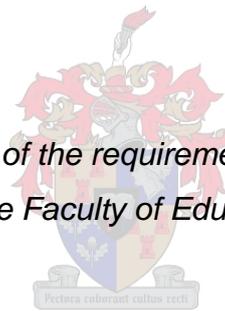


The educational achievement routes of first generation students in a rural town

by

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Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Policy Studies) in the Faculty of Education at Stellenbosch University



Supervisor: Professor Aslam Fataar

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Date: April 2019

Abstract

This thesis explores the unique educational achievement routes of selected rural-origin first generation students (FGSs) in South Africa. The study aimed to understand the family-, social-, community-, and school experiences and paths of three rural-origin FGSs who were able, successfully, to enter university study.

This study applied a combined theoretical framework of Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework and the Figured Worlds theory (Holland *et al.*, 1998), to address the main research question of this study, which is: *How do first generation students from a rural town construct their educational achievement routes during their high school years to gain access to university?*

The methodological research design employed for this study was qualitative, based on an interpretive phenomenological research approach. This approach is characterised by its central focus on the lived experiences of the research participants. For this reason it was chosen as the most suitable approach to understand the nuanced educational achievement routes that the individuals in this study had to establish as aspirant FGSs, growing up in a rural and impoverished small town environment. The data collection method used was the in-depth semi-structured interview.

The most important finding of this study was that unlike the other young people from their rural home environs, the FGSs in this study demonstrated resilience to the restrictive environmental influences around them. Their educational paths were grounded in their ability to use their capitals and community cultural wealth to recognise and utilise the opportunities for educational achievement both outside (in their family-, social-, and community environments) and inside the school. These students used their agency to mobilise the resources in these environments to shape their educational subjectivities in a way that led to them becoming academic achievers, which enabled their entry into the Figured World of educational achievement operating within their high school.

Opsomming

Hierdie tesis verken die unieke opvoedkundige prestasieroetes van verkose landelike eerste-generasie studente in Suid-Afrika. Hierdie studie het beoog om die familie-, sosiale-, gemeenskaps-, en skoolervaringe en paaie van drie suksesvolle landelike-oorsprong eerste-generasie studente, wat die Universiteit van Stellenbosch suksesvol betree het, beter te verstaan.

Die studie het 'n gekombineerde teoretiese raamwerk van Bourdieu se kulturele kapitaal teorie, Yosso (2005) se Gemeenskaps Kulturele Rykdom raamwerk, en die Geskepte Wêreld teorie van Holland *et al.* (1998) toegepas om die volgende navorsingsvraag te beantwoord: *Hoe bou eerste-generasie studente uit 'n plattelandse dorp hul opvoedkundige prestasieroetes gedurende hul hoërskooljare om toegang tot universiteit te verkry?*

Die metodologiese navorsingsontwerp van die studie was kwalitatief en is gebaseer op 'n interpretatiewe fenomenologiese analitiese benadering. Die interpretatiewe fenomenologiese analise word gekenmerk deurdat die metode sentraal fokus op die ervaringe van die navorsingsdeelnemers. Hierdie metode is dus gekies as die mees geskikte benadering om die gekompliseerde opvoedkundige prestasieroetes, wat die individue in hierdie studie moes oprig as aspirant-eerste-generasie studente in 'n landelike en verarmde omgewing, te verstaan. Die studie het semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude as data-insamelingsmetode gebruik.

Die belangrikste bevinding van hierdie studie was dat die deelnemers, anders as die ander jongmense in hul landelike omgewing, veerkragtigheid teenoor die beperkende omgewingsinvloede rondom hulle getoon het. Hul opvoedkundige paaie is gegrond in hul vermoë om hul gemeenskap kulturele kapitale te gebruik om die geleenthede vir prestasie beide buite (in hul familie-, sosiale-, en gemeenskapsomgewings) en binne die skool, te herken en te benut. Hierdie studente het hul agentskap gebruik om die hulpbronne tot hul beskikking te mobiliseer om hul opvoedkundige vakkundigheid te vorm op 'n manier wat hulle toegelaat het om topstudente kon word. Sodoende kon hulle die Geskepte Wêreld van opvoedkundige prestasie wat binne hul hoërskool in werking is, betree.

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Firstly, I give all thanks to the God who lives in me and daily provides me with life and vigour. Thank you for imbuing inside me this passion for learning and seeking the truth.

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Thank you to the Harry Crossley Foundation and the Canon Collins Educational and Legal Assistance Trust for supporting my own educational aspirations.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to all of the unnamed teachers who believe in their students, especially my own teachers at Tulbagh High School. You might not know the world of a difference it makes, but without you we would not be here.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Introduction

South African youth currently have to navigate an education system which is the product of racial inequality and has led to a distinct and noticeable disparity between the educational achievements of working class- and middle class students. Their educational backgrounds impact on how these young people value their identities, and consequently how they form their life aspirations. Burns *et al.* (2015:83) describe the contradiction between the aspirations of working class youth and the harsh barriers of post-apartheid South Africa as the “quiet violence of dreams” for many young South Africans. Despite this reality, there is little empirical research on how the changes in the school landscape during apartheid and post-apartheid affected young people’s identities (Soudien, 2001:311). The existing research focuses even less on how working class young people are constructing their learning practices in the post-apartheid schooling landscape. Moreover, the research that has been done on the identities of young people is focused predominantly on students that are in an urban schooling environment, although 72% of South Africa’s poor live in rural areas (Steyn, Badenhorst & Kamper, 2010:173). Thus, there is a gap in the literature regarding the educational experiences and achievement of working class students from rural areas.

This study narrows down the concept of working class students to first generation students (FGSs), as the majority of working class South African students are the first in their families to attend university (Luckett & Luckett, 2009:479; Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012:29). Thus, this study aims to understand how a selected group of current FGSs at an elite university navigated their rural educational environments and constructed their educational achievement routes successfully. For the purpose of this study, the term ‘educational achievement route’ refers to how students form and adjust their educational subjectivities in the process of engaging with their surrounding environments to achieve academic success in school. This study thus investigates the four environments that impacted on how the participating students applied their agency and subjectivities in the construction of their educational achievement routes during high school. These four environments are: the family-, social-, community-,

and school environments of the students while growing up. I have a particular interest in this topic of research, as I myself am a working class student from a rural agricultural town, as well as the first member in my family to access a university education. Focusing on the selected four environments of rural students' learning might offer insight into how students cope with the challenges associated with the post-apartheid rural schooling trajectory, and how they navigate these challenges to achieve academic success and gain entry into university.

1.2. Background and rationale

As a FGS, I had personal motivation to understand how FGSs from small rural hometown environments construct their educational subjectivities and educational achievement routes to be able to live out their university aspirations. This interest is grounded in the challenges I encountered in my personal educational achievement route as a FGS from a small town. Although there is ample literature on rurality and social class in education in South Africa, current research is limited to what is perceived as extreme rural conditions, such as environments without any educational facilities and/or infrastructure. According to Hlalele (2004: 462-463), the South African government views rurality as a way of life revolving around land, livestock cropping and community. However, the author further asserts that extreme differentiation exists within rural South Africa and that difference is an inherent and unavoidable feature of social existence and education. Thus, rural education needs to be adapted to respond to the realities and challenges of a particular rural setting. As a result of the narrow conceptualisation of rurality, the educational achievement paths of students from small agricultural rural towns are under-researched, where the most significant issues are poverty, lack of exposure and information, and low aspirations. I believe that this study might offer important insights into the unique subjectivities of rural working class youth, who aspire to rise above their circumstances through education and would be of particular significance to school- and university administrators and policy-makers.

To understand the effect of rural agricultural practices on the educational subjectivities of young people, I will review literature on post-apartheid education in South Africa, which highlights the fact that the South African education system is fraught with deep social inequalities. This is especially true for impoverished rural

communities (Motala & Vally, 2010:88). The aforementioned authors argue that whilst writings on the topics of social- and historical disadvantage, marginalisation, exclusion, poverty, and inequalities are crucial to affect social change; South African literature ought to focus more on social class analysis within the educational context. Literature on social class analysis focuses on the impact of class structure in schooling and is important in a country like South Africa, which has a history of social stratification in the education sector. According to McFadden and Munns (2002:357), stratifying schooling practices are directly related to how students develop their schooling identities and consciousness towards education and learning, i.e. how they construct their educational subjectivities.

The educational subjectivity of an individual reflects the social context in which the individual grows and develops. Hence, the interaction of an individual with his/her schooling involves a complex combination of agency and structure. This amalgam could be understood as the impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual's behaviour, as it is mediated through an organisation of social networks (Reay, Crozier & Clayton: 2010:109). The family-, social/peer-, and community dimensions of students' lived environments play a determining role in how they construct their educational pathways. Interconnected relationships between families, teachers, and friends within the community act to mediate and interpret wider political- and cultural discourses; shaping individual educational experiences and perceptions of what it means to be a student (Pollard & Filer, 2007:445). I will discuss these different dimensions of how the FGSs in this study constructed their educational pathways to achieve academic success within their rural town. A town situated in an agricultural environment strongly impacts on the educational subjectivities of its residents. It will be illustrated that the reality of students from such environments is not to enter university, but rather to seek employment from the surrounding farms and factory, out of economic necessity.

According to Chetty (2014:97), the great contradiction of education in the modern era is that whilst it is an avenue for upward mobility out of disadvantaged circumstances, it is also the main social institution through which social status is reproduced from one generation to the next. The social reproduction theory of Pierre Bourdieu highlights the role of schooling in the maintenance and perpetuation of marginalisation and exclusion of the working class, as well as socialising students in ways that reproduce

class structures. Bourdieu theorises that students enter schooling from different cultural- and social positions. These positions are associated with distinct cultural dispositions, which operate as cultural capital in schools. Bourdieu defines cultural capital as an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society. Bourdieu asserts that cultural capital (i.e., education levels, language usage, and social habits), social capital (i.e., social networks and connections) and economic capital (i.e., money, material possessions) can be acquired either from one's family and/or through formal education. The dominant groups in society are able to maintain power through their possession of cultural-, social-, and economic capital, while disadvantaged groups have limited access to these forms of capital. The valorisation of middle class capitals in society leads to exclusion within social structures. Bourdieu and Yosso (2005:76) refer to this process of systemic exclusion as symbolic violence.

Bourdieu's notion of how cultural capital operates in society can be applied to this study as a theoretical lens. In such a way, I might gain insight into the complex routes that FGSs navigate to access university from their rural school environments. The environment that I grew up in, similar to many of the students in my hometown, is not conducive to a culture of learning. Going to a university entails dealing with the challenges that arise from growing up in an impoverished rural community. Growing up in my town, the general priority was not to attend university, but to be able to earn money and provide for oneself and one's family. I have also seen how these challenges overwhelm many young people in life after school. However, I have noticed that there are also those with the capacity to aspire towards more than what such a small town offers. I believe that the capacity of students to have educational aspirations, despite their challenging environments, is grounded in an imaginary dimension and creative interaction with the challenges they encounter in their daily lives (Fillies & Fataar 2015:750). This imaginary dimension refers to how students from physically restrictive environments are able to orientate their thoughts about their future in such a way to keep their educational aspirations alive, although there are not manifestations of these aspirations around them.

Youth in different parts of the world, who imagine themselves as entrepreneurs or other success stories, typically build up such a sense of self by creatively engaging with free market discourses circulated by the state and other institutions, and often

draw on local notions of shrewdness and enterprise (Jeffrey, 2012:250). Thus, their imagined futures play a role in how they act out their lives towards their desired future positions. This idea relates to Zipin *et al.*'s notion of the emergent dimension of aspiration, and Holland *et al.*'s (1998) theory of Figured Worlds (FWs). Zipin *et al.* (2013:12) argue that the emergent dimension of aspiration can manifest in imaginings, voicings and agentic impulses toward alternative futures. The authors argue that these impulses are re-imaginative in their logic. However, these aspirations are intangible as they express the "present-becoming-future", rather than the "past-made-present". Thus, individuals with the ability to imagine their lives as present becoming future are able to generate alternatives to difficult circumstances that are not immediately apparent. Rather than to confine to the possibilities deemed appropriate for their allocated social group, students who create FWs hold beliefs, values, and conduct that are creative and inventive.

In light of the aforementioned contextualisation, this study will attempt to understand how FGSs from rural backgrounds construct their educational subjectivities and achievement routes through the use of a combined theoretical framework. This framework will utilise Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, Yosso's (2005) extended conceptualisation of capitals, and Holland *et al.*'s (1998) Figured World's (FW) theory to answer the research questions outlined in the next section.

1.3. Research questions

Bearing the research problem and the rationale in mind, the following is my main research question: *How do first generation students from a rural town construct their educational achievement routes during their high school years to gain access to university?*

The sub-questions are:

1. How do first generation students establish their educational achievement routes, which offer them access to university, in their rural schooling context?
2. How do achieving first generation students construct their educational subjectivities in the context of their rural town livelihoods?

3. What role does their agency play in how the students successfully navigate their educational achievement routes from a small rural school into an urban university environment?

1.4. Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to explore and understand how FGSs establish their educational subjectivities and construct their educational achievement routes in the light of their rural high school environment.

1.5. Research objectives

The study's research objectives are to:

1. Understand the achievement routes constructed by FGSs from rural towns, which enabled them to achieve academic success in school and gain access to university.
2. Examine how achieving FGSs in a rural town constructed their educational subjectivities.
3. Explore how the construction of their educational subjectivities determined how these students established their achievement routes from a rural school into an urban university environment.
4. Explore what role agency played in the educational practices of these students, as they navigated their way from their rural high school into the urban university environment.

1.6. Significance of the study

As previously mentioned, there exists scarce literature on the educational subjectivities and achievement routes of rural students in South Africa. Moreover, the recent studies done on the academic achievement of South African FGSs are focused on those from urban areas (Norodien-Fataar, 2016; Domingo-Salie, 2016; Kapp, Badenhorst, Bangeni, Craig, Janse van Rensburg, Le Roux, Prince, Pym & Van Pletzen, 2014; Bengani & Kapp, 2005). In my literature search, I have not found a South African study that has focused on the schooling pathways of academically achieving FGSs from rural towns. Thus, I believe that this research is significant in

the light of the current climate of South Africa's education system. This study does not aim to find a one-size-fits-all solution to the low prevalence of FGSs attending university. Rather, it is an attempt to understand the phenomenon of three individuals who navigated their way through their rural high school to attain academic success and enter a prestigious university, unlike their peers.

1.7. Delimitation of the study

As this study is a Master's thesis focusing on a select group of individuals, the study sample was limited to one rural school district in the Western Cape. In collecting data for this study, I conducted in-depth interviews with three students over a period of one year. As context was crucial to this study, the in-depth interviews were augmented with several follow-up interviews, as well as corroborating interviews with teachers and long-term residents of the community.

