, pointing to a pattern of meaning-making that occurs in hindsight and enables them to maintain emotional ties even in cases when the initial message is unclear or incorrect. As Diallo (2004 explains, from an early development stage, young girls are socialised into gendered roles, with sex education typically facilitated by older siblings and elderly women within the home. Girls are taught to carry their bodies in ways that align with socially sanctioned notions of femininity. This aligns with Chauke and Segalo's (2021) observation that older women are often seen as custodians of communal wisdom and moral regulation. They take on the role of

moral educators (Michel et al., 2020), seeking to pass on culturally embedded values to their grandchildren, particularly granddaughters. However, within this dynamic, there is often an expectation that grandchildren will obey. When granddaughters deviate or resist, it can lead to generational tension or perceived moral failure. Lerato's ability to reinterpret her grandmother's words as caring, even if those felt limiting, demonstrates how younger women navigate these tensions by reframing advice in ways that still honour their relationships with elders, while simultaneously asserting their own understanding of gender, sexuality, and autonomy.

Karabo's narrative further emphasised this gap between expression and control by demonstrating how emotional tension could arise from silence rather than reprimands:

> *Karabo: Let's say we make her upset…she will store that in her heart…and when she decides to speak we all wonder why she hadn't said anything before…*

Here, Karabo expresses a desire for more direct and expressive emotional communication, which she believes her grandmother's approach lacks. Although her grandmother's strategy might have its roots in control or dignity (Dolbin-Macnab et al., 2016), Karabo finds it to be confusing and emotionally distant. This highlights yet another aspect of the theme, that shows variations in emotional expression are not just stylistic but impact how caregiving is perceived and valued.

Data also show that even within strong and caring relationships, much like Lerato and her grandmother's relationship, disparities in how they communicate can still cause tension, because while Lerato understands her grandmother's intension, there are times when the form of discipline used by an elder can be difficult:

> *Lerato: There would be times when I do wrong things but then I accept that okay she is like this really, maybe I come back late and then she doesn't want me to come back late she becomes cheeky or she hits me and I understand why because obvious I grew up with her and stuff*

Once again, we observe a pattern wherein granddaughters are performing the interpretive work by presenting disciplinary actions, even when they are uncomfortable, as a component of a larger caregiving duty. Younger women's recollections frequently exhibited this interpretative work, focusing more on the motivations behind their grandmothers' actions than on the effects they had on them.

In contrast, the older women in the study tended to view their communication as legitimate and clear and thus expressed frustration that younger generations believe their approaches, and those they were raised under, are harsh or even abusive (Chan et al., 2023). Grandmother Lucy's reflection demonstrates this difference:

> *Grandmother Lucy: Yoh my granny….I was raised by a granny who had love, my granny had love, it's not like nowadays the kids can say they were abusing us but they were actually teaching us.*

This reflection on changes in disciplinary practices across time captures some defensiveness or confusion that some grandmothers have shown when their discipline-based approach is questioned or challenged. They associate these disciplinary approaches with survival, love, and duty rather than with harm. This reveals a generational mismatch in interpretive frameworks, where the older generation reads discipline as caring, whereas the younger age may understand it as trauma. This tension aligns with Li and Liu's (2019) findings, which suggest that while the influence of grandmothers is often viewed positively, there is limited evidence to show that such influence is necessarily progressive or liberatory. As a result, the influence of grandmothers at times may seem to perpetuate rather than challenge oppressive narratives.

Grandmother Lebo similarly reflects on how discipline and practices of respect typical of her generation may be labelled "abuse" by the younger generation:

> *Grandmother Lebo: So for me I don't want to lie, the way my parents raised me I still respect it even now…would I put this one on the stove and say cook?...They will say it's abuse.*

According to both grandmothers' narratives, younger people have either lost touch with the virtues of obedience and respect or have become unduly sensitive. The data, however, show that granddaughters' responses to discipline are not solely about disobeying rules or being overly permissive, but are about seeking deeper emotional connection and understanding. According to Bozalek and Hooyman (2012), these mismatches in families are caused by different expectations of reciprocity: granddaughters desire emotional transparency and empathy, whereas grandmothers view discipline as a reciprocal act of care to prepare youth for adversity (p. 1023). Dolbin-Macnab et al. (2016) provide more insight into this dynamic by

pointing out that grandparent-grandchild relationships frequently entail different views of caring, especially when younger generations perceive discipline as harsh. Granddaughters like Lerato prefer reciprocity, unambiguous communication and emotional connection, to blind obedience. Their interpretive approach, which emphasises the reasons behind grandmothers' actions rather than the pain of punishment right away, shows an attempt to close this gap and preserve emotional bonds.

The subtheme of intergenerational communication shows that although providing care is frequently reciprocal and appreciated, it is complicated by varying opinions on how to communicate that caring. Grandmothers often view practical caregiving, emotional control, and discipline as acts of love. While acknowledging the caring involved in these behaviours, granddaughters frequently look for emotional clarity, validation, and understanding; in order to preserve an emotional bond, they may need to soften or rephrase their grandmothers' comments or behaviours. In addition to reflecting changes in cultural and emotional norms between generations, this interaction highlights the constant negotiating needed to ensure that caring is understood by both generations. Importantly, this interaction also prompts deeper reflection on the mutual influence between generations. It invites questions about what grandmothers transmit to their granddaughters, through values, advice, and embodied practices, and conversely, how granddaughters may reshape or even challenge those transmissions. These reciprocal influences offer insight into how both generations construct their identities and values within evolving cultural, historical, and emotional landscapes.

4.2 Transmission of Values

The second theme that emerged from participants' narratives was how values are transmitted within and between generations. More specifically how grandmothers seek to shape and instil what they deem as important lessons for granddaughters. This theme showed that families, particularly the grandmother-granddaughter relationship is a special site through which the transference of moral instruction and practice are possible. We particularly see the grandmothers having more urgency in this role, using language to aid their mission. In this regard, Brockmeier (2009) emphasises that language is not merely a means of communication but a dynamic cultural resource for meaning making and agency. In this way, grandmothers may use language to construct “possible worlds” in which their granddaughters can imagine and act on their desired futures. But we also find that some grandmothers use silence about traumatic experiences or histories as an attempt to protect their (grand)children from their own

pain. This silence, while protective in intention, also shapes what is remembered, what is forgotten and what persists. Thus, transmission of values occurs not only through what is said, but also through what is left unsaid.

Across participants' narratives, grandmothers' "sayings" emerged as a central mechanism for transmitting values to their granddaughters, reflecting their hope that these lessons would guide the younger women. These "sayings" encompassed lessons deemed important for womanhood, including appropriate sexual behaviour, navigating relationships, and making informed life choices. Grandmothers often drew on their own life stories as blueprints, weaving moral instructions into everyday reminders and reflections from their childhoods or past challenges. These narratives, often infused with emotional appeal, carried a sense of urgency to shape their granddaughters' values and decisions, despite uncertainty and whether their guidance would be heeded. Unlike formal teachings, these sayings were informal yet purposeful, embodying both hope and a shared commitment to influence the future of the younger generation.

4.2.1 Life stories as Moral Blueprints

This subtheme explores how grandmothers use their personal life experiences shared through "sayings" or storytelling as a narrative framework to model values and guide granddaughters' moral and practical decisions. In African oral tradition storytelling is used as a cultural practice that fosters intergenerational connection (Osei-Tutu, 2022; Thompson, 2007). By framing their life experiences as moral blueprints, grandmothers hope to position themselves as relatable role models who make abstract values (self-respect, resilience, and gendered conduct) more tangible. Therefore, their narratives serve as both examples and cautionary tales, embedding lessons about womanhood, resilience, or cultural expectations within the socio-historical context of Soweto.

Participants' narratives revealed that grandmothers would often draw on their personal histories to influence and impart values, using their life stories as a roadmap for their granddaughters. For example, grandmother Lucy's narrative illustrates this pattern when she shares her experience, with hopes that her granddaughter would follow:

Grandmother Lucy: Myself I talk.

Grandmother Lucy: I do tell her I don't want to lie, I do tell her that I grew up like this and that and if you can follow my steps you will be fine in life. Naledi: Hmm.
Grandmother Lucy: Hmm, you shouldn't regret when I'm in the graves where you will say eish if only I listened to my grandmother I would be having one two three, there is nothing that will change if ever you don't listen to me now.
Naledi: So when you say she does listen, what are the things that you say to her? Grandmother Lucy: I tell her about my life.
Naledi: Okay.
Grandmother Lucy: Yes and that I had a baby at what age, and I have never been busy with boys.
Naledi: Hmm.
Grandmother Lucy: I am giving her the rules, yah so that even if she wants to do something she will remember that oh my grandmother said I shouldn't
Naledi: Hmm.
Grandmother Lucy: You see. Naledi: Hmmm.
Grandmother Lucy: I tell her that the time is coming it will arrive for you to do those things, when the time is here you can do those things you can date but you must date one person.
Naledi: Hmm.
Grandmother Lucy: And what kind of a person is that and it must be a person whom you understand and who understands you, don't just jump into any kind of relationship otherwise you will suffer.

From the above narrative, what starts from grandmother Lucy as vague and minimal words from her saying she does "talk" to her granddaughter, unfolds as a biographical roadmap cantered on moral prohibitions around sexuality, such as delaying childbirth and pursuing committed relationships. Her claim of restraint, *"I have never been busy with boys",* may be a curated self-description, as elders often idealise their past to reinforce moral authority. McAdams (2001) describes how individuals, particularly as they age, create redemptive narratives or emphasise positive aspects of their past to provide meaning and guidance to others (p. 15), which raises questions about her truthfulness in this regard. Her "talk" is a medium of instruction grounded in lived experience, with the impulse to want to pass on what has been learned, which according to Erikson (1975) is normal, and is delivered with a repetitive,

emotionally resonant tone, as Osei-Tutu (2022) notes is common in African oral traditions. For example, her warning, *"you shouldn't regret when I'm in the grave"*, uses vivid imagery to instil caution about sexual choices, reflecting how grandmothers' moral blueprints often focus on sexual restrictions. Cattell (1994) describes how older women often use narrative to promote culturally sanctioned behaviours, such as maintaining virginity and fulfilling appropriate marital roles, thereby projecting "possible worlds" rooted in indigenous ideals. As a researcher and a young woman, myself, I felt a sense of disconnect during these exchanges. My responses, limited to "hmms", reflected the ambivalence I felt, particularly because the advice was directed solely at young women and not young men as well. In a world where young people navigate natural sexual development alongside influences such as media and peer norms, grandmother Lucy's guidance felt less authentic and more disconnected from present-day realities. Yet, grandmother Lucy still hopes for her granddaughter as she utters *"she will remember that oh my grandmother said"* suggesting an expectation that these lessons may resonate later, aligning with Osei-Tutu (2022) view that such teachings plant seeds for future reflection rather than immediate adherence.

Similarly, this same pattern of using personal history to guide or challenge is also highlighted in grandma Grace's narrative though in a more confrontational tone:

> *Grandmother Grace: You know what, she was twenty two years old at that time and had a baby already, the baby was four years old….at your age I was already at my own place, so if we are in a competition have your own place as well please.*

Grandmother Grace contrasts her granddaughter's early motherhood at 22 with her own independence at that age, implying she avoided early childbirth to set a superior moral benchmark. Her critical tone, framing it as a "competition", uses her life as a reference point, but her claim of restraint may be selectively shaped to emphasise moral lessons, as elders often construct narratives to align with social goals (McAdams, 2001). Thus, we see grandmothers' life stories function as narrative tools with the hope of bridging generational gaps, whether through a nurturing or critical tone, aligning with identity theory that personal stories shape individual and collective values (McAdams, 2001; Hall, 2000). By highlighting her restraint against her granddaughter's early motherhood, grandmother Grace makes abstract values like sexual responsibility concrete, positioning herself as a role model for navigating womanhood, though young women may question her advice's relevance due to modern influences like

media. This is consistent with Fay's (1996) concept of narratives as a process of meaning-making, where stories shape and reflect lived experiences through storytelling. In Soweto's context, where oral traditions are present, these "sayings" reinforce cultural continuity, ingraining values like sexual restraint that have existed within the broader intergenerational narrative, as when grandmother Grace reflects on her own grandmother's rules:

Grandma Grace: My grandmother never allowed sleeping out with the boys, no skipping, she never allowed that…until my mother started working… and she had me

This positions values like chastity and discipline within a lineage of intergenerational transmission reinforcing their cultural weight. The idea that grandmothers' "sayings" are embedded within broader intergenerational narrative for cultural continuity is further illustrated in grandmother Lebo's reflection:

Grandmother Lebo: I thank my grandmother a lot because she has taught me a lot of things.

In addition to positioning values within a broader intergenerational narrative, we see grandmothers give out specific "rules" or lessons to their granddaughters similarly to grandmother Grace's own grandmother. Furthermore, we see that grandmothers' rules are often tied to gendered expectations and more interestingly, survival strategies. The following extract is from grandmother Mpho who links cleanliness to self-respect and dignity:

Grandmother Mpho: So nowadays kids they don't care…we were taught that as a person you have to stay in a clean place, clean where you stay, love yourselves…clean even if there's no food clean… so you can be in a clean place.

Grandmother Mpho shares how cleanliness is not just about hygiene but an outward reflection of one's sense of dignity and self-worth. For her the frustration is on how young people do not seem to care about this value but it carries generational weight that emphasises that one's hardship should never strip them of their own sense of discipline and dignity. The lesson here is if you respect yourself and your space, others will too. Idang (2015) suggests, within the African community, values like self-worth and social harmony are often instilled through expectations around conduct and appearance, especially in the home (Billington et al., 1998). Cleanliness here becomes a symbol of care for the self and for the space one inhabits. It is also a subtle strategy for reclaiming agency in the face of socioeconomic hardship: even if food is absent, pride and structure remain.

The next lesson that grandmothers emphasise is the importance of listening as a survival strategy. The directive present also carries a temporal dimension, linking listening to intergenerational continuity. Grandma Mpho's narrative illustrates the importance of this survival strategy:

Grandma Mpho: Okay old people used to listen that is why some of us are still here, so listen and learn, you will do it for you and your children…if you don't listen, you'll see

Grandmother Mpho ties the importance of listening to one's safety and longevity. Her statement *"if you don't listen, you'll see"* serves as a warning and call of action implying that failure to heed guidance may lead to adverse consequences. Thus, listening can be said to be viewed as a way of survival. This aligns with Sharma (2017) who posits that elders tend to transmit knowledge to ensure the younger generations' survival and continuity of values. Furthermore, grandmother Mpho's focus on listening is consistent with narrative pedagogy in which elders employ oral instructions to promote learning and active engagement (Osei-Tutu, 2022). We also see the use of emotional resonance (Osei-Tutu, 2022). By urging her granddaughter to "listen and learn", grandmother Mpho positions listening as an intentional act of agency rather than passive obedience which prepares her granddaughter for future responsibilities (you will do it for you and your children). This also highlights the awareness and the role that grandmothers have, recognising the duty of their role and offering guidance as their role demands that of them when trying to transmit values to the next generation.

Grandmothers also emphasise gendered warnings about safety, respect and reputation, ingraining these lessons within their life stories to guide young women through Soweto's challenging socio-cultural landscape. Below is grandmother Grace extract illustrating this:

Grandmother Grace: Don't do this and this and this, no mama that's an old doings… what what what no no no, don't go there…no mama I go with my friends to dance…it's not safe at the dancing places, okay go then but in the afternoon…why should you go at night, wearing short things like this, the next thing you go with someone you don't even know…when you wake up you find yourselves smoking these things of yours where they may even end up putting drugs for you…you end up doing drugs…where is your pride…how will that boy respect you, you drink alcohol with him…there is no respect, when you are with him until twelve at night he can

see that you control yourself at home…he will end up doing that here as well he will come and fight in here

Following from the above data extract, grandmother Grace's narrative emphasises a sense of urgency. I remember sitting with her and her words coming quickly, and impassioned, each sentence brimming with concern, and wanting to be heard. The way she narrates her story does not follow a linear pattern but is a bit all over the place. This non-linear storytelling aligns with Fay's (1996) concept of narrative as meaning making, where unstructured stories reflect life's complexity to shape lived experiences. Her warnings about appropriate clothing, avoiding nighttime dancing, and cautious partner choice highlight moral prohibitions around sexuality, but also align with victim blaming by suggesting women's dress and behaviour (e.g., "wearing short things," drinking) invite risks like gender-based violence, a pervasive threat in our country (Chauke & Segalo, 2021; Tamale, 2014). Grandmother Grace's account of her own restraint may be selectively shaped to reinforce these lessons (Becker et al., 2003). By asking "where is your pride" and "how will that boy respect you," grandmother Grace ties women's safety to cultural values like family honour, a key concern in African kinship systems (Idang, 2015). This reflects socialisation theory, where families shape social roles and identity (Billington et al., 1998). However, these protective strategies, emphasising chastity and restraint, may be questioned by young women, as modern influences like media promote personal expression, creating tension between cultural norms and individual desires (Shefer & Foster, 2001). Grandmother Grace's "sayings" reinforce cultural continuity, but her victim-blaming undertones may limit their relevance for young women navigating personal and societal expectations.

Following her warnings about gendered safety and respect, grandmother Grace further emphasises the sacred role that caregivers have as figures of ultimate authority in a young person's life. She articulates this sentiment vividly:

Grandmother Grace: But your first God is your parent….your parents are your God because they are the ones who brought you into this world, there is no God who is bigger than your parents, how will you praise God if you are failing to praise the God that you are able to see? The one that tells you that if you get in there where there is fire you will burn

Grace's comparison of parents to God employs emotive appeal to evoke a profound emotional and cultural response, positioning parents as "almighty" figures whose wisdom and

warnings demand respect and obedience. This mirrors Erikson's (1975) understanding of elders as symbolic guides whose narratives shape the moral compass of those who follow. Furthermore, it aligns with African kinship systems, where elders, including parents, are respected as the keepers of social and moral order (Idang, 2015). Her metaphor also reflects socialisation theory, as families shape young people's identities by instilling respect for authority as means of guiding behaviour and maintaining familial harmony (Billington et al., 1998). By likening parents to protective deities who warn against dangers like "fire," grandmother Grace frames elders' wisdom-filled narratives as authoritative guides for avoiding gendered risks, though this can align with victim blaming by implying young women's failure to obey invites harm (Shefer & Foster, 2001). Her account of elders' authority may be selectively shaped to reinforce these lessons, as memory can be reconstructive (McAdams, 2001). This relates to her previous safety cautions since cultural settings stress the importance of listening to elders to manage life's risks and preserve family honour, though young women may question the relevance of such rigid norms due to modern influences promoting autonomy (Shefer & Foster, 2001; Chauke & Segalo, 2021).

Despite their efforts to impart these moral lessons through life stories, not all grandmothers are confident that their "sayings" are received, highlighting a tension between their role as guides and perceived resistance from young women. Grandmother Mpho expresses this resignation:

> *Grandma Mpho: No they don't listen, they don't listen….No I don't know Naledi I don't want to lie, if they can go to school they will be alright, if they can go to school and succeed, they should focus on school.*

Unlike Grandmother Lucy's hopeful narrative which intertwines memory and possibility, grandmother Mpho's tone conveys resignation, narrowing her hope to education as a stable avenue for discipline where young women might "listen". This is consistent with the intergenerational learning theory, which states that elders continue to pass on knowledge even when its acceptance is questionable, planting the seeds for future reflection (Sharma, 2017). Grandmother Mpho's perseverance exemplifies narrative resilience, where storytelling persists as a cultural practice despite resistance, preserving intergenerational continuity (McAdams, 2001).This tension connects to earlier discussions of listening and gendered warnings, as grandmothers like Mpho and Grace strive to protect and guide while at the same time grapple

with perceived indifference highlighting their dedication to shaping their granddaughters futures through moral blueprints.

The grandmother-granddaughter bond is emphasised as a key site for transferring values through grandmothers' life stories, presented as moral blueprints worth following. These blueprints primarily instill prohibitions on sexuality, urging girls (not boys) to avoid sex through lessons on chastity, self-respect, and gendered behavior, delivered via emotionally charged narratives that reflect urgency to guide the young generation (Shefer & Foster, 2001; Chauke & Segalo, 2021). Grandmothers' accounts, like those emphasising restraint, may be selectively shaped to reinforce these gendered norms, as elders often construct narratives to align with social goals (McAdams, 2001). However, young women may question the relevance of this repetitive advice, as modern influences like media promote autonomy, creating tension with these restrictive, gender-specific norms that can imply victim blaming by linking safety to girls' behaviour (Chauke & Segalo, 2021). But whether through nurturing hope or critical benchmarks, their stories carry cultural and moral weight, fostering intergenerational continuity despite uncertainties in their reception. The following subtheme explores more of what is transferred from generation to generation and how young women negotiate these continuities.

4.2.2 Negotiating Intergenerational Wisdom

This subtheme explores how granddaughters receive, interpret, and negotiate the values transmitted through their grandmother's "sayings" and silences, shifting the focus from grandmother's moral guidance to granddaughter's lived experiences. While grandmothers often deliver broad reflections or cautionary tales about relationships, education, and safety, granddaughters recall specific moments, emotions, and meanings, revealing a complex interplay of internalisation, resistance, and reinterpretation. This negotiation reflects the dynamic nature of intergenerational storytelling in "post-apartheid" Soweto, where values are shaped by both guidance and contradiction.