1.8. Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter one offers a general introduction and background to the study, which provides a broad context of the study in relation to the lived experiences of the three participants. This chapter includes the study's research questions, the study's aim and objectives, and significance of the study. The chapter concludes with the layout of the thesis and presents closing comments. Chapter two is the literature review, which provides a background of international and South African literature related to the research topic and forms the foundation for my study. Chapter three is a presentation of the theoretical framework for the study, which offers the analytical lenses to inform and guide data gathering, presentation and analysis. Chapter four focuses on the methodology used to guide the data handling procedures and -processes. This chapter provides a rationale for the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a methodological paradigm, as well as the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews as the main data collection tool. The data was augmented with follow-up interviews and corroborating interviews with community members from the study area. In Chapter five and six I present and analyse the data obtained from the interviews with the participants. The data analysis is structured into the family-, social-, community-, and school environments that the participants successfully mediated to establish their educational achievement routes during their high school years. Chapter seven is the final chapter, which presents the conclusion for the study by addressing the main research question. The final chapter also offers recommendations for future study and policy-implications.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion of the pertinent literature that informs the focus of this study and relates to the main research question, which is: *How do first generation students from a rural town construct their educational achievement routes during their high school years to gain access to university?*

The study explores how first generation university students, hereafter called first generation students (FGSs), construct their educational subjectivities, and how these subjectivities determine how they establish their achievement routes from a rural high school into an urban university environment. This study is approached through the combined theoretical frameworks of cultural capital, community cultural wealth (CCW), and the Figured Worlds Theory, which will be elaborated upon in the following chapter. I propose that the individuals in this study were active subjects, who made use of their capitals to transform their small town life and rural educational contexts into productive routes for accessing university study. According to Vincent (2003:5), current work on identity is valuable in understanding how educational subjectivities are constructed, in particular, how structural forces and individual identities combine to determine how people construct their educational subjectivities. This literature review explores how youth identity is shaped and how identity acts as a central force in the way individuals construct their educational subjectivities to achieve academic success. This study focuses on four key aspects of these rural students' educational achievement routes, which are their family-, social-, community-, and school environments.

The literature review is organised in thematically, with each theme addressing the key concepts framing the main research question. The first theme explores the relationship between youth identity and education, with a specific focus on South African youth. The relationship between youth and education underlies identity-formation processes, defines how young people experience their schooling, and affects how individuals position themselves as subjects of the education system. The second theme covers the connection between social class and schooling. Social class differentiation, and its impact on educational aspiration and achievement, is a

recurring topic in educational research around the world. For the purpose of this study, social class differentiation is defined as the differential valuing of classes within education systems. These attributed values have shaped the structure, influenced the practices, and dictated the very different relationships that particular social classes have to education systems (Reay, 2017:1). Reay's (2017:1) argument relates to Willis' (1977), which is that working class relationships to state schooling is grounded in the notions that it is not "their" educational system and that they have little sense of belonging within it. In contrast to middle class enthusiasm for school based learning, the working class have a historically-rooted attitude to education that recognises that the educational system is not for them, does not work in their interests, and considers them and their cultural knowledge as inferior. This system of social class differentiation in schools is central to the educational subjectivity formation processes of young people. The third theme of literature considers how young people construct their educational subjectivities and aspirations, in light of their family-, social-, community-, and school contexts (Fataar, 2015; Soudien, 2007; Fillies, 2015). The final theme illustrates the need for my research by situating this study amongst other current studies regarding educational achievement in South Africa. The aforementioned theme focuses on how FGSs construct their educational achievement routes in high school.

2.2. Youth identity and education

Defining youth is complex as it is related to a host of factors, including the socio-economic - and home environments of children. Soudien (2004:57) considers what it means to be a young person in South Africa and argues that growing up in South Africa is for most "a journey of a dream denied, if not betrayed". The author explains the aforementioned statement in terms of the poverty and educational experiences of many South African youth. There is a significant gap between the educational experiences and employment prospects of white and black¹ South Africans (Barbarin & Richter, 2001:57). Soudien (2004:57) further asserts that instead of being subject to the structural forces that surround them, young South Africans actively make

¹ The racial terms used in this thesis are relevant when looking at the lasting effects the racialised apartheid education system had on current day South Africa. While Barbarin and Richter refer to the term 'black' as encompassing all of the racial groups except white (i.e. Coloured, Indian, black and 'other'), this thesis differentiates between all racial groups for school demographic reasons.

complex decisions that reflect the identity complexities caused by the socialisation processes that they are a part of.

Young people experience and are required to respond to successive waves of technical- and economic modernisation that are operating in middle class social structures, such as schools (Willis, 2003:391). These changes impact on how these individuals, particularly the working class, identify as youth in the world. Barbarin and Richter (2001:13) assert that working class children growing up in post-apartheid South Africa may be exposed to a combination of economic hardships and poor support services, which may obstruct their academic progress and emotional development. Young people respond to their changing environments to the best of their abilities, relating to how they see, live, and embody their lives. Working class youths' responses may appear chaotic and disorganised, a result from them being creative agents who react to their oppressive circumstances, and seek cultural recognition of their identities (Willis, 2003:292). In light of a modernised world of electronics and commodities (which can be referred to as popular culture), working class young people have begun to adopt expressive subjectivities (Willis, 2003:404). These young people claim the right to mark themselves culturally as a specific kind of person, rather than merely carrying the traditional markers of class, race, and gender. In other instances they choose to belong to these categories in a distinctive, celebratory, or self-conscious way. Similarly, whilst grappling with youth identity in South Africa, Soudien (2004:58; 2007:28) asserts that through cultural appropriation and individualism, globalisation has increasingly impacted on the local identity of young people. Young people are active subjects in the personalisation and creation of new globalised identities, rather than mere recipients thereof. Moreover, Soudien (2007:28) mentions the cultural ambiguity that young people navigate through to establish their individual identities within their group affiliations, amidst their aspirations to succeed in the modern world. This cultural ambiguity marks the complex experiences that young people navigate in the different spaces that they traverse, such as their homes, neighbourhoods and schools.

Various authors, who will follow henceforth, have commented on how South African working class youth construct their identities through cultural identification processes. Dolby (2001:15) comments on the powerful impact of popular culture on the identity formation of young people, and how it becomes a crucial site through

which youth negotiate their identities in school- and other environments. Swartz (2010:14) argues that many young people, who pass their time in township schools, taverns, and shacks, experience these environs as embedded in their style of living, recreation, indulgences, and moral stances. Fataar (2015), Zipin (2013), Yosso (2005), and Delpit (1988) have argued the importance of incorporating the life-based knowledges and capacities of working class students into the formal curriculum. Zipin (2013:2) describes the life world knowledge of the working class, which he also terms funds of knowledge, as valuable cultural assets. He argues that these assets can be used to engage students in curricular work in a way that challenges their intelligence and enables their academic success. Yet, the life worlds of such young people are not acknowledged in formal schooling structures. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section. South Africa has a crisis for representation and self-representation for the majority of young people in the country, as young people are caught between diffused identities. Beyond belonging to racial- and class identities, young people are more or less left alone in establishing their individual identities (Soudien, 2007:32). This observation relates to Beck's (1992) theory of individualisation (cited in Reay, 2003:51) which states that while socialisation causes individuals' life chances to be highly structured, they are increasingly likely to seek solutions individually, rather than collectively. Thus, individuals attribute setbacks in life to their own agency and capabilities, even if these setbacks occur due to processes beyond the individual's control. This complex process of youth identification influences the way young people perceive and embody their education, especially in a fractured post-apartheid schooling landscape.

Young people exercise agency and craft their identities in response to their environments, which affect how they experience or seek belonging (Burns, Jobson and Zuma, 2015:83). South African youth currently have to navigate between a cruel past and an uncertain future, which is fraught with inequality, poverty, and violence. These circumstances impact on how they value their identities, and consequently have a marked effect on their life aspirations. Likewise to Willis (2003), Dwyer, Harwood and Tyler (1998), Alloway, Gilbert, Gilbert and Muspratt (2004), and Burns *et al.* (2015:83) maintain that youth is not a singular identity, but is inextricably intertwined with race, class, gender, sexuality, religious beliefs, and other socio-structural factors. Similar to Soudien's (2004:57) earlier assertion, Burns *et al.*

(2015:83) describe the contradiction between the aspirations of working class youth and the harsh barriers of post-apartheid South Africa, as the “quiet violence of dreams” for many young South Africans. Furthermore, Burns *et al.* (2015:83) argue that young people in post-apartheid South Africa may respond to their challenging lived realities by seeking new ways to express their identities and asserting them “*ikasi style*”², which might include behaviours such as substance abuse, violence, and hyper-consumerism. These behaviours are contradictory to what is expected in the traditional schooling environment, but are lived realities of many South African young people. According to Swartz (2010:14), violence, crime, gangsterism, substance abuse, poverty, and religious and cultural beliefs, interact in producing complex moralities in young people. Steyn, Badenhorst and Kamper (2010:169) refer to the aforementioned contradiction between young people’s educational aspirations and the South African reality as an ethical dilemma. According to the aforementioned study, 1326 adolescents from various socio-economic backgrounds indicated an optimistic view regarding escaping their poor backgrounds, and achieving their career- and societal aspirations amidst daily challenges such as poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, and violent crime.

As many of 60% of the school leavers do not follow the traditional post-school life trajectories associated with a vocational or occupational focus (Dwyer *et al.*, 1998). Thus, young people’s aspirations and future expectations do not automatically fall into two basic trajectories of education and employment. In response to Dwyer *et al.* (1998)’s study, Alloway *et al.* (2004:35) assert that the different post-school trajectories that young people follow can be understood in light of their personal responses to the changing social- and economic world within they live. Hence, the way in which youth interact with their schooling, depends on a complex relationship with their identity formation and their socio-economic backgrounds (Soudien, 2001:312). Soudien (2001:312-313) proposes that the learning identities of youth are formed through the intertwining relationship of formal and informal discourses operating in schools. The author refers to the formal discourse of a school as what a school, as a community, seeks to commit itself to i.e., the stance or approach that the school itself develops as a mission for its educational work. The informal

² The author uses this term to describe alternative modes of belonging adopted by young people as they craft their identities.

discourse is the world of social relationships which young people inhabit, which is associated with their community- and cultural interests. Hattam, Brennan, Zipin and Comber (2009:304) and Fataar (2015:108) agree with Soudien that for many working class youth, the formal discourse that they encounter at school and the informal discourse that they know are in contradiction with each other. Hattam *et al.* (2009:304) state that the cultural habits brought to school by students from disadvantaged communities, are not utilised and scaffolded into, or connected with, traditional school learning methods and contents. They further argue that for the working class, “their lack of fit with the culturally arbitrary selections that are valued by school become individualised and internalised as ‘failure’” (Hattam *et al.*, 2009:304). This contradiction leads to students experiencing a misalignment between their home and their schooling environments, and thus the way in which these students construct their schooling identities. Fataar describes the functioning of schools, in respect of their students’ disadvantaged contexts, as follows:

...schools have hitherto been unable to meaningfully recognise the school going subject in their midst, nor have they been able to provide compelling curricular and pedagogical registers to better connect with these students’ complex and fecund identifications, social circumstances, literacies and knowledges (2015:108).

As such, it is important to consider the role of social class differentiation in the educational subjectivity formation, as well as the educational achievement routes, of South African young people. Subsequently, the impact of social class on the educational subjectivity formation, achievement, and educational aspirations of young people, will be discussed next.

2.3. Social class and education

In conditions where financial-, emotional-, and structural support systems are present and enabling, such as in middle class households, young people are able to establish secure attachments and a positive self-identity (Burns *et al.*, 2015:83). These factors facilitate healthy interpersonal relationships and productive participation in economic- and educational domains. The middle class in society can be defined as those who form part of the dominant or elite labour division and who

make use of particular forms of cultural- and social norms and values. The working class, by comparison, possess cultural norms and -values that differ from those traditionally valued in society. Burns *et al.* (2015:83) further assert that the support systems that working class youth need to be able to exercise their agency and craft productive identities, are largely absent in their lives. Soudien (2007) and Swartz (2010) agree with Burns *et al.* (2015) and argue that South African young people deal with obstacles such as poverty (due to mass structural unemployment), violence, and fractured families and communities. The aforementioned factors limit opportunities for young people to exercise personal agency and demonstrate their abilities in a middle class affirming school system. Thus, the supportive conditions, present in the lives of middle class children, are absent or disabling in many working class households. Individuals who are excluded from social-, economic-, and emotional opportunities find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty, and transmit this status, both materially and emotionally, to their children.

This sentiment of entrapment of the working class is echoed by De Lannoy, Leibbrandt and Frame (2015:24). The authors argue that young people lack access to quality education, financial resources to study, information for decision-making, and social networks, all of which can help them access higher educational- or employment opportunities. The aforementioned factors lead to the working class becoming trapped in the “intergenerational cycle of poverty”. De Lannoy *et al.* (2016:25-26) describe intergenerational transmission of poverty as the process of older generations transmitting both positive and negative “capitals” to the younger generations. Capitals include financial capital (resources like assets, but also debt, land and money); human capital (e.g. levels of education, but also health or illness); cultural capital (cultural knowledge social of systems such as education and the labour market); social capital (networks); and symbolic capital (which provides status and a place of belonging in society). Children from working class households are more subjected to the intergenerational poverty cycle, as they are restricted by their families’ financial-, cultural-, social-, and emotional resources, as opposed to the middle class child. This argument of social differentiation is illustrated by Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller’s (2013:730) study, which draws on Bourdieu’s (1980) concept of capitals and his analogy of ‘playing the game’ of education. The authors assert that middle class students may maintain their advantages through the acquisition,

maintenance, development, and mobilisation of their inherited or acquired cultural, social-, and economic resources. Further, these students have an internalised understanding of the game of schooling and are able to succeed without actively considering the mechanisms of their own operations. Others, who did not have access to these resources whilst growing up, have to operate in a more intentional way.