Young women's narratives highlight how they experience their grandmothers' advice, often remembering precise moments and emotions rather than general moral "sayings". For example Thato describes her grandmother's reluctance to dwell on the past:

Thato: Honestly, she doesn't like talking about things from the past…she thinks it's a waste of

time to talk about the past…she shares small pieces here and there…when we are together

Thato's above reflection shows an important layer to the theme of value transmission. She describes her grandmother as someone who does not like talking about the past, perhaps life during apartheid, calling it "a waste of time." But at the same time, her grandmother still shares advice, small pieces of her own life, especially when they sit together. This creates a kind of tension: on the one hand, her grandmother does not want to dwell on the past, but on the other, she still wants Thato to learn from it as she still speaks about her life. This resembles the complicated nature of intergenerational storytelling in post-apartheid families, where stories are not always fully told, and where silence and contradiction often sit alongside guidance and care (Frankish & Bradbury, 2012). Thus in the end, Thato's narrative shows that values are not only passed down through direct talk. They come through silences, through half-shared memories where ultimately young people have to make sense of the meaning themselves (McAdams, 2001).

Participants' narratives reveal that young women's narratives reveal that they do not passively receive advice but engage with it critically, internalising some messages while challenging others. Thato, for example, resists her grandmother's assumption that closeness to boys implies sexual activity:

Thato: I enjoy being around them…I laugh when I'm with them…It's just fun. That doesn't mean I want to sleep with them. That's not true…and I learn a lot like how they talk about girls

Thato's narrative above reflects the difference in how her grandmother's generation and her own younger generation look at relational dynamics between the sexes. For Thato she observes how boys talk about girls and uses that to gain insight about boys for herself within her social context. Her resistance to her grandmother's assumption is both affective and analytical. And rather than outright rejecting her grandmother's moral framing, she reframes it through the lens of her own lived experience.

Mamello expressed a similar ambivalence towards her grandmother's advice. While she acknowledges that boys can "take advantage of girls" she also shares how she prefers the company of boys compared to girls as they boost her confidence:

Mamello: I prefer them…they convince me to speak, and that confidence I regain. Unlike when I am with girls, they suppress my confidence

Mamello's experience suggests that boys can offer a space where she feels affirmed in terms of her self expression. This is different to her grandmother's cautionary tales, which shows that girl peer groups can be equally threatening to one's sense of self. Both the narratives of Thato and Mamello disrupt the binary moral logic of grandmothers' cautionary tales, aligning with African feminist perspectives which emphasise young women's agency in navigating gendered expectations (Cherrington, 2017). Young women tended to reframe values like caution and respect through their own social contexts negotiating between elder guidance and personal experience.

Young women's narratives about their grandmothers also reveal the ambivalence they have to decipher from their grandmothers' advice and lessons. This is illustrated in Lerato's recollection of her grandmother's advice:

Lerato: she always tells me "don't be like me" and finish school, to have my own things…and she wants me to be like her and have a child when I'm older.

Lerato's above narrative shows the ambivalence found in the transmission of values. Her grandmother wishes to both distance her from her own past (of not finishing school) and use education to realise her dreams. The statement "don't be like me" reflects a broader pattern among grandmothers' narratives where their advice is also shaped by regret as well as aspiration for their granddaughters. This aligns with Erikson's (1975) concept of generativity, which describes the shift in later adulthood from self-focus to a desire to nurture and guide the next generation (Marhánková, 2019). It reflects a dual trajectory shaped by grandmothers' past and young women's imagined future.

Thato also expresses she has also received similar traditional advice from her grandmother that she also has had to negotiate:

Thato: she will say like I must have a child later in my life…but I don't want a child, I want to go to America

When Thato rejects her grandmother's advice about motherhood in favour of going to America, she is not just chasing travel or opportunity. "America" represents a larger desire for freedom, self-reliance, and a life free from the gendered norms of her grandmother's time, including early childbirth or household responsibilities. Thato's ambition is a reflection of her wish to reinterpret who she is on her own terms, putting her own autonomy ahead of social

duties. This negotiation aligns with intergenerational learning theory, where grandmothers, as the "hinge generation" who experienced apartheid's traumas, mediate traditional values and modern realities through their narratives (Frankish & Bradbury, 2016, citing Hoffman, 2004). In African oral tradition, grandmothers' advice carries cultural weight, but Thato blends respect for this wisdom with globalised aspirations (i.e., outward-looking goals influenced by global cultural, social, and economic trends rather than traditional, localised expectations) navigating tensions between tradition and autonomy. This relates to past narratives, like Mamello and Lerato's ambivalence, in which granddaughters negotiate their position in a changing society by balancing personal objectives with elder guidance. These competing narratives reflect what Becker et al. (2003) term the struggle over "cultural continuity", where family becomes the site where both tradition and change are negotiated.

However, we also see, as indicated from the data, that grandmothers constantly repeating the same messages can also diminish their impact. Botlhale illustrates this:

> *Botlhale: my grandmother is the type of person everytime she would complain about everything…I listen…but I always think, oh she started again, it's the same thing*

Botlhale shares that her grandmother's "sayings" lose their persuasiveness through repetition. This is illustrated by Weingarten (2010) who suggests that when moral "sayings" are repeated continuously, they become familiar rather than meaningful. This may suggest why some young people may distance themselves from repetitive forms of moralising.

However Botlhale's grandmother's "sayings" are not entirely unheard, she just craves trust and recognition from her:

> *Botlhale: my grandma started complaining that Botlhale does this and this, she comes back late. And I am one person who when I am home you would even think I am not home - that's how still I am. People in the streets know me more than she knows me, because they are even shocked when I go outside. They only see me when I go to school and come back.*

Botlhale's desire for her grandmother to "know" her reflects a reciprocal expectation of listening, aligning with intergenerational learning and mutual assistance concepts, which posits that the reciprocal process between generations involves sharing of emotions, and

tolerating differences (Sharma, 2017; Dolbin-Macnab et al., 2016; Becker et al., 2003). This reveals a communication gap between generations, since granddaughters want their character to be acknowledged in order to fully participate in guidance.

But despite the resistance, young women still recognise the value of their grandmother's guidance when it resonates emotionally and morally (as a balance). Mamello appreciates her grandmother's parental role in her life:

Mamello: she advises me as a parent in a good way…she would say like do this and not that..like she would tell you if you do this, this is what is going to happen

Karabo reflects on a formative moment:

Karabo: My grandmother shouting at me when I stole was a good thing because I could see that what I did was wrong

These narratives depict granddaughters adapting or rejecting what feels constrictive while absorbing guidance that is consistent with their views. Grandmothers, as the "hinge generation" who experienced apartheid's traumas and life experience, mediate traditional values like respect and responsibility through their narratives, shaping identities in a post-apartheid world (Frankish & Bradbury, 2016, citing Hoffman, 2004). Young women like Mamello and Karabo navigate these narratives, balancing respect for ancestral wisdom with contemporary influences to construct their identities.

This subtheme illustrates that value transmission is a negotiated process, where granddaughters actively interpret, resist, and reframe their grandmothers' moral blueprints. Unlike the grandmothers' focus on delivering guidance (Subtheme 2.1), granddaughters' experiences reveal how values are received through emotional resonance, critical engagement, and cultural reinterpretation, ensuring intergenerational continuity amidst change. These negotiations affirm Sharma's (2017) notion of intergenerational learning, where knowledge is not simply handed down but reworked through lived experience. The process is not linear, as grandmothers' lessons are questioned, revised, or reinterpreted, but remains relational. As Becker et al. (2003) remind us, these reciprocal exchanges preserve both cultural continuity and familial resilience, ensuring that even in disagreement, value transmission continues. As

these young women navigate the tension between traditional expectations and contemporary realities, many begin to embody and internalise ideals associated with the Strong Black Woman, negotiating care, resilience, and independence in ways that reflect both inheritance and resistance. It is to this emerging identity that the next theme turns.

4.3 Strong Black Woman

This theme emerged from the narratives of grandmothers and the young women describing what it means to be a "strong black woman". In exploring this theme, the literature prompts an examination of how grandmothers and young women construct and convey the "strong Black woman" narrative across generations, and whether young women are redefining this identity in post-apartheid South Africa (Collins, 2000; Jones et al., 2021; Porter, 2017). We see in their narratives that the concept of being a strong Black woman carries different meanings for each generation shaped by age, experience, and context. This theme is significant as it highlights generational differences when defining strength and reveals the possibility of how identity is formed, resisted and negotiated (Hall, 2000; Collins, 2000; Jones et al., 2021; Porter, 2017).

Many of the participants' narratives reveal strength as multifaceted that encompasses a sense of agency, perseverance, self-discipline, and a sense of strength that was modelled for them (by older women) to either follow or resist. When analysing the data, most grandmothers defined strength as a passed down obligation tied to survival and moral discipline, while the young women generally negotiated what it meant to them, and within relational terms, where they resisted harm (done to them by others) or were emotionally withdrawn which often challenged the Super Woman Schema's (SWS) restrictive expectations (Woods-Giscombé's (2010).

For example, in the extract that follows, Grandmother Lebo explicitly describes herself as a strong woman, showing her strength by hiding pain and through decisive action:

> *Grandmother Lebo: I'm a strong person, people always say that to me…Even at church…I'm resigning…Someone said I should not bank the money…Who do they want to get into trouble? I told them I'm resigning immediately…I don't want to be controlled in my position.*

Grandmother Lebo's narrative of resigning to resist control embodies Woods-Giscombé's (2010) SWS, particularly the *obligation to appear strong* and *resistance to vulnerability.* Her story embodies self-defined Black womanhood, where strength is a self-affirmed identity rooted in dignity and autonomy resisting external control within her context (Collins, 2000).

However, grandmother Lebo's critique of young women reveals her concern for perceived moral decline:

Grandmother Lebo: No, girls nowadays shame no, have you seen on the street at 2am. They have kids but still on the street…I feel shame on them. And they can't be reprimanded…

Her critique is rooted in worries about safety, lack of perceived responsibility and moral decline of young women. This stance gives us an idea of how she further defines strength, which is around notions of discipline and self-control so one can avoid "shame", a value tied to family honor in African kinship systems (Idang, 2015), highlighting a generational gap in how strength is defined.

Similarly, grandmother Lucy positions strength as restraint and delayed gratification, contrasting her own generation with that of the "weak" youth:

Grandmother Lucy: No ah, you are weak straight. Kids these days are very very weak…they are fast fast fast on everything…They get pregnant at a small age…I had a child at twenty five years, do you understand?...and they rule their parents.

My presence in the interview, both as a listener and as part of the young women being discussed, made clear my positioning to grandmother Lucy. Her use of "you" moved beyond abstraction as it became personal and layered. Her narrative juxtaposes her moral fortitude with the perceived impulsiveness of young women. Her emphasis on delayed motherhood as strength reflects survival strategies, aligning with the SWS's suppression of vulnerability, which Woods-Giscombé (2010) notes can limit emotional expression with fear that one could be perceived as "weak".

Grandmother Mpho frames strength as perseverance and spiritual resilience as we see her advise her sister:

Grandmother Mpho: I was like my sister, marriage is not nice and families are never happy,

be strong and pray harder, she passed that…I wish our children can be strong and never like things like that.

Grandmother Mpho's above narrative reflects Woods-Giscombé (2010) SWS feature of duty to care for others, which positions her as a supportive figure who encourages strength in others through prayer and perseverance. The means, such as prayer, that a lot of Black women used, to survive, are important as these collective communal spaces are continually being undervalued and pushed for other alternatives such as "individual therapy" (Alford, 2023). These spaces, while not always recognised within mainstream psychological discourse, have long served as vital sites of emotional refuge and resilience (Moodley & Meintjes, 2024; Alford, 2023). Grandmother Mpho's wish for children to also be strong shows a generational expectation that reinforces traditional identities of resilience but potentially constraining emotional expression (Jones et al., 2021; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). In grandmothers' narratives at times there is a difficulty to see strength taking a different form or else it is in danger of being perceived as weakness. And this is because, as Alford (2023) suggests, for many Black women like grandmother Mpho, stoicism and self-sacrifice were not just emotional postures but survival strategies handed down through generations.

Young women's narratives, however, reinterpret strength blending ambition, emotional authenticity, and resistance to harm, reflecting #BlackGirlMagic's celebration of Black girls' power. Karabo describes strength through her mother's emotional support and her own assertive boundaries:

Karabo: When I think of a strong black woman, for me it's my mother – she's the one person I can speak to, who understands me when I'm angry. I also see myself as strong because, for example, last year my uncle's girlfriend swore at me in the streets and said I'd done seven abortions; I even thought of taking her to the police station. Also, I don't call my dad when I need something.

Karabo's strength, seen in setting boundaries against public shaming and embracing self-reliance, aligns with the SWS's feature of one's obligation to appear strong but also reflects a self-defined Black womanhood (Collins, 2000). But the public shaming she had to endure reveals the emotional labour that is required to claim the "strong woman" narrative which aligns with Davis and Afifi's (2019) notion that the "strong woman" narrative can be both empowering and draining at the same time. This further reflects the toll of "mbokodofication"

– the cultural pressure to embody relentless strength in tense, gendered spaces marked by social scrutiny (Ngcobo, 2021; Davis & Afifi, 2019). Her mother's support enables resistance to harm, aligning with #BlackGirlMagic's emphasis on community, allowing Karabo to embrace both strength and emotional vulnerability.

Botlhale positions strength as a willingness to endure through hardship, shaped by her grandmother's harsh discipline:

> *Botlhale: I am one. Honestly speaking. Because through what I have been going through, a lot of things I have survived…she [grandmother] would hit us with her sjambok…i have tried from grade 4 to withstand that type of situation until now…For me my main focus is finishing school…I just feel like I am different…my mother even sometimes says I have anger or something.*

Botlhale's narrative above embodies the SWS *resistance to vulnerability* and *appear to be strong* as she has survived physical and emotional abuse by focusing on education. The way she describes herself in terms of being "different" and "brave" fits with hooks's (1990) "will to survive", a quiet defiance as well as #BlackGirlMagic's defiance of stereotypes. However, her isolation and her mother's misreading of her as "angry" suggest that she may be dealing with people placing various identities on her which may mean strength for her may come at the cost of emotional recognition (Jones et al., 2021).

Lerato's narrative introduces an interesting notion around strength for young women, as she describes strength through emotional authenticity and self-preservation:

> *Lerato: For me..I am strong..cause I avoid a lot of things, even now I am avoiding a lot of things…even when someone seeks to provoke me I just look at them and leave them…I am going to keep avoiding them until my things are alright and finish school…I can control my anger.*

For Lerato there is a strategy to her strength which reflects the SWS feature of suppression of emotion. Her choice to avoid conflict is similar to Davis and Afifi (2019) acknowledgment of emotional silence among Black women where it allows for safe identity in a tense home environment but limits their self expression. Unlike Karabo's assertiveness,

Lerato's quiet strength shows diverse ways young women redefine being a "strong Black woman" balancing self-preservation with #BlackGirlMagic's pride in resilience.

In contrast, Mamello's narrative outright challenges the "strong Black woman" ideal as she expresses that she is not a strong black woman:

Mamello: There are so many things…I have a lack of self-esteem…confidence is not my thing,

so many things..those things make me feel like I am not a strong black woman Naledi: So to be a strong black woman you have to have confidence?
Mamello: I would say yes you need to stand up for yourself so for me those things I do not see

that in myself…I wonder if I would go to university how would I survive without my parents..

Mamello's view of the "strong Black woman" while at first glance it can be interpreted as a lack of confidence, but her notions around strength challenge the often pushed narratives that strength has to be triumphant. Her narrative forces us to embrace her sense of self-doubt. However Mamello is embracing what Alford (2023) characterises as "rupture in silent strength" or Collins' (2000) concept of self defined Black womanhood where more Black women are permitted (though not always encouraged) to lay down the burden of stoicism. Her ability to self-express has created a "rupture in the lineage of silent strength". In terms of her academic pressures her fear of surviving alone shows mbokodofication's toll (Ngcobo, 2021), but her honesty aligns with #BlackGirlMagic's celebration of authenticity. She has refined strength for herself, to include softness, boundary-making, and grief, and it is in this where she expands her lineage.

Thato similarly rejects the Super Woman Schema's (SWS), choosing to embrace her own emotional sensitivity as compared to her grandmother:

Thato: She is strong…her background was tough, I can't believe the conditions she was raised in..and even when she is sick she makes sure to go to work…I'm not strong…little things hurt me…I'm a cry baby…there is this boy at school..he is a sort of pervert…he hurt me telling me that I think I am pretty and don't have a nice body and that I am built like a man…my friends told me to be strong…my tears are always near

Thato similarly to Mamello is negotiating the ideals around the "strong Black woman" features found in the SWS. This is important as she is negotiating her sense of identity in the

midst of her grandmother and her peers and social context who are telling her who to be and she is gently negotiating that trying to figure out how she is in relation to these identities being ascribed to her. Thato, embracing her "cry baby" identity, challenges the SWS's suppression of vulnerability, aligning with Cherrington's (2017) African feminist emphasis on communal and individual agency, where emotional authenticity becomes a form of strength.

The grandmothers' and young women's stories showed the narratives about "strong Black woman" as both empowering and limiting and how their identities were also shaped in their narratives around strength. Grandmothers' narratives from their upbringings around discipline, prayer, and caregiving reflect SBW's protective role, rooted in survival (Woods-Giscombé, 2010). Their strength, forged in communal spaces like prayer circles, nurtured resilience but hid pain (Moodley & Meintjes, 2024). Granddaughters redefine strength through #BlackGirlMagic, their aspirations and embracing vulnerability, despite mbokodofication's emotional toll (Ngcobo, 2021). Karabo's boundaries, Mamello's doubts, and Thato's tears resist SWS's demand to suppress emotions, reflecting Alford's (2023) call for softness. In "post-apartheid" South Africa, with challenges like violence and poverty (Bradbury & Clark, 2012), their narratives create a dialogue where strength evolves, honouring grandmothers' sacrifices while embracing new ways to be (Porter, 2017).

4.4 Negotiating Gendered Expectations

This theme emerged from participants' narratives highlighting how women, whether young or old, negotiated gender expectations. Gendered expectations are expectations set by society about what it means to be a "good woman" (Chauke & Segalo, 2021). This theme revealed that grandmothers often positioned themselves as enforcers of traditional gendered expectations, like cooking, cleaning, and acting respectfully, that they learned growing up, especially during apartheid when these roles helped families survive. Granddaughters, however, share stories about wanting to be themselves, choosing their own paths in today's South Africa. These narratives created a back-and-forth dialogue, full of tension, as old and new ideas about being a woman clashed. These tensions however suggested possibilities for evolving identities that blend tradition with contemporary agency.

Grandmothers' narratives described being a "good woman" as doing household chores, staying obedient, and keeping family honour, ideas rooted in tough times during apartheid. Grandmother Lucy shares her routine:

Grandmother Lucy: I would wake up at five o'clock and clean the stoop. I have made fire by then, I make tea and soft porridge before I go to school…I go when everything is complete, so that is a lesson that I was taught from where I am until now.

When I asked if she still followed this routine, grandmother Lucy said, "Y*es, I work I don't want to sit on the bed."* Her narrative shows that women were expected to put family first by doing chores before anything else, even school. This idea, which Chauke and Segalo (2021) say regulated Black women's bodies, means society judged women by how well they did these tasks, making them "proper" in the eyes of their families and communities. Grandmother Lucy's narrative is a lesson for her granddaughter, teaching that hard work (that is defined by family and society) and duty define a good woman, but it also limits personal freedom because it leaves little time for her own wants. Chitando and Mateveke (2012) explain that in African families, women's actions, like grandmother Lucy's chores, show respect for the family, which is why she keeps doing them and wants her granddaughter to follow suit. Her narrative reflects apartheid days, when women's work held families together despite poverty and oppression, making it a powerful way to pass down rules about womanhood.

Grandmother Lebo also talks about her strict childhood:

Grandmother Lebo: my parents were very strict, I knew that after school I must go straight home, there's a lot of work at home waiting. I cook, I clean and do everything…I am the eldest of the girls…I started cooking at the age of five.

As the eldest daughter and from a very young age, grandmother Lebo had responsibilities, showing how women's roles were about serving the family, which Chauke and Segalo (2021) say limits personal choice. Grandmother Lebo however is also frustrated with how they forced to raise children now:

Grandmother Lebo: Now Mbeki comes in with children's right…we are not allowed to beat a child…a child can sleep and wake up at twelve or one and you won't tell them they will tell you can't you see that I'm tired.

Grandmother Lebo blames "Thabo Mbeki's" laws for giving kids too much freedom, making it hard to teach discipline, which she sees as key to being a woman.

Grandmother Grace shares a similar narrative, emphasising that being a "good woman" means respecting elders and following strict rules, unlike today's women who seem reckless to her:

Grandmother Grace: You kids of these days you are too fast…we used to respect our parents and they used to beat us up…but you guys…Thabo Mbeki said we should not beat you up because you have rights, you open cases for us to be jailed but you want to eat from us, you sleep in our houses and you want us to buy you clothes to wear

Grandmother Grace's narrative paints a picture of her generation's womanhood, where respecting parents and accepting discipline, even physical punishment, shaped a "proper" woman who put family first. She contrasts this with modern youth, whom she calls "too fast," meaning they act without restraint, like staying out late or talking back. To grandmother Grace, this behaviour breaks the traditional respectability that African families value, where a woman's actions reflect the family's honour (Chitando & Mateveke, 2012). Her frustration with the government's emphasis on children's rights policies, introduced in post-apartheid South Africa to protect children from abuse, shows a clash between old and new ways. Grace feels these laws weaken her authority, as kids can now challenge or even report elders, which she sees as undermining the discipline needed for womanhood (Shefer & Foster, 2001). This tension reflects broader changes in post-apartheid South Africa, where "new" freedoms, like children's rights, challenge oppressive narratives of womanhood (Motsa & Morojele, 2021). Grandmother Grace's narrative also hints at her struggle to balance care (e.g., providing food and clothes) with frustration over losing control, showing how her narrative tries to teach granddaughters to value respect over modern freedoms.