Within education systems, the process of an individual's identity formation, as being a subject of schooling, can be referred to as the formation of the individual's educational subjectivity. According to Fataar (2015:7) a focus on youth subjectivity provides one way of understanding how educational subjects are positioned within the schooling system. Subjectivity provides a lens through which one can study how educational subjects come into being through their interactions with their social worlds, their schooling, and the complex identifications that they make through their engagement with their lived realities. Schools, as inherently middle class institutions, place worth on the cultural values of the middle class. First generation students (FGSs) with working class identities, who do not have access to middle class cultural capital, thus experience a feeling of misalignment in schools. The cultural misalignment that working class students experience in schools may cause them to disengage from their schooling (Fataar, 2015; McFadden & Munns, 2002; Willis, 1977). Marks, Fleming, Long & McMillan (2000:28) also refer to cultural factors, such as cultural capital and social capital, to explain differential participation in education due to socio-economic background. These authors assert that the education system rewards students from the dominant culture in society, who have attitudes and behaviours that are aligned with the expectations of educational gatekeepers (cultural capital), whereas social capital emphasises the family- and social networks that help (or hinder) a student's educational experience. Social capital also includes the manner in which parents convey positive values about education to their children, the time and effort spent helping with children's school work, role modelling, and other attitudinal- and behavioural patterns that are likely to improve student learning and interest in continuing with education.

Hatcher (2006:202) argues that the most accurate estimate of school success is family wealth (in terms of parental education), as social class is closely correlated with academic achievement. Hatcher (2006:212) further asserts that family income

and occupation are the most common ways in which class is defined in relation to school. Middle class families are more likely to embody and transmit the dominant form of cultural capital to their children. Moreover, the cultural capital embodied by the middle class offers significant benefits in terms of school knowledge such as: how to choose a school and subject choices; how to negotiate with teachers; how to effectively support the child's homework or assessed coursework; curriculum choices and their likely subsequent benefits; and how to apply to university and choose an appropriate course. Middle class parents, having already succeeded in the education system, possess the communication skills and confidence which enable them to secure academic success for their offspring. In comparison to the aforementioned study, Khattab (2003:296) developed a conceptual model which determined the influences on working class students' aspirations and academic attainment. He found that several factors, such as: school setting, social capital, students' perceptions of educational success and socio-economic background, exert significant effects on students' aspirations and act as channels to transmit parents' values, norms, knowledge, and expectations to their children. Khattab (2003:296) found that even though parents and communities did not have high levels of education, they viewed education as an important means for personal- and family advancement and for escaping the vicious cycles of poverty and deprivation. Contrary to Hatcher's argument, the working class families and schools in Khattab's (2003:297) study generated high educational aspirations amongst the students, by conveying to them their values and perceptions concerning educational success. Thus, aspirations were found to be strongly correlated to self-perception, rather than merely the socio-economic status of parents and students.

The cultural capital misalignment that working class students experience in schools, may lead to a "self-selection" effect, according to an empirical assessment done by Wildhagen (2009:174). The self-selection effect argues that the cultural capital that students possess has an effect on academic performance by determining students' expectations and aspirations for future educational attainment. Wildhagen (2009:179) argues that the self-selection effect causes students, who do not possess middle class cultural capital, to view school as an alienating and qualitatively poorer experience than their middle class counterparts, which leads them to be less likely to aspire to higher education. According to Reay (2001:334), despite more than 100

years of universal state education in England, the authority in the educational system remains in the hands of the middle classes. This phenomenon of symbolic violence is found in educational systems across the world. As the middle class controls the education system, the system itself places value on middle class, rather than working class, cultural capital. The author asserts that regardless of what working class individuals are able to negotiate and achieve for themselves within the educational field, the collective patterns of working class educational trajectories remain sharply different from those of the middle classes. Thus, society's valorisation of middle class cultural capital in schools affects the academic outcomes and aspirations of majority of the working class, partly because students who do not possess the "valued form" of cultural capital often develop lower educational expectations based on societal norms.

Middle class students are at an educational advantage as they are better able to communicate with teachers regarding the middle class school curriculum. This communication in turn contributes to teachers' positive perceptions of these students. The negative experiences of the working class, who are not in possession of middle class cultural capital, reflect in the self-making processes of these students, which lead to them accepting lower educational standards. The self-selection effect may cause working class students to experience schooling as "outcasts on the inside" (Bourdieu in Reay, 2001:336) and therefore not to exercise strong academic effort during high school and consequently to be less likely to pursue higher education. Konstantinovski (2003:246) affirms the self-selection effect by offering insight into how young people experience their educational aspirations and how these aspirations are influenced by social class differentiation processes reproduced in schools. He argues that differences in orientation and social behaviour of youths in the educational field are a reflection and replication of differentiation in society. The school system fails those who are not able to align themselves with the cultural capital of the school. Working class students, with aspirations to achieve higher positions in society through education, become aware of these socially imposed barriers upon entering school and thereafter often lower their aspirations.

Paul Willis' (1977) longitudinal study offers a classic example of how social class differentiation can lead to working class youth experiencing education as "not for them". Willis' main study group comprised of twelve non-academic, white, working-

class males, in their penultimate year of schooling, from a rural industrial working class mining town in England. The participants were all part of the same social network, and were in the same grade level at an all-boys, working class high school in their rural town. Willis examined how these students, as social agents, subjectively experience the schooling culture in their communities, and how these subjective experiences determine the labour force in the town. Through the use of interviews, Willis investigated the phenomenon of how education and labouring is subjectively understood and objectively applied in the class formation processes of different social groups. Furthermore, Willis asserts that these processes help to construct both the identities of particular subjects, and the distinctive class forms which they to identify with. Willis' study illustrated that a desire to belong to a social group, lead to the working class boys actively disassociating from school, i.e. rejecting the formal school culture in preference of belonging to a social group.

Amid the complex navigations that the working class have to traverse within the schooling environment, educational geographers are becoming increasingly concerned with the concept of aspiration in terms of access to school and higher education (Halloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011:80). Zipin, Sellar, Brennan and Gale (2013:2) argue that due to the rise of neoliberalism in education, governments emphasise individual aspiration to succeed, instead of attempting to redress social inequalities through state welfare. Halloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2011:82) describe the neoliberal approach of nation states to their citizens, as that of an enabler or facilitator. Furthermore, this citizen-subject relationship is based around middle class norms against which the working class is also measured. Thus, neoliberal policies do not target the structural inequalities in society that lead to the dissonance or failure of the working class, but rather attribute these occurrences to a lack of aspiration. In doing so, schools do not acknowledge that social inequalities suppress working class students' aspirations. Amidst the aforementioned structural barriers that working class youth encounter, the question of how these young people construct their identities and exercise their agency to access education, remains. Johnson (2002:1308) states that although much has been written regarding the societal barriers that youth encounter in reaching their aspirations, little attention has been given to how individual young people form and maintain their goals, values, and aspirations in education.

Within the South African context, social class differentiation was reinforced through the political system of apartheid education. The stratifying practices of apartheid education is still visible in post-apartheid South Africa, and have been the primary conditioning experience for young people in schooling (ensconced in the institutional habitus of schools). The nature of the curriculum and the racial- and ethnic character of schools, implicitly position and prepare young white and black people for their respective allocated places in the economy and broader society (Sadovnik, 2006:11). Consequently, the aspirations carried by the “born free” generation are not aligned with the experiences that they have inside schools, which result in them constructing identities that are much more complex than the stereotypes ordained for them by apartheid (Soudien, 2012:102).

2.4. Students in rural educational contexts in South Africa

Students from rural areas are more likely to believe that there is no use in going to university and instead become disaffected by formal schooling. Mills and Gale (2010:30) assert that youth from rural areas will often resort to alternatives other than education to survive economically, such as social welfare and/or the informal/underground economy. Mills and Gale (2010:31) further argue that within the Australian context, educational and post-school prospects are especially poor for young people from low socio-economic backgrounds, particularly indigenous young people and those from rural areas. Alloway *et al.* (2004:2-3) agree that the low socio-economic status of working class students adversely affects their schooling success. Factors such as hunger, financial hardships, and restricted access to educational resources have a severely negative influence on the educational achievement and aspirations of these students. Rural working class students are therefore significantly less likely than urban students to believe that a university degree will offer them rewarding career prospects (Willis, 1977:126-127), which affects the manner in which they construct their educational subjectivities.

The conditions of South African rural schools are similarly hostile and isolated from the urban university context (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). These inadequate learning circumstances have resulted from the apartheid education system, where race determined the state allocation of resources to schools. The author of the report explains that,

I have often said that the most profound challenges to South Africa's development and democracy can be found in its rural hinterlands. These areas, systematically and intentionally deprived of the most basic resources under apartheid, continue to lag behind the rest of the country in the post-apartheid era. (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005:vii)

Furthermore, the Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005) describes South African rural environments as impoverished, and the physical land harsh and demanding. Rural schools, which are influenced by political- and economic change in the geographically distant cities, are often ill equipped, under-resourced and poorly staffed. These conditions are closely intertwined with South Africa's past and consequently display the inequality between urban and rural areas. Motala and Vally (2010:90) state that due to this lingering legacy of the apartheid, the expectation that learning be equally successful in rural and urban schools, despite the lack of fundamental resources and support given to rural schools, is unfair and unrealistic. Schools in rural areas are chronically short of qualified teachers in specialised subjects like Science and Mathematics, the result of which is that these subjects cannot be offered. Consequently, students from such schools fail to meet university entrance requirements. Also, environments for facilitating learning, e.g. books in the home and parents who help teach their children how to read, are not the norm in rural areas (Chetty, 2014:92). The relationship that such students have had with schooling led to them historically forming "tenuous" or insubstantial connections with formal school going, i.e. these students tend to form fragile academic identities (Fataar, 2012:52).

Empirical research on the South African schooling context in relation to young people's identities is limited (Soudien, 2001:311), and even more so on how young people construct their educational subjectivities and aspirations in rural areas. Recent research done on the subjectivities of young people in South Africa focused predominantly on students that are in an urban schooling environment (Fataar, 2017; Norodien-Fataar, 2016; Fataar, 2015; Kapp, *et al.* 2014 & Soudien, 2001). The literature is lacking regarding rural students' formation of their educational subjectivities, where the agricultural practices in the surrounding areas determine the

schooling practices in the town. According to Steyn, *et al.*, (2010:173), 72% of South Africa's poor live in rural areas. Furthermore, Halloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2011:81) assert that notably few researchers have engaged in studies on how young people's school experiences, parental influence, and neighbourhoods impact on their educational- and future employment aspirations. This research study addresses this gap in the literature by investigating how successful first generation students (FGSs) constructed their educational subjectivities in response to their family-, social-community-, and school environments. I now proceed to discuss the aforementioned environments on the educational aspirations of young people, with a specific focus on rural youth.

2.4.1 Family environment

Three South African studies (Marshall & Case, 2010; Kapp *et al.*, 2014; Sonamzi, 2017) illustrate examples of the working class family backgrounds against which township students have entered university. The students referred to in these studies navigated their educational achievement routes successfully despite challenging home circumstances such as: poverty, child-headed homes, uninvolved parenting, exposure to criminal activities and violence. Although these studies concern students from urban and not rural working class families, who successfully transitioned into university, the research provides insight into how these students transcended their working class family environments into university. Another study by Tate, Caperton, Kaiser, Pruitt, White and Hall (2015:304) indicates that working class youth's experiences of their parents' career- and financial struggles were connected to their motivation to succeed in school, university, and beyond. Some participants were further motivated by the desire to act as a role model for younger siblings and to alleviate the difficulties of other siblings entering university as FGSs.

A South African study on the career aspirations of rural-origin students makes mention of several family-related reasons for rural students having low career aspirations. These reasons included: students having to migrate from home communities to cities to attend university, safety- and security concerns, as well as the fear of ending up socially isolated and experiencing a culture misalignment (Diab, Flack, Mabuza & Reid, 2012:2). However, the rural-origin individuals in the study collectively made mention of a strong sense of family belonging, such as older

siblings who graduated university, which inspired them to pursue higher education. Additionally, the motivation to succeed in their tertiary studies was intensified by the lack of education within previous generations. Similarly, in another study of FGSs, participants consistently declared that their families were what inspired them to enter university (Gofen, 2009:109).

Despite the constrained living conditions of township families, Sonamzi (2017:30) asserts that such families have domestic practices that provide necessary capitals that enable their children to achieve in school. Sonamzi (2017:17) draws on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and Yosso's (2005) notion of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), to explore how selected township families mobilised their domestic practices to support their children's education. The CCW capitals include: aspirational-, linguistic-, familial-, social-, navigational-, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005:76). Sonamzi (2017:22) particularly refers to the familial support of the township families, which included the way in which siblings, parents, and extended family members offered their emotional support and encouragement to the children. Other examples of domestic support practices included constant motivation, high expectations, and a belief that their children can achieve in school. In response to their parents' expectations and aspirations for their futures, the students appeared not to want to disappoint their parents and were aspiring to be successful and to improve the situation in their homes. Families also involved themselves in social networks within the township context by involving its members in extramural sport-, cultural-, religious-, and educational activities (Sonamzi, 2017:25). Additionally, these families made use of their social networks to build the linguistic- and literacy capabilities of their children by engaging in activities such as storytelling, as well as encouraging their children to build friendships across linguistic- and cultural divides.

The aforementioned studies indicate that family is a strong motivating factor for working class young people to succeed academically. Moreover, even when familial circumstances are not conducive to their learning, aspirant FGSs still find ways to construct their educational achievement routes.

2.4.2 Community environment

In a study of the aspirations of working class communities, Halloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2011:84) mention that principals perceived that low-income communities,

such as rural towns, are limited by low aspirations and lack of cultural know-how. These limitations arise as a consequence of experiences and surroundings. Limited opportunities for skilled work in rural communities may discourage young people from undertaking further education, which could otherwise be a pathway to employment. This translates into a loss of skills for rural communities and the perpetuation of educational disadvantage in many rural areas (Black, Duff, Saggors & Baines, 2000:40).

To understand why young people from rural areas do not pursue education and training opportunities to the same extent as their urban peers, Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman (2002) investigated how social capital influences rural young people's work/study values and priorities, with regard to post-school pathways. Family members and social networks are sources of information and advice that help shape the aspirations and expectations of young people, as they forge pathways from school to higher education and/or work, and assist them in raising or lowering their work/study goals. Shucksmith (2000) in Kilpatrick and Abott-Chapman (2002:44) assert that young people nearing the end of their schooling in rural and remote areas are often forced between two choices. Such students can either choose to stay near family and aim for the limited rural labour market, or choose the emotional- and financial cost of leaving home and attempting to enter the more advantageous national labour market. Furthermore, familial connections and social networks are often the means by which rural youth find employment, which offers a sense of security. By contrast, leaving the security of home and facing social dislocation, might make entering the urban labour market appear less appealing and more risky to rural youth (Kilpatrick & Abott-Chapman, 2002:56).