However, the young women tell stories about wanting to be themselves and not just following the traditional rules their grandmothers teach: For example, Karabo decided to get a tattoo to express herself:

Karabo: My first tattoo, 'peace to myself,' I got in grade 10 when I was thinking about my dad; I also got my date of birth tattooed…my grandmother…calls my tattoo 'demonic' and my mom just said 'hai' when she saw it. I never told them I did it.

Karabo's tattoo, tied to her feelings about her dad, is more than just art, it is her way of saying who she is and finding peace. Her grandmother calling it "demonic" and her mom's disappointed "hai" show they think tattoos are not "proper" for a woman, as Chitando and Mateveke (2012) explain that women's bodies should show family honour in African cultures. Karabo's choice to hide her tattoo is what Chauke and Segalo (2021) call a quiet disruption, a sneaky way to challenge her family's rules without a big fight. Her narrative fits self-defined Black womanhood (Collins, 2000), where she decides her own identity, even if it upsets her grandmother and mother. This clash shows how Karabo's narrative pushes against old ideas about women needing to look and act a certain way to be respected, reflecting a new kind of womanhood in today's Soweto, where young women take up their own freedoms and choose to express themselves despite the opposition.

Botlhale wants to be a soldier not a doctor like her family wants:

> *Botlhale: I have been interested in being a soldier since grade R…here was a lot of fights (violence) next door…*she was able to fight the man…I said never I am going for it

Botlhale's dream started when she saw a woman soldier stop a violent man, showing her that women can be strong and protect others, not just do "soft" jobs like nursing or cooking. Her family wants her to be a doctor, which they see as more "feminine," but Botlhale says, "I am not going for it," choosing a bold path instead. This choice challenges traditional women's roles, as Shefer and Foster (2001) say young women do to create their own paths. In South Africa, where violence against women is a national issue (Stats SA, 2025), Botlhale's dream of being a soldier is about protecting people, a new kind of care different from her grandmother's housework. We also see her also want to protect her sister from chores:

> *Botlhale: My little sister she cooks…but sometimes I give her rest because she is still young. I don't want her to feel what I felt…I started cooking at the age of 7*

Botlhale's care for her sister, sparing her from early cooking like she had to do, is another quiet disruption (Chauke & Segalo, 2021) pushing back against the idea that girls must start chores young to be "good women." Her story shows a mix of caring for others and choosing her own path, redefining what a woman can be.

Mamello feels pressure to be like her "good" sister who seems to be a "proper" woman:

> *Mamello: My mom wants me to be like my sister…she was always at home…everytime I am on the phone…they tell me I am dating people on the phone…I am different shame…they tell me the way I am not a good child because I love my friends too much, when actually I literally only have one friend.*

Mamello's family thinks she's not "proper" because she uses her phone and has friends, unlike her sister who stays home and follows traditional rules. Chauke and Segalo (2021) say this pressure to be respectable controls Black women's behaviour, making Mamello feel torn between being herself and pleasing her family. Her narrative shows the emotional struggle of wanting to be "different" while facing criticism, like being called a "bad child" for having one friend. Billington et al. (1998) explains that identities form through family "sayings", and Mamello's narrative is a conversation where she tries to hold onto her own way of being a woman, even as her family pushes old rules. Her struggle also reflects the challenge of balancing personal freedom with family expectations in a transforming Soweto.

Participants' narratives show how grandmothers and young women talk about being women in different ways, creating a dialogue that shapes who they are. Grandmothers' stories come from apartheid, when women had to do chores and act respectful to keep families safe and strong despite racism, poverty, and violence. They want young women to follow these rules to stay safe from dangers like gender-based violence, which is still common in Soweto (Stats SA, 2025). Their narratives push ideas of a "good woman" as someone who works hard and respects family, as Chitando and Mateveke (2012) say, women's actions reflect family honour in African cultures. But young women live in a transforming South Africa with more freedoms, like children's rights, and new challenges, like peer pressure or school demands. Their stories, getting tattoos, dreaming of being a soldier, or wanting friends, show they want to choose who they are, not just follow old rules. This push-back, as hooks (1990) calls a "feminist act of resistance", lets them create new kinds of womanhood that blend respect for family with their own dreams. Frankish and Bradbury (2012) note that "post-apartheid" South Africa brings new possibilities, allowing young women to challenge old norms while still valuing some traditions, like caring for others. Their storytelling brings insight into how women create "possible worlds" not only for themselves but for their families as well. This is illustrated more clearly within the lens of "hope", which we will explore in the following theme.

4.5 Hopes and Fears for the future

The theme of hope as agency, entwined with fear, emerged from narratives of grandmothers and young women positioning each other as sources of hope, shaped by age, culture, and place. Drawing on Bradbury (2020), who defines hope as a future-oriented desire for material, emotional, and intergenerational improvement, this theme explores how participants articulate futures amid South Africa's structural injustices and African relational ethics of communal interdependence. Grandmothers offer safety and connection, embodying hope rooted in collective resilience from historical survival strategies, while young women pursue ambitions like education or economic independence, confronting challenges of unemployment and violence. This theme is significant as it reveals hope as agency within struggle, highlighting identities that balance personal dreams with collective responsibilities in post-apartheid South Africa.

Grandmothers' narratives show hope for their granddaughters' futures through advice and protection but they are also worried about losing connection in a fast-changing world. Grandmother Lebo shares her wish:

> *Grandmother Lebo: I have fear I have a wish, my wish is that these children if they can at least listen to us one day, if they can be our friends, so that even when you talk to them they can hear you well one day, because one day when the parents are no more, what will you be?*

Grandmother Lebo's hope rests on young "children" people embracing respect - valuing elders' wisdom through attentive listening and nurturing communal bonds akin to friendship - to prepare for a future without elders. Her hope is future-oriented yet shaped by a real fear: that once elders are gone, the values that hold communities together, like respect, responsibility, and interconnectedness, may disappear too. This fear speaks directly to the core of ubuntu, where identity and survival are rooted in family and collective care (Dolbin-Macnab et al., 2016). As South Africa continues to shift, with new freedoms and youth rights challenging older forms of authority, this sense of loss becomes more pronounced (Bradbury, 2020). Furthermore, what also emerges is that grandmothers, like Lebo, are quietly contemplating a future without themselves in it. And in that imagined future, they struggle to see how it can be a good one unless their voices are carried forward. There is almost a condition placed on the future, that it will only be survivable for young people if they continue to draw

from older people's wisdom. Bradbury (2020) frames hope as an intergenerational force, and Grandmother Lebo's hope is exactly that, a desire for her teachings to move forward, not just as memory, but as a lifeline. Yet, her hope is tangled with fear, that without this intergenerational continuity, something essential will be lost.

Grandmother Lucy shares a similar hope for her granddaughter's future through education:

> *Grandmother Lucy: I wish she can be educated she must go on with her studies until she become something that her heart desires…she won't tell me…She doesn't tell me like she only says things like, I want to study and finish then I work and buy a house and leave your house…I wish she can do as she speaks.*

For grandmother Lucy, education represents the pathway to a dignified and independent life, a life where her granddaughter can own a home and pursue what she truly wants. But woven into this hope is a concern: the phrase "she doesn't tell me" repeats with weight, signaling a gap in their emotional closeness. It leaves grandmother Lucy unsure whether her granddaughter's aspirations are shared with her fully or simply spoken as vague intentions. This speaks to what Levetan and Wild (2016) describes as relational caregiving, where grandmothers guide and support, even while navigating moments of emotional distance or uncertainty in their relationships. Grandmother Lucy's fear that her granddaughter might not realise these dreams also reflects the reality of South Africa's post-apartheid economic challenges, where education does not always guarantee employment or security. Still, her hope endures, reflecting a quiet force that helps her stay connected to a future she may not witness, but wants to help shape.

Grandmother Grace's sense of hope centers on her granddaughter's safety:

> *Grandmother Grace: I wish they are alright and protected, there should not be anything bad that will happen to them, because even though they have turned on me for as long as I know myself that I was showing them the right thing.*

Grandmother Grace dreams of her granddaughters being safe from dangers like violence, which is a real threat in South Africa. Her words, *"there should not be anything bad"* show a deep wish to shield them from harm, like crime or hardship, common in their community. But she feels hurt because "they have turned on me," meaning her granddaughters do not always listen to her advice about being respectful or careful. Despite this distance,

grandmother Grace holds onto hope believing she taught them "the right thing," like values of respect and caution. This fits Collins' (2000) "motherwork", where Black women protect their families even when relationships are strained, and Cherrington's (2017) African ethics, where caregiving is a duty to pass down moral lessons. Grandmother Grace's narrative shows her enduring love and faith in her guidance, even when she feels pushed away, rooted in her survival through historical (apartheid)'s dangers (Shefer & Foster, 2001).

The young women's narratives center on aspirational dreams for their futures such as attaining better homes or careers but also fears of failing themselves or their families in South Africa's challenging world. Karabo shares her vision:

Karabo: I see myself as a lawyer, having fixed the house at home, owning my own things.

Karabo's hope is both personal and collective. She wants to become a lawyer, not only for her own independence, but to to uplift her family by repairing their home and building stability. This speaks to what Bradbury (2020) describes as hope that is both material - focused on tangible change like housing - and emotional - tied to pride, care, and intergenerational responsibility. Karabo's vision of success is not individualistic but grounded in her sense of duty to those around her. In Karabo's reflection, she also sees hope as an "imagining" of a better life despite structural limitations. Her aspirations also echo Collins' (2000) framework of self-defined Black womanhood, where agency involves not just personal ambition but caring for others and transforming oppressive conditions. Her hope is bold, and yet she is aware that it exists within the weight of South Africa's economic realities, where unemployment and poverty still shape many young women's futures.

Botlhale also dreams of a better life:

Botlhale: In five years' time or ten years' time… I see myself having my own house, having my own car, two, two cars … I want to live alone. But in the future, I want to change… move my mom where she lives … so each person can have their own bedroom… because now we live in a shack … we all bathe in the same space.

Botlhale imagines owning a house and cars, giving herself independence, but also moving her mom from a crowded home where everyone has their own room. Her hope is

material (Bradbury, 2020) about better living conditions, and emotional, about giving her family dignity and privacy which is also rare in township Soweto (Stats SA, 2025). Her youthful excitement contrasts with grandmothers' cautious hope, showing a bold identity that blends personal dreams with family care (Collins, 2000).

Moreover, as our conversation continued, I found myself asking Botlhale directly "*what does hope mean to you?"* At the time, I had not fully engaged with literature that challenges the need to define hope in rigid or abstract terms. Looking back, my question came from a place of curiosity, but also from an assumption that hope should be definable, containable in language. However, she responded by saying:

> *Botlhale: I don't know how to explain it…but then...hope is something like that you would wish for, like that you would like to see yesss…even now…I think..I hope like…let's hope like we are going to pass or we are going to…yesss*

But Botlhale's response gently unsettled my initial idea of hope. She paused, searching for words: "I don't know how to explain it… but then… hope is something like that you would wish for, like that you would like to see." Her definition may have been uncertain in form, but it was grounded in feeling. For her, hope was not a fixed concept, but a felt sense, something close, intuitive, and present. Botlhale's difficulty in naming hope aligns with Bradbury's (2020) assertion that hope is not always articulated in clear language, it is often experienced through desire, action, or even contradiction. Bradbury warns against framing hope as an individual psychological state that must be neatly defined; instead, she argues that hope lives in the relational, the everyday, and the political. In Botlhale's case, hope shows up in her aspirations, in her dreams of improving her home and caring for her mother, and in the way she speaks about "wishing for" and "seeing" something better, even if the path to that better life remains uncertain.

Mamello's grandmother positions her as a source of hope for her family but Mamello struggles with fear and pressure:

> *Mamello: She always tells me about school shame…she wishes I would succeed in life and finish school…just push,try your best and you will succeed…I have always wanted to be a doctor or actuarial scientist…but schooling…it's not painless shame…I would see myself*

driving a Ford Ranger…bought my mom her own house and my little siblings having a stable life…but I will just see where life throws me.

Mamello's grandmother sees her as a source of hope through school, pushing her to become a doctor or actuary. But Mamello finds school hard, with money struggles and pressure to care for her family, making her say, *"life will happen"* showing fear of losing control. Her hope to buy her mom a house and drive a Ford Ranger is a relational hope (Bradbury, 2020), about helping her family, but it is heavy. Mamello adds:

Mamello: My siblings…they look up to me…I wish I could…buy my mom a house…I feel like I will disappoint them if I don't succeed…I don't know…I never have to think for myself…I would offer up my lunch money."

Mamello's fear of letting her siblings down even to the point of giving up her lunch money, shows a heavy responsibility she carries. Ngcobo (2021) calls this emotional labour, where Black girls put family first, often at their own expense. Chitando and Mateveke (2012 state that young girls are often socialised into gendered roles that align with caring for others as their identity is conferred by fulfilling community obligations (Chauke & Segalo, 2021), so Mamello's hope is loving but also a burden, shaped by her context.

The stories of grandmothers and young women in this theme revealed how hope drives them to imagine better lives in Soweto, even as fears of failure, disconnection, or danger make these dreams feel heavy. Grandmothers like Lebo, Lucy, and Grace share hopes rooted in historical struggles, propelling them to guide their granddaughters toward education, safety, and respect to survive challenges such as gender-based violence and poverty (Shefer & Foster, 2001). Their fears of losing closeness or influence show a longing to keep African values of togetherness, or ubuntu alive (Mkhize, 2018). Granddaughters like Karabo, Botlhale, and Mamello dream of careers, houses and family care, taking control of their futures despite worries about money or disappointing loved ones (Frankish & Bradbury, 2012). As Bradbury (2020) notes, hope is both material and emotional, tied to survival, dignity, and connection, and in these stories, hope becomes a bridge between generations, even as its meaning and direction are constantly being negotiated.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

This final chapter will discuss potential limitations of the research before presenting recommendations for future study which might be related to this research report. Furthermore, this section will also summarise the findings discussed in Chapter 4 and draw conclusions for the study as a whole.

5.1 Limitations

This chapter is essential as it provides opportunity for this research to be assessed in order to inform future recommendations.

5.1.1 Lack of Multigenerational Pairs

One key limitation of this study was the inability to recruit multiple grandmother-granddaughter pairs. While the goal of this research project was to explore intergenerational relationality and dialogue, only one family pair participated. This limited the study's capacity to capture shared family narratives or examine how stories are passed down between generations within the same household. As a result, the analysis focused on individual narratives rather than relational dynamics. This highlights a broader challenge in intergenerational research, where practical and logistical barriers, such as family availability, interest, and geographic distance, impacted participation. Thus, future research might consider extended timelines or alternative methods (e.g., joint interviews) to better explore direct intergenerational engagement. Despite this limitation, the inclusion of older and younger participants still enabled the research to explore generational perspectives across time.

5.1.2 Positionality

The position of the researcher within narrative work was another important consideration. Mumby (1993) reminds us that as researchers, "we are never neutral, dispassionate observers of behaviour but are always heavily implicated in the construction of the narratives (petit or grand) that provide insight to the social reality that we inhabit" (p. 4). This idea is important in narrative research, where meaning is co-produced. McDonald (2013) similarly encourages self-reflexivity, requiring researchers to attend to the implications of their research not only on themselves but also on their participants. While researcher implication can never be fully removed, the involvement of my supervisor throughout the research process helped alleviate this. It was not a process (data collection process) where I just "got" whatever I wanted, but rather a process of allowing participants to take me wherever the story needed to go.

5.1.3 Subjectivity

The subjective process of selecting themes and threads of narrative to analyse was a potential limitation. I want to preface this by saying that the transcripts were so rich that I often felt overwhelmed with wanting to include everything, but I realised this was not possible. That overwhelmingness actually allowed for deeper analysis. Themes and threads did not simply "emerge", as I stated in Chapter 4, they were actively sought out by reading the data multiple times, selecting in relation to the theoretical framework of the study, and choosing extracts based on relevance, significance, and usefulness.

Subjectivity is often raised as a limitation in qualitative research, but in narrative work, it is embraced. As long as the researcher remains reflexive and self-aware about the biases they bring, subjectivity is not a flaw but a tool. Throughout this research process, I attempted to make my position clear, and it is also hoped that supervision helped ensure that important elements were not overlooked. I was asked hard questions about how I included participant data, how I saw myself in relation to literature, and how I interpreted participant narratives. Ashton et al. (2025) write about the ethical tension that comes from trying to offer a faithful account of participants' stories while avoiding misrepresentation. As the researcher, I also faced that challenge, trying to honour the words of my participants, while recognising that I am not an "objective" instrument. I bring my own assumptions and ambiguities when I look at the data, and acknowledging that is part of conducting ethical research.

5.1.4 Narrative Research Limitations

There are also issues surrounding narrative research itself that are not only specific to this study but important to raise. This report purports that identity does not exist in a vacuum or in the "here and now" only but is continuously shaped by how one makes sense of the past and imagines the future. These temporal layers of identity interact with intersectionality, aspects such as gender, race, socio-economic background, and age do not exist in isolation but move and shift through time and relationship. Hall (2000) reminds us that identity is never a finished product, but always "in process" (p. 2). People do not simply "have" an identity; they become who they are through ongoing experience, storytelling, and reflection. And while identity shifts, Hall (2000) also argues that it is formed through "the marking of difference and exclusion" (p. 4), which suggests that people still use markers such as past/present, young/old, to define themselves even while they change.

A critique often directed at narrative research is: how do we study identities that are moving? This study responds to that critique through the concept of queer reflexivity

(McDonald, 2013). My job as a researcher is not to capture a fixed essence, but rather to act like a photographer who captures a snapshot in time, knowing the person in the picture will change, but also recognising that the picture still holds meaning. Reflexivity here includes accounting for power dynamics that are always being (re)negotiated, between researcher and participant, and even within the self. As part of reflexivity, I initially considered myself more of an insider than an outsider. I, too, am a young Black woman, with class and life experiences similar to those of my participants. But over the course of the research, particularly in writing Chapter 3, I began to realise that "matching" identities (being Black, being a woman) was not enough to ensure I occupied the same social location as my participants. There were moments where I related to the older women and younger women, and moments where I did not. Coming from “Wits”, doing my “Master’s degree", speaking with a “twang”, those markers shifted me from insider to outsider, depending on who I was with. Sometimes I was seen as “just like them”; other times, I was clearly “not one of them.” And that fluidity is important to acknowledge and is acknowledged.

5.2 Recommendations for future study

There are a number of directions that future research could take based on the findings of this study. To begin with, it might be useful to do narrative research where actual grandmother-granddaughter pairs are both present in the study, so their stories can be directly aligned. This could allow for more detailed reflection on the ways intergenerational values are transferred, or resisted, in real time.

Another suggestion is to integrate artistic methods to help participants tell their stories. For example, younger women could create collages or zines, while grandmothers might share photographs or artefacts that are important to them. This could add more depth to their narratives and give participants a tangible way to reflect on their own experiences and “possible worlds” (Pink, 2004). There’s also something powerful about allowing participants to make sense of their own lives as they narrate, especially since people do not always think of their lives in a coherent, story-like way. Art-based methods can help surface meanings that are otherwise unspoken.

Additionally, future research could include the triad: grandmother, mother, and granddaughter. Both generations in this study mentioned “mothers” frequently, their own, or in the case of the older generation, their daughters (or daughters-in-law) as mothers to their grandchildren, and it would be useful to explore those dynamics more explicitly, especially

across different socio-economic contexts. Because this study focused on Black women from lower socio-economic backgrounds, a comparative study could be conducted with middle-class Black women, or women from other backgrounds, to see whether these intergenerational shifts are more widespread or unique to specific communities. These everyday micro-level stories offer a powerful lens into society, reminding us that personal narratives are never just personal, but also social and political.

5.3 Conclusion

This study aimed to explore intergenerational narratives between grandmothers and young women, focusing on their shared and distinct lived experiences in Soweto, South Africa. Specifically, it considered how the past is (re)constructed and communicated by grandmothers, how these messages are received by young women, and how these influence both present and future identities. This research project drew on African oral storytelling as both method and epistemology and aimed to foreground the voices of Black South African women and centre their lived experiences. By telling their stories, the hope was that these women would reflect on how they see themselves, and how they see each other. Through these exchanges, past, present, and future meanings were made visible, collaboratively. The way in which the research aimed to achieve these aims was guided by three research questions. The first of these is revisited below:

What are the similarities and differences in the experiences of Black young women and older women?

Findings indicate that both generations were raised in extended families, with their grandmothers present and central to the home. However, much of the literature positioned extended families as alternative or exceptional, particularly in Western contexts. However, the data from this study suggested that extended family systems were not only common but normal in the lives of the study's participants. Nearly all of the women, both older and younger, were raised in households that included grandparents or other extended family members. This structure is not peripheral; it is central to their understanding of kinship, caregiving, and identity formation. The women also shared similar life challenges, particularly around violence, poverty and the death of loved ones. However, a key distinction emerged in their perceptions of caregiving. The grandmothers tended to frame caregiving around physical provision, and discipline, while the younger women placed emphasis on emotional support, presence, and relational care. These differences point to shifting generational expectations, reflecting broader

societal changes in how care is understood and enacted. While both generations expressed deep devotion to family, the ways in which this devotion is communicated differed significantly. Grandmothers prioritised the transmission of traditional values, emphasising the importance of being a "proper" woman by avoiding boys, maintaining modesty, and upholding family dignity. In contrast, the younger women placed greater value on autonomy, self-expression, education, and material success, not only for their own empowerment but also as a means of contributing to and supporting their families. This shows that while the importance of intergenerational caregiving has stayed the same, the way "care" is enacted and appreciated in the context of family has changed across generations.