In contrast to young people who succumb to the restrictions of their rural community circumstances, there are those who use their backgrounds as a motivation for social mobility. Fataar and Fillies (2016) offer accounts of South African young people who used their challenging rural circumstances to construct productive learning identities. These students used their difficult lived experiences as an inspiration to generate high educational aspirations, which motivated them to escape their circumstances (Kapp *et al.*, 2014:54). Similarly, Marshall and Case (2010:496) offer a narrative analysis of how a poor and orphaned black township student used his disadvantaged circumstances as a motivation to get into university. After becoming an orphan in

high school, the participant of this study made the decision to stop partaking in criminal activities with his friends, and to actively focus his attention on successfully getting into university.

2.4.3 Social environment

Past studies on the effect of the social environment of schooling on working class students' aspirations and achievement, indicate that peer relations are often not favourable to educational attainment. McFadden and Munns (2002: 358-359) refer to Willis' (1977) study on rural working class students, to argue that at critical points of engagement, cultural support for school resistance amongst peers often becomes a crucial factor in young people deciding to reject what formal schooling offers them. Students may recognise the potential benefits that school engagement can offer them, however, belonging to and experiencing the cultural solidarity of a social group overrides the prospect of individual advancement. The social context of a small town thus fosters a sense of belonging which discourages youth from leaving its boundaries and entering foreign terrain. Students shape their educational subjectivities and learning orientations, at the intersection of home, school, peer-groups, socio-cultural influences, and relationships. The dynamic relationship between students, their siblings, and their peers is reflected in their choice of learning strategies and how they position themselves in the wider school culture.

More recent studies illustrate how academically achieving working class youths make conscious decisions to dissociate themselves from their "non-academic peers". Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009:1107) report that for their participants, putting their academics first entailed avoiding groups that were perceived as less committed to learning. Furthermore, where "non-academic" groups constituted the majority of the school, participants referred to experiences of exclusion from peers, which were often self-imposed. Kapp *et al.* (2014:57) assert that participants in their study actively distanced themselves from their peers and deliberately sought out equally serious students as themselves to form study groups with. In a study of rural working class students that entered a mentorship programme, Lockett and Lockett (2009: 470) suggest supportive relationships that offer students recognition and status, are vital contributors to the academic success of such students. The authors further assert that this may especially be the case for aspirant FGSs, who often are not in a

position to receive appropriate support and social- and cultural capital from their homes and primary socialisation.

2.4.4 School environment

Existing literature on how working class students experience their schooling environments is conflicting. Rates of participation and achievement may be lower in rural compared to urban areas due to factors such as: low socio-economic status; negative community attitudes to education; high staff turnover (i.e. inexperienced teachers); inadequate preparation of teachers for teaching in schools with low levels of basic literacy skills; restricted access to university subjects; and perceived restricted employment opportunities (Black *et al.*, 2000:59). However, in a South African study, rural-origin students tended to identify positive role models as influential persons when asked about their decision to pursue university (Diab *et al.*, 2012:5). These mentors were often high school teachers or principals who encouraged students to pursue tertiary education, assisted in university applications, and offered continued support throughout their studies. In contrast to the Diab *et al.*'s (2012) study, Kapp *et al.* (2014:55) report that although a particular participant indicated that she had felt supported by her teachers in the high school setting, they actively discouraged her from pursuing tertiary studies.

Ingram (2009:422) argues that the institutional habitus of a school plays a definite role in the academic success or failure of working class students. The author asserts that it is difficult for working class children to find belonging in a school outside of their local geographical context. In order for such youth to succeed they must grapple with a process of acculturation, which involves accepting their home identities as inferior and assimilating into the institutional habitus of the school. Similarly, in their study on academically achieving working class students, Reay *et al.* (2009:1106-1107) remarked that secondary schooling environments did not provide the working class with easy access to the dominant cultural capital required for meritocratic success in school. The authors further noted that participants also reported a feeling of not fitting into their middle class schooling environments.

The family-, social-, community-, and school environments of rural students can thus either act as a motivating- or restraining factor with regards to their educational aspirations and -achievements. As mentioned by Kapp *et al.* (2014:58), students

realised that the classroom was not conducive to their learning and started to make use of other spaces. These spaces included studying home during school time (with the knowledge of teachers) and staying over with friends to study. I propose that the way rural high school students navigate through these different environments to achieve their educational aspirations, depends on how they construct their educational subjectivities and how these subjectivities interact with the aforementioned structures to generate productive educational achievement routes.

2.5. Educational achievement routes of rural students

This study explores how rural first generation students (FGSs) constructed their educational subjectivities during high school, and the way these subjectivities determined how they established their educational achievement routes from a rural high school into an urban university environment. Hence, the participants in this study are rural-origin FGSs who are currently attending what is considered at an elite South African university. A FGS is defined as a student whose parents have not completed a bachelor's degree (Tate *et al.*, 2015:304). FGSs embody the social concept of "equal opportunity," which is manifested through one's chances to acquire education at any level, independent of one's social background (Gofen, 2009:104). The author further asserts that past research regarding the educational trajectories of FGSs focused more on comparing the first generation cohort with their second generation peers than on their own pathways into university. Thus, there is a literature gap regarding the processes that enable FGSs to become the first individuals from their families to break the intergenerational educational cycle.

First generation students often experience difficulties with transitioning into the middle class institutional habitus of universities due to a lack of prior exposure and involvement. For example, FGSs encounter barriers such as financial restrictions, lack of parental support, and geographical barriers to access, which illustrate the powerful influence of structural factors on educational opportunity (Bowl, 2001). Zipin and Brennan (2006:337) agree with Bowl, as they argue that FGSs born in the de-industrialising times personify newly complex experiences of rural and working class positions, which bear significance in terms of orientation to university study. Many such students grew up in families with financial struggles and rising job instability and thus feel greater stress about gaining university degrees for access to decent

work, contrary to their middle class counterparts. According to Reay *et al.* (2001:861), disparities in university choice were most evident in the extent to which students talked about geographical constraints. Financial barriers can severely affect the educational aspirations of working class students (Ball, Reay & David, 2002:337). A localism (concern over geographic restraints) was prevalent in the narratives of the working class students in her study, that was absent from the narratives of more economically privileged students. Kapp *et al.* (2014:52 52) argue that the limited pool of working class students who attend university in South Africa, are the top achievers in their under-resourced schools and are generally the first generation at university. The authors further pose the question of how these students persist and succeed at school, despite coming from social backgrounds that do not seem to be conducive to learning, and concluded that working class students who succeeded in going to university, have developed strategies to navigate their challenging educational environments.

Reay, Davies, David and Ball (2001:860) describe the first generation cohort of university applicants as survivors of the process of breaking down class barriers in education. According to the authors, the process of navigating through a middle class education system, involves as a complex process of finding, and at the same time losing, oneself. Reay (2001:337) argues that for the working class, being an aspirant FGS is pretentious, virtually by definition. The author suggests that the promise of university itself poses a threat to the self-identity of aspirant FGSs, as class hybridity often clashes with a sense authenticity. This clash is rooted in the instinct of working class students to hold onto their cultural selves, and simultaneously escape the structural limitations of their social class. This process of self-realization has a “negative tinge” for the working class students, as their aspirations are enmeshed in uncertainties about where they fit into the unfamiliar environment of university. This is not the case with middle class students. Rural FGSs are able to mobilise a limited range of resources in support of their schooling- and educational aspirations compared to middle class- or second generation students, whose access to resources and cultural capital is more closely aligned with society’s requirements for schooling. This structural dimension limits the quality and extent of FGSs’ engagement with their schooling, especially those from rural areas (Fataar, 2015:108). Thus, the academic success of FGSs could be attributed

predominantly to their agentic self-formation processes, rather than active support in their learning environments (Reay *et al.*, 2009:1107).

The alienating way in which working class students (especially FGSs) experience their schooling, lead to them finding alternative pathways to reach their educational aspirations (Fataar, 2015:77:81-83). Fataar (2017:4) describes these alternate pathways as being in parallel existence of the school's formal education structures, from where they work out their educational becoming or subjectivities through strategic educational practices. Ingram (2009) did a recent study which builds on the work previously done by Willis (1977) and Reay (2001). Ingram's research concerns the intersecting of schooling success/failure and locality, and how these factors impact on the working class identity of adolescent boys. Ingram found that working class individuals often internalise a culture of resistance to schooling as a means to protect their local identity (similar to Willis' findings), and academically successful individuals often become ambivalent or resistant to their cultural identities, as a means of promoting academic success (similar to Reay's findings). A later study by Reay *et al.* (2009:1105) affirmed that successful working class students displayed the ability to successfully move across different fields. Such students seemed to combine a strong connection their home localities with a classic middle class academic disposition, which they had acquired early in their schooling careers.

2.6. Conclusion

This literature review has identified the need to investigate the educational experiences and achievement of rural-origin FGSs with university aspirations. While many international studies focus on working class relationships to education (Bourdieu, 1977; Willis, 1977; Reay *et al.*, 2001; McFadden & Munns, 2002; Gale & Parker, 2015; Willis, 2003; Reay *et al.*, 2009), not much research has been done on how FGSs in rural areas go about realizing their educational aspirations. A yearlong study carried out by Mills and Gale (2010), focuses on the disadvantaged circumstances within which rural working class students go about their schooling, but does not elaborate on how the in the study students achieve success despite their educational disadvantages. The research that has been done concerning the educational experiences of working class students has primarily focused on the barriers that these students encounter in accessing a university education. Few

studies concern the educational pathways and strategies applied by successful working class students during high schools. Moreover, these studies predominantly focus on the urban educational environment, such as peripheral township schools. The aforementioned studies neglect the pathways of rural working class students, whose rural origins cause them to face a host of additional barriers in accessing university, as discussed earlier. The limited number of studies that have been done with regards to rural working class youth, focus on their subjectivity formation processes in high school (Joorst, 2013 ; Groenewald, 2013 & Fillies, 2015), but do not include the pathways and strategic mechanisms that these students employ to achieve their academic aspirations of accessing a university education. This study will specifically focus on four dimensions of the educational routes that rural high school students construct to be the first people in their families to successfully access university. By studying the family-, social-, community-, and school environments of these students, researchers might better understand how rural FGSs are able to construct successful educational achievement routes during high school within their difficult life worlds.

Chapter 3 Theoretical framework

3.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an analytical lens to examine the main research question of this study, namely: *How do first generation students from a rural town construct their educational achievement routes during their high school years to gain access to university?* This research is based on the roles of subjectivity formation and agency in how rural first generation students (FGSs) established their educational achievement routes during their high school years, to gain entrance into university. For this study, the focus is on the family-, social-, community-, and school environments of academically achieving FGSs in high school. The theoretical framework will thus be oriented around the strategies that these students employed during their high school years, to be able to construct successful educational achievement routes.

This study combines the thinking tools of three theories. The core theoretical framework of this study is Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. The cultural capital that an individual possesses is intricately related to how they construct their educational subjectivities, as will be elaborated upon later in this chapter. Thereafter, Yosso's framework of community cultural wealth (CCW) will be offered as a supportive framework to account for the limitations of Bourdieu's conceptualisation of cultural capital. The CCW framework consists of aspirational capital, familial capital, navigational capital, resistant capital, social capital, and linguistic capital. Yosso (2005:70) argues that these capitals are often unacknowledged and unrecognised in middle class societies. However, Yosso's framework still does not adequately explain how successful FGSs, such as the participants in this study, utilised the CCW capitals during their high years, whilst other students in their environments did not. To fill this gap, Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain's (1998) theory of Figured Worlds will be used as an explanation of how the students in this study achieved their academic aspirations of going to university despite their working class and rural circumstances.

3.2. Bourdieu's concepts

Bourdieu's social reproduction theory provides several thinking tools which are used to discuss social reproduction and inequality in schools. These thinking tools include habitus, cultural capital, practice, bodily hexis, field, and doxa. The habitus arguably lies at the heart of Bourdieu's theoretical framework (Reay, 2004:431), which Bourdieu (1977:82) offers to explain how people identify their places in the world and how they are culturally inclined to respond to social structures. In a later work, Bourdieu (1998a:81) describes the habitus as a socialised, structured body, which has incorporated the immanent structures of the surrounding world and which structures the perception of that world, as well as the actions taken in that world. The habitus can be viewed as an unconscious- and subconscious cultural regulatory mechanism, which reproduces the structures within which it is generated. The habitus has been subject to widespread criticism, mainly on the basis of its latent determinism (Reay, 2004:432).

The participants in this study followed a route different to those from the same social world as themselves, where most young people do not attach value to school and university. As aforementioned, this study uses Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital as a theoretical lens to explore how these FGSs successfully navigated between their family-, social-, community-, and school environments to be able to gain entry into an elite university. Thus, the primary focus of this study is on the strategies and mechanisms applied by these students, including how they constructed their educational subjectivities and which capitals they employed to succeed in their schooling.

3.2.1. Cultural capital

Cultural capital can be acquired unconsciously to varying extents, depending on the age, socialisation, and social class of an individual. Cultural capital always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition. These conditions are discernable by identifiers such as characteristic pronunciations or accents. The aforementioned identifiers, together with social class structures, help to determine the value of cultural capital. Furthermore, cultural capital cannot be accumulated beyond the appropriating capacities of an individual agent (Bourdieu, 1986:18). Bourdieu (1986:16) further asserts that the distribution of the differentially valued types of

cultural capital, at any particular time, represents the immanent structure of its social world, i.e., the set of constraints inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way and determines the chances of success for practices. Bourdieu (1986:17) conceptualised cultural capital as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes. He did this by relating academic success to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and within class fractions.

The dominance of cultural capital is dependent on the objective relations between the system of economic production and the system producing the producers, i.e. the school. This relation is itself constituted by the ideology of the given society, as well as the relation between the school system and the family. A society requires the necessary literacy to preserve and accumulate the cultural resources it has inherited from the past, as well as the educational system which would give its agents the aptitudes and dispositions required for the symbolic re-appropriation of those resources (Bourdieu, 1977:186). Bourdieu (1977:187) further asserts that academic qualifications are to cultural capital what money is to economic capital. Academic qualifications offer a set value to its holders. Thus, any one individual who possesses the same qualification can take the place of another. However, as the exchange of dominant cultural capital is invisible to the lower classes, the educational system minimises the obstacles to the free circulation of cultural capital. This regulation of cultural capital by the education system results in the dominant form of cultural capital being encased in individual persons from particular backgrounds. Consequently, the education system contributes to the reproduction of the established social order and enables the dominant classes to officially access cultural capital through qualifications, but also unofficially through socialisation processes such as family, friends, and peers (Bourdieu, 1977:188).

3.2.2. Limitations of cultural capital

There are several critiques against Bourdieu's theories. In *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value*, Frow (1995) describes Bourdieu's works as essentialist, i.e. that Bourdieu tends to collapse various social groups and various social experiences into a single group and a single experience, in the interests of arguing for a dominant

field-specific logic. As aforementioned, Bourdieu (1998:20) argues that educational systems reproduce social stratification by continuing

...the pre-existing order, that is, the gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital ... by a series of selection operations, the system separates the holders on inherited cultural capital from those who lack it. Differences in aptitude being inseparable from social differences according to inherited capital, the system thus tends to maintain pre-existing social differences.