How do participants position themselves within the narrative of a "strong woman," and what possibilities for identity does this open for Black women?

All the participants identified with the trope of the "Strong Black Woman", though its meaning varied across generations. The grandmothers defined strength through silence, endurance, and the ability to "carry on" despite hardship. In contrast, the younger women expanded this narrative to include emotional honesty, boundary-setting, and vulnerability. Interestingly, grandmothers also valued boundary-setting and emotional support, but this was often mediated through community spaces such as prayer groups or church circles, where emotion could be shared within a socially acceptable framework. The younger women, however, expressed these needs more explicitly and independently, often without reliance on such structures. This generational shift may reflect broader cultural changes, including increased mental health awareness, evolving gender norms, and greater exposure to media and discourses that affirm emotional expression as a form of strength. The younger women could thus be viewed as those redefining the "Strong Black Woman" not as someone who must always endure in silence, but as someone who can be open and soft. In doing so, they challenge one-dimensional portrayals of Black womanhood and open space for more nuanced, expansive identities on what it means to be a "strong" Black woman. In many ways, the study also complicates the assumption that wisdom or resilience is simply passed down from older to younger generations. While grandmothers do play a formative role, young women draw strength not only from inherited narratives but also from their own lives. They are not passive recipients of history but active interpreters of it. In this sense, intergenerational exchange is not linear but dialogical, marked by both alignment and divergence.

In what ways do grandmothers and young women position each other as sources of hope, and how does this differ based on age, culture, and location?

The young women in the study saw themselves as the family's hope for a better future, expressed through dreams of building/buying a home, graduating, or achieving financial independence. Their individual achievements are not seen as purely personal, but as contributions to the wellbeing and pride of their families. In this sense, their hope is communal. The grandmothers also place their hope in the younger generation, believing that their own sacrifices and struggles will be honoured through the success of their grand(children). Their hope and the hope of their grand(children) was also communal. The grandmothers articulated their hope through guidance, prayers, and verbal messages, what might be termed "hope talk." However, this hope talk was sometimes expressed as concern or fear that their wisdom is not being heard or valued. They felt that the survival knowledge they carried, about hardship, family, and resilience was often overlooked or dismissed by the younger generation. This reflected a tension in intergenerational communication: while both generations invested in one another, they did not always feel heard or understood. While the grandmothers want their experiences to be respected and passed on, young women are forming their own ideas about what matters and how to live. Thus, while both generations express hope for a similar future, a better life marked by stability, success, and independence, the difference lies not in what they hope for, but how they believe it can be achieved. Young women often imagine reaching these goals through personal agency, education, and self-expression. Grandmothers also desire these outcomes for their grand(children), but they place greater emphasis on traditional values, discipline, and listening to elders. This difference can create frustration or a sense of being misunderstood on both sides. Still, at the core, both generations are united by a shared vision: they want their families to thrive, even if they do not always agree on the path to get there.

In conclusion, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how Black South African women engage in intergenerational storytelling, identity-making, and meaning-making. It shows that intergenerational relationships are sustained not only through shared values but also through the negotiation of difference. By centering women's voices and their everyday acts of storytelling, the study affirms the importance of memory, dialogue, and narrative in shaping Black female subjectivities. The research also highlights that identity is not a fixed product but a process, one shaped through time, memory, and narrative. Both older and younger women construct meaning through storytelling, positioning themselves in relation

to the past and imagining possible futures. This understanding of identity as dynamic, intersectional, and evolving adds depth to current literature on African womanhood and intergenerational relations. These findings point to the value of further research that continues to honour complexity, contradiction, and relationality in the lives of African women across generations.

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Appendices

Appendix A



Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Soboyisi
CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE PROTOCOL NUMBER: H23/06/46

PROJECT TITLE Narratives between generations: Stories of Black grandmothers and granddaughters in Soweto, South Africa

INVESTIGATOR(S) Ms N Soboyisi

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT Human and Community Development/

DATE CONSIDERED 23 June 2023

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE Approved

Risk Level: Minimal

EXPIRY DATE 02 October 2026

DATE 03 October 2023 CHAIRPERSON _____ (Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Prof J Bradbury

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and A SIGNED COPY returned to the Secretary electronically. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. I/we agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low Risk studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.



03/10/2023

Signature Date

Appendix B

FOROMO YA TUMELLO YA MOTSWADI

(Consent form for Parents)

Lefapha la thuto ya kelello Sekolo
sa Tlhabollo ya Batho & Setjhaba
Univesithing ya Witwatersrand
Mokotla wa Poraefete 3, WITS, 2050
Mohala: (011) 717 4500 Fekse: (011) 717 45

Sehlooho sa Lipatlisiso	Ditlaleho dipakeng tsa meloko: Dipale tsa ditloholo le bo-nkgono Dobsonville, Soweto.
Lebitso la Mofuputsi	Naledi Pertunia Soboyisi

(Ka kopo, tlatsa foromo ena hang ha o se o badile le ho utlwisisa leqephe la tlhahisoleseding)
Nna, , ke dumela hore moradi waka a ka nka karolo
morerong ona wa dipatlisiso. Dipatlisiso di hlalositswe ho nna jwaloka mohlokomedi wa ngwana wa ka le nna. Ke utlwisisa hore na ho nka karolo ha bona ho tla akaretsa eng. Ke Dumellana le tse latelang:

Sepheo sa dipatlisiso se hlalositswe ka puo eo ke e utlwisisang.

Ke dumela ka bolokolohi le ka boithaopo ho nka karolo.

Dipotso tsa ka mabapi le boithuto di arabilwe.

Ke utlwisisa hore boitsebiso ba ka bo ke ke ba phatlalatswa le hore nka nka karolo ke sa itsebahatse. Ke dumela hore mofuputsi a ka sebelisa mantswe a qotsitsweng a sa tsejweng tlalehong ya hae ya dipatlisiso.
Ke dumela ho nka karolo puisanong ya motho ka mong le mofuputsi.

Kea utlwisisa hore nka ikgula ho se nke karolo phuputsong ena neng kapa neng, mme sena se ke ke sa nkama hampe ka tsela efe kapa efe.

Lebitso la monkakarolo (boikhethelo)	
Mosaeno oa morupeluwa	
Letsatsi	

TUMELO HO AUDIO-REKHOTA

Ke dumela hore puisano ya motho ka mong le mofuputsi e rekotwe ka mantswe. Kea utlwisisa hore dipuisano di tla rekotwa le hore mofuputsi o tla nka mehato e tiileng ya ho sireletsa ditaba tsa ka nakong yohle ya thuto.

Tshaeno ya monkakarolo ____

Haeba o na le dingongoreho dife kapa dife kapa ditletlebo mabapi le mekgwa ya phuputso ena, o amohelehile ho iteanya le Komiti ya Boitshwaro ya Dipatlisiso tsa Botho ya Univesithi (Non-Medical), ka mohala ho +27(0) 11 717 1408 KAPA Imeile ho hrecnon-medical@ wits.ac.za Haeba o bona eka ha se mekgwa eohle e boletsweng ka hodimo e ileng ya fihlelwa kapa o hloka tlhaloso efe kapa efe mabapi le dipatlisiso tsena, ka kopo ikopanye le mofuputsi o sebedisa dintlha tse fanoeng ka tlase.

Haeba o na le dipotso tse ding kapa o lakatsa ho tlaleha mathata afe kapa afe ao o bileng le ona a amanang le dipatlisiso, ka kopo ikopanye le mookamedi wa dipatlisiso o sebedisa dintlha tse fanoeng ka tlase.

Lebitso la Mofoputsi	Naledi Pertunia Soboyisi
Nomoro ya Mohala	+27 60 388 1051
Emeile	1760608@students.wits.ac.za
Lebitso la Bahlahlobi ba Lipatlisiso	Professor Jill Bradbury
Nomoro ea mohala	011 717 4515
Emeile	Jill.Bradbury@wits.ac.za

Appendix C

Information sheet to parents

Psychology department

School of Human & Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Good day,

My name is Naledi Pertunia Soboyisi. I am a Master's in Community-based counselling psychology student in the School of Human and Community Development at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Professor Jill Bradbury. I am conducting a research study about Black girls and their grandmothers in Soweto. The study title is *Narratives between Generations: Stories of Black grandmothers and granddaughters in Soweto.*

I am asking permission from you as a parent/guardian to allow your daughter to take part in an interview where stories about her childhood and youth will be explored. If they decide to take part in this study, their participation will only last about 30 minutes to an hour. The interview will be held at the Secondary School in Soweto. The interviews will take place in the afternoon afterschool. The final date will be agreed upon by the researcher and parents and participants.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This recording will be stored in a password-protected folder which only I and my supervisor will have access to until the duration of my research is complete.

During the interview, I will be asking your daughter questions about their life as a young girl growing up in Soweto. I will also ask questions about their grandmothers and some of their hopes for their own future. The narration of their stories will not be relayed to anyone else.

However, my supervisor will have access to the audio and will be able to hear the conversations. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include their name or anything else that could identify your daughter. Pseudonyms (fake names) will be used in place of their real name.

If you decide to allow your daughter to take part in the research study, it should be because they want to volunteer. They do not have to take part in the study if they do not want to. They are not forced to. You as the parent and your child can stop being in the study at any time. Your child does not have to answer any questions if they do not want to. They will not get any direct benefits if they choose to join the research study. They will not lose any services, benefits, or rights they would normally have if they decided not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you or them anything. The date and time for the discussion will be agreed upon by both the researcher and parent and the participants themselves.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life. However, if some of the questions asked make your daughter feel sad or upset, I will stop the interview and continue another time. Referrals to psychological support will be provided, if necessary, after the interview. These services are free of charge and can be accessed by contacting 0800 567 567 from Monday to Sunday 8 am-8 pm (The South African Depression and Anxiety Group) or 0861 322 322 Lifeline Pretoria 24-hour line.

This research study will be written up as a research report for my dissertation as a requirement to obtain my Masters' in Community-based counselling psychology degree. The report will be available on the Wits university library website.