Thus, the concept of cultural capital by definition attributes the academic success of middle class students to inherited social- and interpersonal dispositions, which are valued by educational institutions, and misrecognises the culture and knowledge of individuals and households who do not form part of the dominant culture in society. For this reason Yosso (2005:70) critiques Bourdieu's conceptualisation of cultural capital as an explanation for social reproduction in schools, as it implies that the dominant cultural capital in society is more valuable than the forms utilised by socially disadvantaged communities.

3.3. Community cultural wealth

Tara Yosso (2005) applied the critical race theory to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, and developed a community cultural wealth (CCW) framework. She argued that while Bourdieu's work attempted to provide a structural critique of social- and cultural reproduction, his theory of cultural capital implies that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor (Yosso, 2005:76). Yosso rejects Bourdieu's implication that middle class cultural capital is more valuable than working class capitals, and inherently bestows more social power to individuals who possess it. To determine how the working class mobilise possibilities that education offers them, whilst recognising that their circumstances are restrictive, Yosso argues that these students possess alternative capitals that they use to construct viable and successful educational achievement routes. The working class who possess, and are able to apply these capitals successfully, are able to access the unfamiliar university environment unlike the majority of their working class peers.

With her CCW framework, Yosso (2005:76) challenges the assumption that working class cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts ought to be viewed as deficit or 'lacking', i.e. as resources that cannot be used productively to support educational aspiration, for example. Yosso argues rather that these assets should be viewed as key resources in poor people's lives. Yosso consequently outlines six forms of capitals as part of the CCW framework, as an alternative to the Bourdieuan conceptualisation of cultural capital. The capitals comprise of: aspirational capital, familial capital, navigational capital, resistant capital, social capital, and linguistic capital. Yosso (2005:70) further describes what Bourdieu refers to as the marginalised groups in society as "Communities of Color". She acknowledges the way that racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices, and discourses, which is relevant in the South African schooling context. For the purpose of this study, the marginalised group concerned are rural-origin FGSs.

3.3.1 Aspirational capital

Aspirational capital refers to the ability of an individual to maintain future-oriented hopes and possibilities, despite having to overcome various barriers to achieve such aspirations (Yosso, 2005:77). Individuals who are FGSs have a strong resilience to adverse situations as they are able to sustain their educational aspirations amidst hardships such as constraining financial-, structural-, and educational support. Additionally, as they are the first individuals in their families to become university-educated, they often become the beacon of aspiration for the rest of their families, which indicates that aspirational capital is transferable.

3.3.2 Familial capital

Familial capital refers to cultural knowledge forms nurtured within the family environment. These knowledge forms carry a sense of community history, memory, cultural intuition, and kinship, and raise awareness for the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to communities and its resources (Yosso, 2005:79). The kinship that Yosso refers to acts as a means of emotional-, moral-, and educational support from which FGSs are able to draw on throughout their educational trajectories. In a study of 103 FGSs, McCarron (2012) discovered that if their high school aspirations and family support are high, FGSs were more persistent and successful in their educational achievement routes. Familial capital exists within and

between families, and is fostered through sport, school, religious gatherings, and other social community settings.

3.3.3 Navigational capital

Navigational capital refers to the ability to an individual to move strategically through social institutions, specifically the ability to manoeuvre through institutions in which the individual experiences a cultural capital misalignment (Yosso, 2005:80). Navigational capital includes individual agency within institutional constraints, as well as the use of social networks to facilitate community navigation through social systems.

3.3.4 Resistant capital

Resistant capital can be described as the possession of knowledge forms and skills that challenges and transcends inequality in social environments (Yosso, 2005:80). According to Yosso, resistant capital is an amalgam of attitudes and behaviours that challenge the status quo and is a means of maintaining and passing on CCW in the face of race-, gender-, and class inequality. Unlike self-defeating or conformist forms of resistance that feed back into the system of subordination, Yosso (2005:81) asserts that resistant capital is transformative and includes cultural knowledge of the structures of racism and a motivation to transform such oppressive structures.

3.3.5 Social capital

Social capital comprises the networks of people and the community resources that are mobilised by FGSs. Social capital ties into familial- and navigational capital, as these individuals make use of peer, and other social contacts, as instrumental emotional support to establish their educational achievement routes from school into university (Yosso, 2005:79). An example of social networks is illustrated by Kapp *et al.* (2014:57), where black students from impoverished home environments spoke of associating themselves with similarly serious students in high school in order to stay focused in their academics.

3.3.6 Linguistic capital

Linguistic capital includes the intellectual- and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style. These

communications forms may consist of art, music, poetry, and storytelling (Yosso, 2005:78-79). The author further asserts that the repertoire of storytelling skills may include memorisation, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, and rhyme. As an equivalent to the language skills and - styles of students who possess middle class cultural capital, FGSs may use these skills to establish and maintain resourceful relationships with others around them.

3.3.7 Critique of community cultural wealth

Yosso's CCW framework is an important conceptualisation of the potential capitals that FGSs may draw on to establish successful educational achievement routes. However, the literature provided in the previous chapter indicate that significant disparities still remain between the educational aspirations and achievements of working class- and middle class students (for this study, FGSs and non-FGSs). Whilst Yosso's framework of CCW capitals is extensive, it is not all-inclusive regarding the mechanisms and strategies employed by the working class to construct their educational achievement routes during high school. I therefore suggest that the FGSs in this study applied CCW capitals in different ways during their high school years, based on the development and maintenance of their aspirations. However, they applied these capitals in order to attain the same objective; that of entering university. To further investigate this concept, I will make use of the Figured Worlds Theory.

3.4. Figured Worlds

The way CCW capitals are differentially employed by rural FGSs could be explained by employing Holland *et al.*'s (1998) theory of Figured Worlds (FWs). This research proposes that the FGSs in this study participated in a Figured World of educational achievement (Holland *et al.*, 1998), with capitals as a key constitutive component of the educational achievement routes that they established during high school. Moreover, through active self-reflexivity, they consciously made strategic decisions to be able to navigate their challenging educational terrains in high school (Reay *et al.*, 2009:1105). FWs are sites of possibility, where identities are (re)produced and enacted. Holland *et al.* (1998:40-41) broadly define FWs as socially embedded and culturally constituted activities, through which people come to conceptually and physically produce/perform new- and multiple self-understandings or identities. As

previously mentioned in the literature review, identity is valuable in understanding how educational subjectivities are constructed. Thus, the FWs theory might be able to shed light on how structural forces and individual identities combine to determine how people construct productive educational subjectivities. According to Urrieta (2007:109), the significance of FWs is that they are actively recreated by day-to-day practices and activities with others. Individuals who participate in FWs thus form their identities, and subsequently their educational subjectivities, by participating in activities organised and oriented by FWs.

According to Holland *et al.* (1998:31), ethnographic researchers no longer take the relationship between cultural forms and personhood for granted, instead they are emphasising the interactive formative linkages between a specific cultural context and identity formation processes. In this light subjectivity becomes crucial in understanding how individuals enact their lives from their various senses of selves, i.e. their ability to self/sense-make through multiple and open-ended internal dialogues (Holland *et al.*, 1998:173). Holland *et al.* (1998:32) further assert that researchers view cultural discourses and -practices as the media around which socially- and historically positioned people construct their subjectivities in practice. Holland *et al.* (1998:278-279) particularly draws on and elaborates upon Bourdieu's theory of culture in practice, which they describe as "identity in practice", in both cases, an open-ended, transactional process (Fecho, Graham & Hudson-Ross, 2007:177).

People construct their identities within different contexts inside of a FW: contexts of positionality, contexts of spaces in which to respond to those worlds, and contexts of ability to make or remake those worlds. Thus, subjectivity can be seen as the interplay between the social- and embodied senses of self, i.e. the "self in practice". This research interprets the "self in practice" as mediation between the socio-cultural informed self and the individual's (often contrasting) perspective of self. Holland *et al.* (1998:38) use Vygotsky's concept of semiotic mediation to describe this phenomenon. Semiotic mediation provides individuals the capacity to gain control over their behaviour by attempting to modify their environment (social- and culturally imposed self) to affect their own behaviour (embodied self). This process is uncertain and beyond the ability of any individual to undertake alone. As a tool of agency it is

social in nature as the symbols of mediation are collectively produced, learned in practice, and remain distributed to others for extended periods of time. These symbols (which the authors term artefacts) manifest in FWs, within which collectively formed, socially produced, and culturally constructed activities exist. These FWs provide participants with “a means to conceptualize *historical* subjectivities, consciousness and agency, persons (and collective agents) forming in practice” (Holland *et al.*, 1998:41-42).

For the purposes of this study, and its analytical lenses, one can thus conceptualise FWs as the processes and practices through which participants construct productive subjectivities via their active participation in their educational contexts and associated spaces such as their family-, social groups, community-, and school. In this light it is apt to draw on Holland *et al.*, who explain that,

By “figured world,” then we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others. Each is a simplified world populated by a set of agents...who engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state...as moved by a specific set of forces...These collective “as-if” worlds are sociohistoric, contrived interpretations or imaginings that mediate behaviour and so,...inform participants’ outlooks (1998:52).

Holland *et al.* (1998:49-50) further refer to the works of Caughy (1984) and Vygotsky (1978) to illustrate the concept of FWs. According to Holland *et al.* (1998:50) imaginary worlds can either inspire actions, or encourage escape or withdrawal from action. Thus, some individuals have the propensity to be drawn or recruited into what Holland *et al.* (1998:52,271) call “as-if” realms, which could take the form of cultural-, virtual-, intentional-, or imagined worlds. In terms of this study, the FW (“as-if” world) of educational achievement arguably offered the participants a means of forming their subjectivities in a way that would allow them to escape or change their environments. Their individually- and collectively constructed FW allowed them to detach themselves from reacting to their immediate difficult surroundings, and to enter a world based on life circumstances that differ from the everyday, and to react to the imagined objectives and events of that world (Holland *et al.*, 1998:50).

According to Fecho, Graham and Hudson-Ross (2007:177) those who populate a FW learn acknowledge a historical Figured World, determine their positioning within that world, improvise or envisage a response to that world, and reconceive that world. Holland *et al.* (1998:279) further highlight the importance of agency in allowing improvisations or adaptability as: "they tell us where- along the margins and interstices of collective cultural and social constructions- how, and with what difficulties human actors, individuals, and groups are able to redirect themselves". Urrieta (2007:120) interprets FWs in the educational field as such:

Figured worlds are thus formed through social interaction, and in them people "figure out" who they are in relation to those around them. The significance of figured worlds is in how they are recreated by people's social engagement with each other in localized and temporal spaces that give voice to particular landscapes and experiences. Through participation in figured worlds people can reconceptualize who they are, or shift in who they understand themselves to be, as individuals or as members of collectives. Through this figuring, individuals also come to understand their ability to craft their future participation, or agency, in and across figured worlds.

I propose that the students in this study lived out their aspirations for academic mobility in FWs of co-produced activities, discourses, performances and artefacts (Holland *et al.*, 1998:51) as part of the construction of their educational achievement routes. Thus, when constructing their educational subjectivities, the students in this study purposefully organised their lives into four distinct and overlapping environments that supported their FW of educational achievement (family, social, community, and school) As stated by Urrieta (2007:110), relationships, practices, acts, courses of action, people, and cultural resources within FWs are tied to powerful, trans-local institutions in society, such as the school, church, and other community organisations. The FWs theory proposes that people's sense of selves change in and through activity and must be conceptualised as they develop in socialisation processes. Thus, regarding self-making processes, the concept of FWs is similar to Bourdieu's (1998a:81) theorisation of the habitus as a socialised, structured body, which incorporates the immanent structures of the world and which structures the perception of that world, as well as action taken in that world. Holland

et al., (1998:5) also show that identities are key in how people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways of being. In FWs significance is given to certain actions, and certain outcomes are valued over others. Thus, the actions and events recognised and valorised within the FW of educational achievement are those that would lead to academic achievement and attainment of a university degree. Over time, these FWs, while starting out in the imaginings of aspiring people, would become embodied through continual participation in the lives of these people and others like them. In the imagined reality and on-going practices in the FWs, participants become familiar with the rules that lead to success and acceptance in this world (e.g. taking school work seriously, making use of resources). Participants of a FW are able to participate in them through the use of artefacts, such as objects, events, discourses, and collective memory. As Holland *et al.* (1998:53) put it:

Players become ever more familiar with the happenings of a figured world...and learn to author their own and make them available to other participants. By means of such appropriation, objectification, and communication, the world itself is also reproduced, forming and reforming in the practices of participants.

While Holland *et al.*'s (1998) artefacts could be viewed as physical objects such as assignments, tests and grades; for the purpose of this study these artefacts are also conceptualised to include intangible symbols. Holland *et al.* (1998:40) describe these artefacts as living tools of the selves, which enable individuals to figure the self constitutively, and in this manner position themselves for themselves, referring to the "self in practice", which this study interprets as mediation between the socio-cultural informed self and the individual's imagined self.

The objective of the FWs theory is to respect the socio-cultural boundaries of humans, and to recognise the processes whereby groups and individuals move themselves from one set of cultural- and social subjectivities to another "led by hope, desperation or even playfulness" (Holland *et al.*, 1998:7). Gale and Parker (2015:91) argue that recent conceptualisations of aspirations emphasise a shift from historically-informed to future-oriented perspectives. Gale and Parker's (2015) research build on that of Mills (2008), who argues for a change in theorising aspiration to allow greater prominence to agency, i.e. considering the formation of

students' futures outside of the structuring structures of the habitus and cultural capital, albeit within existing structural conditions. I propose that rural-origin FGSs, who have successfully navigated their way from a rural schooling environment into university, do not merely learn how to navigate their predetermined futures better than others around them, but become actively involved in imagining and creating FWs within which their aspirations are navigated.

Thus, FGSs who were able to navigate their educational achievement routes into university, were successful in conceptualising and effecting FWs, which involved processes of imaginative developments of the self, potential "agentive actions", and change in their life trajectories (Holland *et al.*, 1998:278). The reason behind this claim is because I believe that individuals' aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) strengthen with their ability to imagine alternative futures, which in turn supports their development of various other forms of capitals. According to Choudry and Williams (2017:248), the FWs theory allows researchers a means of understanding how the development of agency and identity influences educational subjectivity formation, as it is embedded within practices and activities of socially enacted and culturally constructed worlds (Holland *et al.*, 1998:7).

3.5. Conclusion

This thesis draws on a combination of three theoretical frameworks which I have used in a collective way to understand how three rural FGSs constructed their educational subjectivities throughout high school, in a way that enabled them to access university. In this chapter, I have explained key elements of each framework. While Bourdieu's cultural capital theory offers an explanation for the scarcity of FGSs in university, Bourdieu does not account for how those that traverse their working class educational contexts successfully and are able to establish fruitful educational achievement routes. Therefore, Yosso's CCW framework was used as a supplementary framework for Bourdieu's cultural capital theory. Yosso developed the community cultural wealth (CCW) framework, in response to the lack of representation of the working class achievement in Bourdieu's cultural capital theory. Yosso (2005:70) argues that these capitals are often unacknowledged and unrecognised in society. However, Yosso's CCW capitals do not account for the low success rates amongst working class students (as indicated in the literature review

chapter), or the creative action required to apply the capitals and achieve academic success. Thus, the possession of capitals and CCW capitals do not equate educational success. I argue that not all individuals are able to activate and convert their capitals and CCW capitals into successful educational achievement routes. This study was interested in how the successful FGSs in this study mobilised their CCW capitals, in the light of how they established their subjectivities and educational routes in high school. This research made use of the concept of FWs to investigate how these students converted their CCW capitals into productive educational achievement routes. The concept of FWs would explain how the FGSs in this study constructed their educational achievement routes by envisaging the actions required to realise their educational aspirations in non-conducive environments. By purposefully structuring and separating their different educational environments (family, social, community and school), these students were able to adapt their educational subjectivities in response to their environments and in this way construct successful educational achievement routes.

Chapter 4 Research methodology

4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology used in this study. The methodology of a research study refers to the theoretical- and philosophical orientation followed during the research process. According to Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011:33), the research question guides all other subsequent tasks in the research process and is thus directly related to the methodological aspects of research. For this reason I restate the research question of this study, which is: *How do first generation students from a rural town construct their educational achievement routes during their high school years to gain access to university?*

First, I discuss why I chose a qualitative research design and interpretive phenomenological research paradigm for this study. Secondly, I describe the process of participant selection and the sampling methods used. Thirdly, I discuss my three methods of data collection. I emphasise my use of in-depth semi-structured interviews, which were my primary sources of data and were structured around answering my research questions. In the data analysis section, I discuss how I processed, thematised and categorised the raw data. Finally, I discuss the trustworthiness of the study by considering factors such as: reliability, validity, and ethicality. The aforementioned factors are important for educational researchers to determine the quality of other studies, as well as to select suitable approaches and methodologies for their own studies (Bush, 2002:59)

4.2. Research design

4.2.1. Research methodology

Research is a systematic process through which an objective is defined, data is managed, and findings are communicated, within established frameworks (paradigms) and in accordance with existing guidelines (research methodologies). Research originates with a question about a particular phenomenon of interest. The research methodology is the philosophical framework that guides research activity, in other words the theories behind the methods employed in the research process (Le Grange, 2016:459). These frameworks provide researchers with an indication of

what to include in the research process, the methods used to perform the research, and the inferences that are probable based on the data collected. The three common approaches to conducting research are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. The researcher anticipates the type of data needed, and hence the research method required, to respond to the research question. Researchers typically select the quantitative approach to respond to research questions requiring numerical data, the qualitative approach for research questions requiring textural or narrative data, and the mixed methods approach for research questions pertaining to both numerical and textural data (Williams, 2007:65).

I draw a contrast between the two main research approaches to clarify the choice of paradigm for this study. Quantitative research methods were originally developed in the natural sciences to study natural phenomena, while qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social- and cultural phenomena. According to Giddens (1976:55), in Le Grange (2000:193), understanding within the natural sciences depends on the objective observation of the relationship between cause and effect. In the social sciences understanding is gained from subjectively studying humanity through an empathetic identification with the other. Both quantitative- and qualitative research studies are conducted in educational research. Neither of these methods is intrinsically better than the other; the suitability of each is decided by the context, purpose, and nature of the research in question. Due to the fluidity of the research process, it might be more useful to characterise qualitative research by the overall aims of the study, rather than by the kind of data produced or the methods used to produce them. The most basic way of characterising qualitative studies is that this approach generally aims to seek answers to questions regarding the 'what', 'how' or 'why' of a phenomenon, rather than questions about 'how many' or 'how much' (Green & Thorogood, 2004:5).

This study aims to understand how "first generation students from a rural town construct their educational achievement routes during their high school years in order to gain access to university". Thus, this study makes use of the qualitative approach to research. Creswell (2007:37) asserts that qualitative research begins with a particular assumption and worldview that underlies an inquiry into the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social- or human phenomenon. Hennink *et al.* (2011:10,35) further state that qualitative research describes the process of how

researchers attempt to gain insight into the perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and feelings of research participants. Qualitative research thus allows the researcher to depict the experiences of their participants in response to the research question, from the participants' own perspectives. This approach also offers descriptive data in the participants' own words and voices (Joorst, 2013:81), and uncovers the meaning that they give to their experiences (Hennink *et al.*, 2011:10).

4.2.2. Research paradigm

Research is based on philosophical assumptions about what constitutes valid research and which research methods are appropriate for the development of knowledge in a given study. According to McGregor and Murnane (2010:419), the intellectual integrity, trustworthiness, and diversity of research depend on researchers accounting for the methodological or philosophical underpinnings of their work. These methodological/philosophical underpinnings stem from the paradigm within which the research is situated. The most widely known definition of a paradigm is that of Kuhn (1962:162), who asserts that a paradigm is a constellation of beliefs, values, and techniques shared by the members of a given scientific community. McGregor and Murnane (2010:419) define a paradigm as a set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality for the community that shares them. Paradigms are based on underlying assumptions that position the researcher and research subjects in the social world. These assumptions are the ontological-, epistemological-, and methodological foundations of the research. Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and existence, epistemology is related to the theory of knowledge, and methodology refers to the principles and ideas on which the method for research is based (Creswell, 2007:15).

This study is situated within the interpretive research paradigm. Interpretive research is based on the belief that a deeper understanding of a phenomenon is only possible through understanding that phenomenon from the perspectives and interpretations of persons whom are experiencing it (Shah & Corley, 2006:4). Connole (1993:19) argues that understanding is a method of studying humanity through an emphatic identification with the other, by attempting to grasp their subjective experience. My research attempted to understand the nature of how FGSs in a rural schooling

environment constructed their educational achievement routes. As the interpretive research paradigm is fundamentally concerned with meaning, i.e. understanding social agents' definitions and understandings of their situations, it is a suitable approach for this study (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004:21).

The interpretive researcher assumes that natural reality and social reality are different and therefore require different kinds of methods for investigation, depending on the phenomenon of inquiry. Thus, interpretive research can be divided into five approaches namely; symbolic interactionism, realism, hermeneutics, naturalistic inquiry, and phenomenology (Gray, 2013:23). According to Gray (2003:24), the principles of symbolic interactionism are that people interpret the meaning of objects and actions in the social world and then act upon those interpretations. Meanings arise from the process of social interaction. These meanings are not fixed but are constantly modified by the interactive experiences of individuals involved in a phenomenon. Realism proposes that there exists a reality which is independent from human experiences, but that this independent reality of human behaviour is related to the subjectivity inherent to human beings. Thus, research requires the identification of macro social processes and forces beyond the control of humans, as well as the subjective interpretations of reality, to gain a full understanding of a phenomenon (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2009:114). Hermeneutics sees reality as socially constructed rather than grounded in objective fact. Hence, hermeneutics argues that research should emphasise interpretation, more than explanation and description of phenomena as social reality is too complex to be understood through solely the process of observation (Gray, 2003:26). According to Lincoln and Guba (1994) in Gray (2013:26), naturalistic inquiry holds that there are multiple constructed realities that can only be studied holistically. The limitation of this approach is that phenomena can only be understood within their environment or setting; they cannot be isolated or held constant while others are manipulated. Additionally, the research process is still influenced by the perspectives of the researcher. Thus, even though this approach aims to uncover the most natural state of a phenomenon, there are many complex-, diverse-, and interdependent factors that impact on the research process.

After a consideration of the research question and the phenomenon of interest, this qualitative study will be based on the philosophical underpinnings of

phenomenology. Gray (2013:24) states that phenomenology holds that any attempt to understand social reality has to be grounded in people's experiences of that reality. Similarly, Saunders *et al.* (2009:597) assert that phenomenology sees social phenomena as socially constructed, and is particularly concerned with generating meanings and gaining insights into those phenomena from the perspectives of those involved in the phenomena. Thus, phenomenology requires that the researcher avoids ways in which their personal prejudices serve to bias the data. This is done to gain the purely subjective experience of the research subject. The use of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to interpret the data could allow me to understand the individual schooling experiences of the FGSs in this study.

There are limitations to IPA research that might influence the trustworthiness and credibility of the data gathered through the study. Due to the subjective nature of an IPA study, researcher bias can influence the design of a study and enter into data collection. Any group that is studied is altered to some degree by the very presence of the researcher. Therefore, any data collected is somewhat skewed. Conole (1993:23) asserts that knowledge gained by interpretative inquiry is dependent on the process of discovery. Furthermore, the integrity of the findings depends on the social-, linguistic-, and cognitive skills of the researcher in the collection- and analysis of the data. As I have been acquainted with the participants for several years as we come from the same geographic area, there is a degree of familiarity that facilitated the data collection process in terms of navigating power dynamics and communication aspects. Other limitations of IPA research are that sources or subjects may not all be equally credible and some subjects may be previously influenced, which might affect the outcome of the study. Additionally, the study population is not necessarily representative of the larger population, which limits the extent to which conclusions from data can be extrapolated. It takes time to build trust with participants that facilitates full and honest self-representation (Constable *et al.*, 2012:13). It is important that the researcher be cognisant of these points in order to minimise their effects during the course of the study.

4.3. Participant sampling

4.3.1. Purposeful sampling

Purposive sampling is an example of non-probability sampling (Domingo-Salie, 2016:78), where participants are selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research question. In a phenomenological study, it is important to select people who can best help the researcher to understand the central phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2012:206). Thus, this study made use of homogeneous sampling by purposefully sampling individuals based on the research question. Given that the main research question of this study concerns the educational achievement routes of FGSs from a rural town, the criteria for selecting the participants for this study were:

- Participants are FGSs.
- Participants are current students at Stellenbosch University.
- Participants are from the same rural area, later referred to as the *Greater Tulbagh* area.
- Individuals were willing to participate, i.e. willing to articulate their thoughts regarding their educational experiences openly and honestly.

As a researcher I found that the number of students that fulfilled the above requirements was limited. Therefore, I made use of the snowball sampling method to enlarge my study population with the goal of gathering richer and more authentic data.

4.3.2. Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling is a method of identifying and recruiting research participants with very particular characteristics or rare experiences (Hennink *et al.*, 2011:100). As illustrated by the literature review, this specific study is investigating a neglected area in South African educational research, i.e. studies concerning the educational achievement routes of rural-origin FGSs. For the purpose of a qualitative interpretive study, I was not able to find sufficient participants through purposive sampling. Therefore, I requested the participants to help recruit other persons who qualified for the sample population based on the aforementioned criteria.

4.3.3. Participants' information

Table 1: Biographic information of research participants

NAME	GENDER	AGE	MOTHER'S HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION	FATHER'S HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION	STUDENT'S CURRENT DEGREE
Cindy	Female	19	Diploma	Unknown	B(Social work)
Katherine	Female	19	Matric ³	Unknown	BA(Humanities)
Timothy	Male	25	Matric	Matric	MSc(Mathematics)

4.3.4. Advantages and limitations of study sample

As previously mentioned, due to the unique nature of the study sample, it was difficult to locate suitable participants. Therefore, this research study used a small study sample. In phenomenology studies, the study sample can range between 2 and 25 people (Alase, 2017:15). According to Creswell (2012:209), it is typical in qualitative research to study a few individuals or cases. The benefit of a small sampling size is that it allows for a more in-depth picture of each individual's experience of the phenomenon being studied. Alase (2017:13) agrees that due to the homogeneity of the research participants, and the size of the sample pool, it is anticipated that IPA research studies will be rich and descriptively deep in its analytical process. The depth of the data is important in IPA studies especially, seeing as one objective of qualitative research is to present the complexity of the information provided by individuals.

The limitation of a small study sample is that the sample represents a theoretical example of the population/group that is being investigated. This sample is not representative of a true population and the findings of the research cannot be generalised to the general population. Additionally, Kumar (2011:213) asserts that

³ Matric refers to the South African high school qualification.

that the study sample in a qualitative study is highly subjective as it depends on the data saturation point. The data saturation point is the point where the researcher decides that the data collected is enough to answer the research question within the scope of the study and that any additional data collected provides few, if any, new insights (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:235).

4.4. Data collection methods

The data collection process involved the use of individual semi-structured in-depth interviews with the participants, informal follow-up interviews, and various corroborating semi-structured interviews with residents from the *Greater Tulbagh* area. The choice of data collection methods depended on the availability of the research participants and the time constraints of the researcher. Although I initially planned to follow the individual interviews with a focus group, I found that the individual interviews offered rich and descriptive data and as the participants felt comfortable with me as a researcher, they opened up freely about their personal experiences. The interviews were followed by multiple follow-up interviews to augment the data generated from the in-depth interviews, which enabled refining of the initial themes drawn from the data. Lastly, I made use of corroborating interviews with members of the community to validate the information given by participants. This was especially important and necessary for the contextualisation of this study, as the research was heavily concerned with how particular environmental factors influenced the schooling experiences of the participants.

4.4.1 Semi- structured interviews

According to Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick (2008:292), interviews may provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods. Furthermore, interviews are most appropriate where little is known about the study phenomenon or where detailed insights are required from individual participants. Interviews are also useful for exploring sensitive topics, where participants may not want to talk about their experiences in a group environment. As aforementioned, the aim of this research is to understand, examine, and explore how FGSs from a rural town successfully constructed their educational achievement routes during high school. Thus, the primary method of data collection

was the semi-structured interview, which is typically used when seeking out individual, personal experiences (Hennink *et al*, 2011:109).

A semi-structured interview has the advantages of allowing direct context with the interviewee, thus eliminating misunderstandings and ambiguity (Babbie & Mouton, 1990:250). This could be of use when asking questions about sensitive topics, to which the researcher can adapt the original question. These types of interviews are structured more informally and allow interviewees to describe their experiences freely and openly (Aloovi, 2016:98). This research method also offers the researcher the opportunity to interact with the research participants in such a way that builds rapport, and consequently lead to a safe- and open environment. A semi-structured interview allows the participants to answer open- and close-ended questions. They can thus talk freely and offer rich descriptive narratives, whilst the questions allow the researchers to prevent the interview from veering off track.