If you have any questions about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor at the details listed below. 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), by telephone at +27(0) 11 717 1408, or email at hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Naledi Soboyisi

Researcher: Naledi Pertunia Soboyisi
Email: 1760608@students.wits.ac.za
Phone number: +27 60 388 1051

Supervisor: Professor Jill Bradbury
Email: Jill.Bradbury@wits.ac.za

Appendix D

Assent Form for young women

Psychology department

School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Title of project: ***Narratives between generations: Stories of Black grandmothers and granddaughters in Soweto***

Name of researcher: Naledi Pertunia Soboyisi

I, , agree to take part in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES NO
I understand that I was not forced to take part in this study	YES NO

I agree that the interview may be audio recorded YES
NO

I agree that things that I say from the interview may be used by the researcher in the research report

YES
NO

I agree that my real name will not be used by the researcher in the research report

YES
NO

I agree that the information I provide in the interview may be stored in a password protected computer but my name and any personal information will not be used

or passed on YES
NO

(signature)

(date)

(signature)

…Naledi Soboyisi… (name of researcher)

Appendix E

Information sheet for the young women

Psychology department

School of Human & Community
Development
University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Good day,

My name is Naledi Pertunia Soboyisi. I am doing a Master's in Community-based counselling psychology in the School of Human and Community Development at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Professor Jill Bradbury. I am conducting a research study about Black girls and their grandmothers in Soweto. The study title is: *Narratives between Generations: Stories of Black grandmothers and granddaughters in Soweto.*

I am inviting you to take part in an interview where stories about your childhood and youth will be explored. If you decide to take part in this study, your participation will last about 30 to an hour. The interview will be held at the YOTS site. The interviews will take place in the afternoon afterschool. The final date will be agreed upon by the researcher and you as the participant.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the narrative interview. This recording will

be stored in a password-protected folder which only I and my supervisor will have access to until the duration of my research is complete. Thereafter, it will be securely stored in the NEST computer archive.

During the interview, I will be asking you questions about your life as a young girl growing up in Soweto, I will also ask questions about your grandmother and some of your aspirations about the future. In the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. Pseudonyms (fake names) will be used in place of your real name.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. The date and time for the discussion will be agreed upon by both researcher and participant.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life. However, if some of the questions asked make you feel sad or upset, I will stop the interview and continue another time. Referrals to psychological support will be provided, if necessary, after the interview. These services are free of charge and can be accessed by contacting 0800 567 567 from Monday to Sunday 8 am-8 pm (The South African Depression and Anxiety Group) or 0861 322 322 Lifeline Pretoria 24-hour line.

This research study will be written up as a research report for my dissertation as a requirement to obtain my Masters in Community-based counselling psychology degree. The report will be available on the Wits university library website.

If you have any questions about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor at the details listed below. 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), by telephone at +27(0) 11 717 1408, or email at hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Naledi Soboyisi

Researcher: Naledi Pertunia Soboyisi
Email: 1760608@students.wits.ac.za
Phone number: +27 60 388 1051

Supervisor: Professor Jill Bradbury
Email: Jill.Bradbury@wits.ac.za

Appendix F

Informed consent form for grandmothers in Sesotho

Lefapha la Psychology

Sekolo sa Ntlafatso ya Batho le Sechaba

Univesithi ya Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Mohala: (011) 717 4500 Fakse: (011) 717

Sehlooho sa Lipatlisiso	Ditlaleho dipakeng tsa meloko: Dipale tsa ditloholo le bo-nkgono Dobsonville, Soweto.
Lebitso la Mofuputsi	Naledi Pertunia Soboyisi

(Ka kopo, tlatsa foromo ena hang ha o se o badile le ho utlwisisa leqephe la tlhahisoleseding) Nna, , ke dumela ho nka karolo morerong ona wa
dipatlisiso. Ke hlaloseditswe dipatlisiso mme ke utlwisisa hore na ho nka karolo ha ka ho tla kenyelletsa eng. Ke Dumellana le tse latelang:

• Sepheo sa dipatlisiso se hlalositswe ka puo eo ke e utlwisisang.

• Ke dumela ka bolokolohi le ka boithaopo ho nka karolo.

• Dipotso tsa ka mabapi le boithuto di arabilwe.

• Ke utlwisisa hore boitsebiso ba ka bo ke ke ba phatlalatswa le hore nka nka karolo ke sa itsebahatse.

Ke dumela hore mofuputsi a ka sebelisa mantswe a qotsitsweng a sa tsejweng tlalehong ya hae ya dipatlisiso. Ke dumela ho nka karolo puisanong ya motho ka mong le mofuputsi.

• Kea utlwisisa hore nka ikgula ho se nke karolo phuputsong ena neng kapa neng, mme sena se ke ke sa nkama hampe ka tsela efe kapa efe.

Lebitso la monkakarolo (boikhethelo)	
Mosaeno oa morupeluwa	
Letsatsi	

TUMELO HO AUDIO-REKHOTA

Ke dumela hore puisano ya motho ka mong le mofuputsi e rekotwe ka mantswe. Kea utlwisisa hore dipuisano di tla rekotwa le hore mofuputsi o tla nka mehato e tiileng ya ho sireletsa ditaba tsa ka nakong yohle ya thuto.

Tshaeno ya monkakarolo _____

Haeba o na le dingongoreho dife kapa dife kapa ditletlebo mabapi le mekgwa ya phuputso ena, o amohelehile ho iteanya le Komiti ya Boitshwaro ya Dipatlisiso tsa Botho ya Univesithi (Non-Medical), ka mohala ho +27(0) 11 717 1408 KAPA Imeile ho hrecnon-medical@ wits.ac.za

Haeba o bona eka ha se mekgwa eohle e boletsweng ka hodimo e ileng ya fihlelwa kapa o hloka tlhaloso efe kapa efe mabapi le dipatlisiso tsena, ka kopo ikopanye le mofuputsi o sebedisa dintlha tse fanoeng ka tlase.

Haeba o na le dipotso tse ding kapa o lakatsa ho tlaleha mathata afe kapa afe ao o bileng le ona a amanang le dipatlisiso, ka kopo ikopanye le mookamedi wa dipatlisiso o sebedisa dintlha tse fanoeng ka tlase.

Lebitso la Mofoputsi	Naledi Pertunia Soboyisi
Nomoro ya Mohala	+27 60 388 1051
Emeile	1760608@students.wits.ac.za
Lebitso la Bahlahlobi ba Lipatlisiso	Professor Jill Bradbury
Nomoro ea mohala	011 717 4515
Emeile	Jill.Bradbury@wits.ac.za

Appendix G

Informed consent form for grandmothers in Zulu

Psychology department

School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Isihloko socwaningo	*Narratives between generations: Stories of Black grandmothers and granddaughters in Soweto*
Igama lomcwaningi	Naledi Pertunia Soboyisi

(Ngicela ugcwalise kuphela leli-form kuphela mangabe usufunde waqondisisa iForm lolwazi) Mina, , ngiyavuma ukuba inxenye yalolucwaningo.

Inqubo nenhloso yalolucwaningo ngichazeliwe yona futhi ngaqonda ukuthi ukuba inxenye yalolucwaningo isho ukuthini. Ngiyavuma futhi ngiyakuqonda konke okulandelayo:

- Inhloso yalolucwaningo ngichazeliwe yona kabanzi ngolimi lwami engilwaziyo futhi engiluqondayo.

- Ngikhetha ukuba inxenye yalolucwaningo ngokungempoqo kepha kungokuthanda kwami.

- Imibuzo ebenginayo ngalolucwaningo, ngizitholile izimpendulo zayo.

- Ngiyaqondisisa ukuthi ukwazeka noma ubunikazi bami ngeke ibekwe engcupheni. Ngiyavuma ukuthi umhlaziyi angasebenzisa izingcaphuno ezingaziwa ocwaningweni lwakhe.

- Ngiyavuma ukuba inxenye yalolucwaningo engxoxweni ezoba ngomunye-ngomunye nomcwaningi.

- Ngiyakuqondisisa ukuthi nginganyula ekubeni inxenye yalolucwaningo ngananoma isiphi isikhathi kanti futhi lokhu ngeke kungithikameze ngananoma iyiphi indlela.

Igama	
Isiginesha	
Usuku	

IMVUME YOKUREKHODWA KOMSINDO

Ngiyavuma ukuthi inhlolokhono yami nomcwaningi iqoshwe ngokomsindo kuphela. Ngiyaqonda ukuthi inhlolokhono izorekhodwa, nokuthi umcwaningi uzothatha izinyathelo zokuphepha eziqinile ukuze avikele ulwazi lwami lomuntu siqu kulo lonke ucwaningo.

Isiginesha yombambi qhaza:

Uma unokuthile okukukhathazayo noma izikhalazo mayelana nezimiso zokuziphatha izinqubo zalolu cwaningo, wamukelekile ukuthintana nebhodi leNyuvesi elengamele ucwaningo i- Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), ngocingo ku- +27(0) 11 717 1408, noma i-imeyili ku-hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Uma unomuzwa wokuthi akuzona zonke izindlela ezishiwo ngenhla ezifinyelelwe noma udinga ukucaciswa mayelana nalolu cwaningo, sicela uthinte umcwaningi usebenzisa imininingwane enikezwe ngezansi.

Uma uneminye imibuzo noma ufisa ukubika izinkinga ohlangabezane nazo ezihlobene nocwaningo, sicela uxhumane nomphathi wocwaningo usebenzisa imininingwane enikezwe ngezansi.

Igama lomcwaningi	Naledi Pertunia Soboyisi
Inombolo yocingo	+27 60 388 1051
i-Imeyili	**1760608@students.wits.ac. za**
Igama lomphathi wocwaningo	uSolwazi Jill Bradbury
i-Imeyili	**Jill.Bradbury@wits.ac.za**

Appendix H

Interview Schedule

Psychology department

School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Interview Schedule

I will begin to gather data collection through the use of narrative interviews once permission has been obtained from the University of Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee and go where YOTS members meet (at Forte Secondary School). The grandmothers will be interviewed at a convenient place for them and the researcher. These are some of the questions that will be asked for each groups:

Narrative interview with the young girls

1. I am interested to know what it is like for teenage girls living in Soweto today. Can you please tell me a story about your experiences, perhaps here at school or at home or in the streets of your community.

2. Please tell me a story about yourself as a small child (maybe five or ten years old) growing up? (Then I can probe, where did this happen? Did you grow up here in Soweto? Tell me about your family / Who did you live with?)

2. What do you know about your grandmother's life/grandmothers' lives? (They can choose whether to speak about one grandmother or both or more.)

3. Can you please tell me a story of an important shared experience with your grandmother.

4. What are some aspects of your life now as a teenager that you feel your grandmother can relate to and some aspects, she would not be able to relate to?

5. What do you think is meant by the phrases "strong black woman" and "black girl magic"? How do you think these ideas apply to you?

6. What are some of your hopes and dreams for your future? What does your grandmother think about these dreams? What do you think she would want for your life?

Narrative Interviews (grandmothers)

1. Please tell me a story about yourself growing up as a young girl. (Then I can probe, where did this happen? Did you grow up here in Soweto? Tell me about your family / Who did you live with?)

2. How do you think your experiences as a young Black girl in South Africa compare to those of your granddaughter/s today? In what ways have things changed or stayed the same?

3. How often do you see your grand-daughter now and what kinds of things do you do together / talk about?

4. Can you tell me about times when your granddaughter inspired or made you proud?

5. Can you tell me some of your hopes and fears for your granddaughter?