The semi-structured interview schedule (see Addendum 1) used in this study was loosely structured and addressed the themes that were highlighted in the previous chapter. The questions of the interview schedule were structured in a way that it addressed the central research question, whilst simultaneously allowing the researcher to shift and change the questions depending on the participants' responses. In this way the participants had flexibility with regards to what they wanted to talk about, how much they wanted to contribute, and how they wanted to express it.

4.4.2 Follow-up interviews

In the case of exploratory research like this study, the research process tends to uncover unanticipated insights and so-called 'promising lines of enquiry' that the researcher might wish to follow up on (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:297). Vincent (2013:342) further asserts that a single interview is unlikely to provide the detailed and deeply descriptive accounts necessary for the holistic understanding of a phenomenon. Additionally, being able to listen to (or read) the first interview again before undertaking the second one provides opportunities to follow up lines of enquiry missed in the first interview, which enhances the validity and authenticity of the data analysis process. Follow-up interviews provide the researcher with the benefit of being able to explore unexpected insights in research. As the researcher

has already undertaken face-to-face interviews with the participants and established rapport (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:349), I found that during follow-up interviews the participants themselves guided the conversation which led to a richer understanding of their personal experiences.

4.4.3 Corroborating interviews

Due to the highly subjective- and personal nature of the data gathered through this study, it was necessary to conduct corroborating interviews with individuals who also experienced the phenomenon of interest, but from a different perspective. In this way I could get a holistic sense of the context within which the participants experienced the phenomenon. The corroborating interviews thus provided a background for the study and served as a way to validate my interpretations of the data gathered during the research process. Thus, these interviews played an important role to acknowledge and address my possible researcher's bias as a person whom myself experienced the phenomenon of interest (De Villiers, Rouse & Kerr, 2016:7).

4.5. Data analysis

The essence of a phenomenological study lies in its analytic focus, which is to capture participants' attempts to make sense of their lived experiences (Smith *et al.*, 2009:79). To fully capture the lived experiences of participants, without interference of researcher's bias, Creswell (2013:193) advises researchers to describe their own experience with the phenomenon under study. In this way, the researcher is mindful not to interject their own experiences into the lived experiences of the participants. This is elaborated upon later in this chapter. According to Alase (2017:16), IPA researchers are encouraged to follow the advanced series of analytic methods set forth by Moustakas (1994). Each interview was transcribed and thereafter the data was analysed using Moustakas' (1994) method. Moustakas (1994:118) outlines the analysing process of an IPA study as such:

4.5.1 Horizontalising the data

First, the researcher studies the interview transcriptions for horizons/statements relevant to the research question. For this study: *How do first generation students from a rural town construct their educational achievement routes during their high*

school years to gain access to university? Each of the identified statements carries equal value.

The initial interviews were used to construct biographical profiles of each participant. The semi-structured individual interviews were structured around participants' high school experiences and were categorised into their individual aspirations, perceived educational achievement routes, and the four educational environments (family, social, community, school) outlined in the interview schedule. In this stage of analysis I read through each of the transcribed interviews two times. The first time was to get familiar with the data set and the second time I made notations where there were similarities across the participants' interviews.

4.5.2 Thematising the statements

In this stage of analysis the researcher then uses the horizontalised statements to list the meaning or meaning units, which are categorised into themes by removing overlapping or repetitive statements. I read the interviews again, this time through the analytical lens of the theoretical framework of the study. Through the use of the theoretical framework (i.e. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, Yosso's CCW framework, and Holland *et al.*'s Figured Worlds theory), I was able to construct themes of interest from the data set, as it relates to the research questions of the study. During this stage of analysis, I was also able to identify gaps in the data set, which were augmented through the use of multiple follow-up interviews with the participants.

4.5.3 Constructing narrative descriptions of phenomenon

Lastly, clustered themes are used to develop textural descriptions of the experience, which are integrated with structural descriptions in order to describe the essence of the phenomenon as deeply as possible. The themes constructed in the second stage of the analysis are used to develop textural descriptions of each participant's experience. Creswell (2013:193) describes textural descriptions as descriptions of "what" the participants experienced within the phenomenon of interest.

The textural descriptions of the participants were augmented with the structural description of the phenomenon, i.e. the biographic- and demographic background to

the study. In this stage of analysis I identified the need for corroborating interviews with community members, to fully understand the context of the environmental factors, and the role of FWs in FGSs' aspirations and achievements. The themes and contextual settings, in which the participants experienced them as themes, were used to construct the narrative description of the phenomenon of interest.

4.6. Trustworthiness of study

To evaluate the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data gathered from a research study, a researcher must employ some measurement to ensure quality (Golafshani, 2003:601). The concepts of reliability and validity are used to ensure trustworthiness in this study.

4.6.1. Reliability

According to Creswell (2012:159), reliability is a measurement of the consistency of a research instrument, for example an interview or a questionnaire. For an instrument to be reliable, the outcome should be nearly the same when researchers administer the instrument to the same study sample at multiple, different times. Following this definition, one can see why using reliability as a quality measurement in qualitative research may be problematic. Qualitative studies attempt to generate understanding of individual experiences, not to gain a predetermined measure of any value. Thus, if the trustworthiness of such a study depends on reliability as a criterion, the study is inherently poor (Stenbacka, 2001:551). Moreover, Lincoln and Guba (1985:316) assert that because there can be no validity without reliability, and that a demonstration of validity is sufficient to establish reliability. Similarly, Creswell (2013:159) states that reliability and validity are bound together in complex ways, where validity can be thought of as the larger, more encompassing, term when assessing the choice of an instrument. If evidence is not reliable, it cannot be valid or meaningful. However, to account for reliability the researcher made use of the same interview schedule for all of the participants, similarly for the collaborating interviews with the members of the community.

4.6.2. Validity

Validity is the development of sound evidence to demonstrate that the research instrument matches its intended use (Creswell, 2012:159). Validity can also be

thought to as a way ensure that the data is trustworthy, rich, and accurate. I subsequently describe how I accounted for validity in this study.

As mentioned in the data analysis section, clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study is important so that the reader understands the researcher's position and any biases or assumptions that impact on the enquiry. In the researcher's positionality section below, I acknowledge how I accounted for my own researcher's bias during the research process.

I also made use of member checking, which involved asking participants' views on the accuracy of the interpretations of data and findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985:314) consider this technique as critical for establishing credibility.

Rich and thick descriptions of data allow readers to make decisions regarding the transferability of data, because the researcher writes detailed descriptions for the context- and participants of the study. Thus, the researcher enables the reader to transfer information to other settings and to ascertain whether the findings are transferable because of common elements (Erlandson, 1993:32).

In triangulation, researchers make use of multiple and different sources for data collection, theories and investigators to provide corroborating evidence to shed light on a theme or perspective (Creswell, 2007:208). All data collecting methods have their strengths and weaknesses. Thus, the use of multiple methods assists in data verification, as well as balancing out any potential weaknesses in each single data collection method (Gray, 2013:37). As aforementioned, I made use of individual semi-structured interviews, follow-up interviews, and collaborating interviews to ensure an authentic portrayal and interpretation of the data as I attempted to answer the research questions of this study. Additionally, Babbie and Mouton (1990:275) argue that the use of multiple methods and sources partially allow researchers to overcome personal biases, as well as the deficiencies that can flow from one method or source. They further state that triangulation is generally considered to be one of the best ways to enhance validity and reliability in qualitative research.

4.7. Researcher's positionality

For a qualitative researcher in an interpretive phenomenological study, it is important to have a sense of 'one-self' and a true understanding that one is intruding into

another human being's private life (Alase, 2017:18). Additionally, as the researcher is a primary 'instrument' in qualitative research (Domingo-Salie, 2016:81), it is important to acknowledge the researcher's positionality in relation to the study being carried out, to account for possible biases that might arise. According to Green and Thorogood (2004:195) reflexivity is the recognition that the researcher is part of the process of producing the data and interpreting their meanings, as well as a conscious reflection on how the researcher's position influences that process. In qualitative research, there is a risk that the researcher's positionality could possibly bias the data. To counteract this risk for bias, the researcher is required to explicitly account for their personal subjectivity as it pertains to the study. As I have a similar background to the participants, I was careful to monitor my position in the research process to maintain a professional focus on the research agenda. To account for my own researcher's bias I constantly questioned, reflected upon, examined, and understood my own context within the focus of the research and how my positionality possibly impacted on the research process and the data produced. I did this by always attempting to remain an objective observer during the research process, and to be aware of how my personal background might influence my interpretation of the data.

4.8. Ethical considerations

When doing research involving a human subject, it is important to consider the ethical guidelines which have been designed to protect the subjects involved in the research (Domingo-Salie, 2016:85). Le Grange (2016:443) argues that educational research is dominated by the utilitarian perspective of ethics. According to this perspective, guiding principles for ethical conduct should benefit the majority of people. The *Belmont Report* (1979) was created by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Behavioural Research, and serves as a set of ethical guidelines for institutional review boards on ethical principles for human research (Hennink *et al.*, 2011:63). This report outlines three basic tenets required to do ethical research: respect of persons, beneficence, and justice. Furthermore, Burgess (1989:4) highlights a range of ethical dilemmas that may occur during educational research. These include: the dominance of the researcher's values, research relations and sponsorship, informed consent, and data dissemination.

To adhere to accepted ethical standards, I thoroughly considered the ethical issues of informed consent, privacy, respect for persons, and confidentiality. Every participant who took part in the study did so voluntarily, and was presented with the required consent form, explaining the purpose and importance of the study (see Addendum 2). Participants were dealt with in an honest manner throughout the research process and made aware that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point, without providing reasons. The participants' right to privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality was respected by keeping all transcribed interviews confidential. No participant was identified, and pseudonyms were used in the analysis and discussion of the data. Participants were informed that copies of the thesis would be made available to them upon request, after it had been assessed. Permission to conduct the research was granted by the Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch (see Addendum 3).

4.9. Conclusion

This chapter has described the process that was followed in conducting this research study. The qualitative research approach was selected as it is a naturalistic approach that tries to study phenomena in their natural settings, which allows the researcher to understand the phenomenon of interest as wholly and authentically as possible (Pandey & Padnaik, 2014:5752). I further explained the choice of paradigm with regards to the research questions. The chapter also validated the choice of data collection methods and described the data analysis procedure followed in this study. Lastly, I showed how I ensured the trustworthiness in the study and discussed the ethical issues which were considered during the research process.

Chapter 5: Data presentation and analysis of the family-, social- and community influences on participants' educational subjectivities

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the data relating to the family-, social- (i.e. peers and friends), and community environments of the three first generation students (FGSs) in this study. By focusing on these different environments, this chapter provides a background against which to interpret and understand how these students constructed their educational subjectivities, which enabled them to navigate and transcend their rural educational upbringing. For this study, I have defined educational subjectivities as how individuals position themselves with respect to their educational experiences. How these students position themselves in their education is shaped by the different environments that they navigate whilst growing up, such as their family-, social-, and community environments. In Chapter 3, I have defined educational achievement routes as the actions and strategies that FGSs employ to realise their educational aspirations amid non-conducive environments. By purposefully structuring their different educational environments, these students were able to adapt their educational subjectivities in response to these environments and in this way construct successful educational achievement routes.

This chapter presents the data gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews and informal follow-up interviews with the participants, which were based on the following research sub-questions:

- 1. How do first generation students establish their educational achievement routes, which offer them access to university, in their rural schooling context?*
- 2. How do achieving first generation students construct their educational subjectivities in the context of their rural town livelihoods?*
- 3. What role does their agency play in how the students successfully navigate their educational achievement routes from a small rural school into an urban university environment?*

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide a historical background and describe the contexts within which the participants established their educational achievement routes as aspirant FGSs. As this study is concerned with the phenomenological understanding of the participants' lived experiences, it is important to sketch the context within which to interpret these experiences. According to D'Allegro and Kerns (2010-2012:294), Beard (2011:5) and Tate *et al.* (2015:295), a FGS can be defined as a student whose parents or guardians have not obtained a Bachelor's degree, but may or may not possess some level of post-secondary education. Beard (2011:5) further states that FGSs generally lack an exposure to middle class academic literacies and an understanding of the way university education systems work. As such, these individuals only truly experience these situations once entering the institution. In Chapter 2, FGSs are described as survivors of the process of breaking down class barriers in education (Reay, Davies, David & Ball, 2001:860). Moreover, FGSs from rural backgrounds encounter several historically- and economically constructed barriers in accessing higher education. Barriers such as unemployment, agricultural labour patterns, and low university attendance are characteristic of small towns which were established in a period of slavery. The chapter will henceforth focus on the FGSs in their rural environments by discussing the geographical location of the town, the historical development, economy, and history of schooling in the town, as well as the town's labour- and employment patterns.

5.2 Rural educational context of participants

This study is located in the *Greater Tulbagh* area of the Western Cape Province of South Africa. For the purpose of this study, the *Greater Tulbagh* area refers to the town of Tulbagh, as well as the surrounding contiguous towns of Gouda (initially called Bushman's Rock), Wolseley and Saron. The area is characterised by a history of agriculture and slavery. The so-called Tulbagh basin is surrounded by mountains; *Witzenberge* in the east, *Winterhoekberge* in the north, and *Oukloofberge* in the west (later called *Nuwekloofberge* and now called the Obiqlwa Mountains). As depicted in Figure 1 below, Tulbagh town is centrally located amongst the other towns and historically functioned as the economic heart of the basin, as will be discussed in the next paragraph.

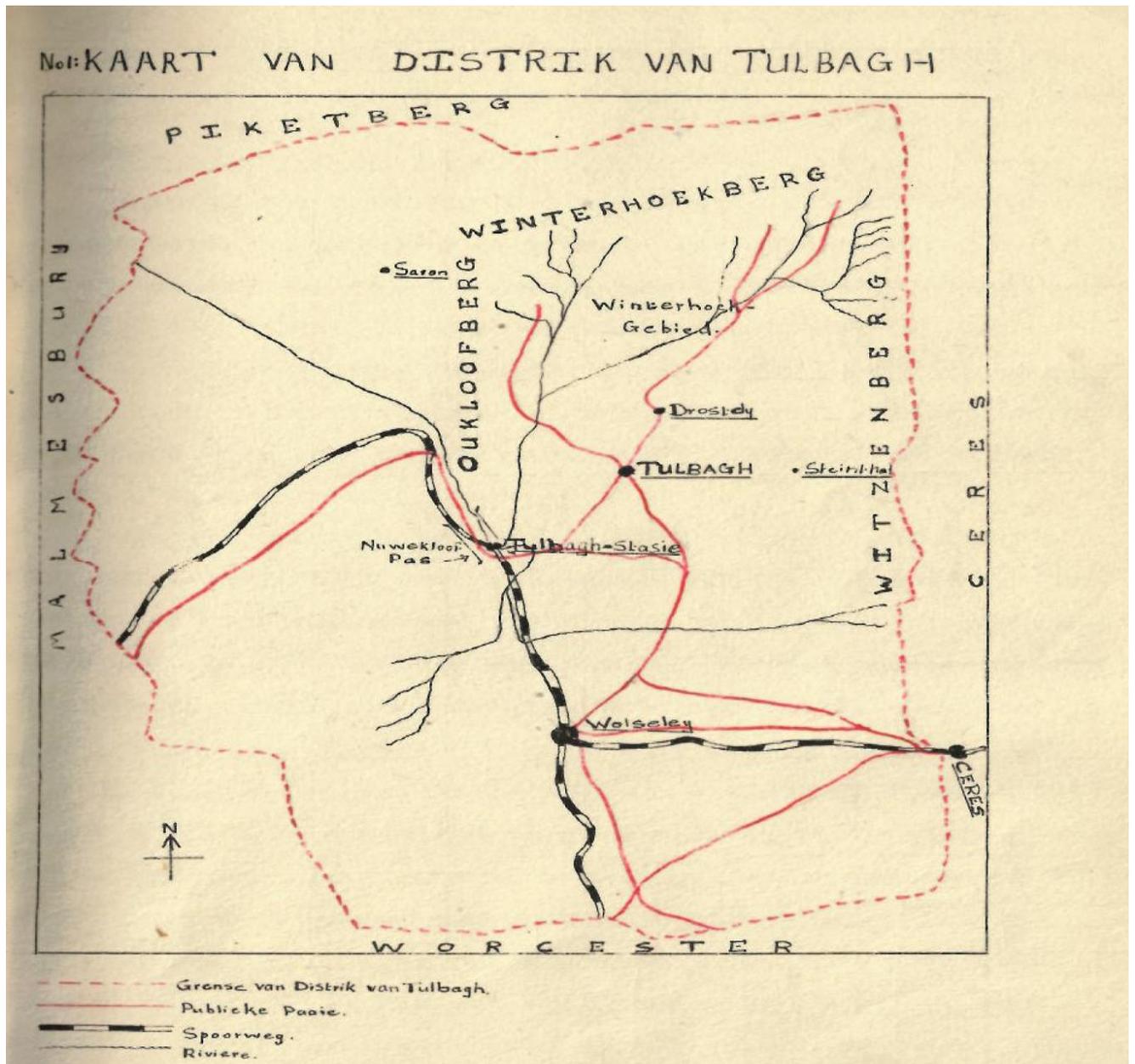


Figure 1: Map of Tulbagh district in 1947

(Source: Du Toit, 1947:7)

The geographic location and climate of the Tulbagh basin provided the area with plentiful water sources due to winter rainfall, and the snow on the mountains was a water source for fountains and rivers that fed farms in the dry summers (Du Toit, 1947:8). Due to its favourable climate for seed- and fruit farming, the Tulbagh basin became an agricultural hub and the main source of employment within the magistrate district. In 1947 the Tulbagh basin had a population of 2507 whites, 6995 Coloureds, 599 'naturals', and 7594 non-whites⁴ (Du Toit, 1947:12). Du Toit does

⁴ The terms 'white', 'Coloured', 'naturals', and 'non-whites' refer to the apartheid racial classifications and reflect the original terms used by the author. These terms do not reflect my own viewpoints as a

not clearly define the racial terms used, but one can infer that those referred to as 'naturals' were native Africans and those referred to as 'non-whites' were part of other mixed racial groups. The core source of employment for residents was seasonal farm labour on the numerous fruit- and wine farms in the area.

Whilst there was adequate education provision for the white towns- and farm children from the year 1810, farmers discouraged the educating of coloured people (their slaves), as they believed it would hinder the quality of their work (Venter, 1938:50). By 1905, white schooling was fully secured with the establishment of nine schools in the *Greater Tulbagh* schooling district. The schools reached the towns of Gouda, Winterhoek I and II, Drostdy, Wolseley, Conradies and Weltevrede. The schools were all established within the radius of Tulbagh town. There were also smaller farm schools and private school teachers available for the white farm children. Thus, each white child in Tulbagh had access to education, which cemented the economic position of whites and economic dependency of Coloureds in the area, because the stratified access to schooling was intended to keep Coloureds uneducated. It was only in the year 1837, after the abolishment of slavery, that Coloureds were able to acquire very limited levels of schooling, up to primary school (Venter, 1938:50). Venter offers an anecdotal summary of Coloured schooling, which he constructed from journal inscriptions during that period, which were made by mission workers from the Rhenish Mission Society. According to Venter (1938:64), after the establishment of the Coloured-only Steinthal village in 1842 (see Figure 1), a kindergarden school was established in the village. Approximately 30 older children had to walk to Tulbagh town to attend the school, which hosted 91 students, 43 of whom were white. Coloured education was organised by a system which was put in place in the year 1829, where older students were responsible for teaching younger ones. This system, in combination with poverty, culminated in the sub-standard establishment of Coloured education. Furthermore, education for the small number of blacks ("naturels") in the area was practically non-existent (Venter, 1938:67-68).

To uncover the socio-economic impact of the historic agricultural practices on Coloureds, I reviewed a sociological study of a group of Coloured farmworkers in the

researcher and are retained to demonstrate the racialised relationship between social class and schooling in South Africa.

Tulbagh district in 1947 (Du Toit, 1947). Although the study was executed and written up by a white male, and thus reflects the political and socio-economic ideology at the time, it offers a perspective about the transition period from slavery to a post-slavery context. In doing so, the study allows the reader insight into the circumstances and environments that led to the current labour- and education patterns in the *Greater Tulbagh* area. Slavery had a distinct effect on the labour relationship between former slave owners and former slaves. Although slavery in the Cape Colony came to an end on 1 December 1834 (Warnich, 1988), the resulting economic- and social class conditions were evident, especially in the relationship between the farmer and labourer. This is especially true for rural areas, such as the previously known Tulbagh magistrate district, where slave ownership was prevalent and customary. In 1816, the Tulbagh basin had a white population of 524, the largest population in the Tulbagh/Worcester magistrate district. In 1826, Tulbagh still had the biggest slave population of 437 slaves (Warnich, 1988:13). This high owner to slave ratio elucidates the wide reach of slavery in the area and its consequences on the education system and perceptions of education amongst inhabitants.

According to Du Toit (1947:50), some farmers described Coloured farm labourers as having the “mentality of a child” and that “attempts to educate him and to improve his quality of life would be futile”. Other farmers argued that “one should not mess around with Coloureds [presumably former slaves] and let them go their own way, otherwise they move away”. Further, Du Toit (1947: 51) asserts that most farmers were of the opinion that “as long as the drink [alcohol] has such a hold over the Coloureds, it will not help to try and reform their way of life” [own translation]. Du Toit (1947:31) further describes the working environment for coloured people as follows:

...workdays for men and children working on the farms are 12 hours long in the summer, and 8.5 hours long in the winter. Work agreements between the farmer and the labourer were informal, with no contracts being signed due to the illiteracy of most of the labourers.

Furthermore, 12-13-year-olds were often taken into permanent employment to do unskilled work to supplement the workforce of the farmer. Similarly, girls were

employed to look after children and help with housework and to do seasonal farm work. Although the farmers helped to establish two primary schools for Coloureds in the area, they did so with the intent of having the children being made available for seasonal work, and even during the school terms (Du Toit, 1947:24, 47). As schooling was not yet made compulsory for Coloureds, the farmers did not encounter difficulties in recruiting children for farm work. The farmers did not struggle to find child labour due to the following reasons (which were affirmed by statements made by Coloured teachers): first, there were few Coloured parents who realised the minimal value of education, as presented to them in Tulbagh, and consequently did not motivate their children to attend school; second, children were not interested in attending school, as they preferred farm work to schoolwork; and thirdly, parents usually welcomed the extra income, so when a child was old enough, they were expected to work on the farm. At the time when Du Toit (1947:142) carried out his research, the standard for Coloured education was significantly lower than that of whites, due to apartheid policies. Moreover, other factors influenced the education for rural Coloureds. These factors included: having to walk long distances to schools, lack of transport to schools, as well as the fact that schooling was not yet compulsory. Additionally, Du Toit (1947:143) argues that Coloured parents would not see the need for educating their children as their prospective jobs would be that of a blue-collar worker, which would not necessitate attending many years of primary schooling.

In an interview that I conducted with Wilhelm April (pseudonym) during June 2018, he offered insight into what it was like to live and work in Tulbagh during the late 1900s. Wilhelm (74) was born and raised in Tulbagh and he affirms the conditions of Coloured labour as depicted by Du Toit. According to Wilhelm, he did not complete his schooling because he failed one subject (English) in Grade 10. Thereafter, his father took him out of school to help with the “piece work” that he did for farmers, such as cutting trees and miscellaneous construction work. Wilhelm pointed out that the labour conditions of the farms were inhumane, as farm workers started their day before sunrise and finished work when it was dark. Wilhelm also makes mention of the use of the *dopstelsel*⁵, which he argues the farmers used to keep the labourers dependent on them in return for negligible payment. Wilhelm continued working at

⁵ The *dopstelsel* was a form of payment used by farmers that paid their labourers partly in alcohol.

several places around the Tulbagh area, until he was permanently employed at the newly established factory in town, Tulbagh Fruit Industry (Pty) Ltd, at the age of 18, which relieved him from having to continue doing farm labour. According to Wilhelm, earning money to support the family was a more pertinent issue than finishing school, especially once you have wasted money as a result of failing. I thus argue that the *Greater Tulbagh* community, which is socially and economically characterised by the agricultural development of the area, has in place a historical emphasis on cheap labour employment opportunities offered by these agricultural practices, rather than those offered by any form of educational achievement.

The accounts of Du Toit (1947:18,40) and Wilhelm mirror the nature of agricultural work in the area as it still exists: most of the employment is seasonal farm- and factory work, which consist of the picking, packing, and drying or processing of fruit. The notable difference in the agricultural work since Du Toit's study is the establishment of the Tulbagh Fruit Industry (Pty) Ltd. canning factory in 1954, which was bought by the South African Preserving Company (SAPCO) in 1965, later by Del Monte in 1983, and finally by Rhodes Food Group (Pty) Ltd in 1999 (Rhodes Food's history, 2018). The success of the canning factory in its various forms expanded the industrial activity in the town and took over as the largest source of employment in the area, which made the farm labourers less dependent on the farmers for employment. In an interview with Dennis Jacobs, a retired teacher from Tulbagh, he states that there is still a culture of young people dropping out of school and going to do seasonal farm- and factory work for menial payment. Dennis has 38 years of experience teaching both primary- and high school in Tulbagh's so-called Coloured combined school. Dennis attributes the lack of aspiration for university studies to the lack of motivation from many parents in the area, who shift the educational responsibility of their children to the teachers. He also argues that the legacy of apartheid is to blame for the older generation's nonchalant attitude towards education.

When one investigates the schooling culture of a community, it is important to consider the social- and economic climate of the community in which the school culture is established. In a rural community, such as the *Greater Tulbagh* area, the predominant lack of education and poverty in families are contributing factors to how young people view education. Dennis recalled a student asking him why they should

care about school, when their parents did not even finish school. Family background, parental education, and community attitudes toward education are important factors to consider when trying understanding how the participants in this study navigated their rural environments to establish successful educational achievement routes. The next section of the chapter will give a background to the specific community of the three participants in this study, as well as the challenges that these students encountered in their schooling within this community.

5.3 Biographic introduction to participants

This chapter is intended to provide an understanding of how the first generation students (FGSs) in this study constructed their educational subjectivities in the context of their rural town, especially with regard to the dynamics of their family-, social-, and community environments, as well as how they interact in these contexts to construct their pathways. This section of the chapter offers a biographic background of the three participants of the study: Cindy, Timothy and Katherine (pseudonyms). All three participants are current students at Stellenbosch University. Cindy is a third-year student pursuing a Bachelor of Social work. In 2017 Timothy received his Honours degree in Bio-Mathematics at Stellenbosch University. He commenced with his Master's degree in Mathematics in 2018. Timothy also became a member of the Golden Key honours society in 2018, an international society honouring students whom are top achievers in their respective academic programmes. Katherine is a third-year student pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree. The three participants were purposefully selected for this study, as they all grew up in the *Greater Tulbagh* area and are currently attending the same university. Thus, in constructing successful educational achievement routes in high school, all three FGSs in this study were immersed in and eventually transcended similar socio-economic circumstances, home environs, schooling experiences, and challenges that are unique to their rural backgrounds.

5.3.1 Family backgrounds of participants

From the interviews, one can infer that none of the participants come from a traditional nuclear family. It is also clear that this 'non-traditional' structure of their family environments shaped how all three participants viewed life, as well as their schooling. Thus, the navigation of their living contexts had a significant effect on their

educational subjectivity formation as young people. The three participants classify as FGSs because their parents had never enrolled into university; neither completed a bachelor's degree. They are all the first persons in their families to attend university, and in doing so are acting as pioneers in their families and community with regards to entering the urban university context. This chapter explores how the participants experienced their locatedness growing up in a rural town and how they mediated their locatedness to establish their educational practices which enabled them to construct viable educational achievement routes.

Cindy's mother and father are divorced and Cindy (19) is the eldest of her siblings on her mother's side. She has both a younger sister (7) and brother (1). On her father's side, she has other siblings, but does not know any of them. Cindy's mother does not have a university degree but qualified as an early childhood development (ECD) practitioner at Boland College⁶, while Cindy was in high school. Cindy could provide no information regarding her father's educational background. Cindy's stepfather possesses a matric certificate and is a petrol attendant. Cindy does not come from a "traditional" nuclear family, being raised by her mother and stepfather and not having any contact with her father. Cindy mentions that her household was very supportive emotionally, but not able to provide for her financial needs, such as schooling supplies. This seemed to be a motivating factor for Cindy, whose mother wanted "more and better for her" than she could offer Cindy.

Katherine (21) lives with her single mother, older brother, cousin, her cousin's husband, and her cousin's two young children in a house with four compartments⁷. Katherine's mother attended high school until Grade 8 and is a seasonal factory worker in Ceres (refer to Figure one). Her father was, as she puts it, "never in the picture". Katherine's brother matriculated and did a course at Boland College in Human Resource Management. Katherine's family circumstances has had a definite influence on her career aspirations, as Katherine said that she never had a fixed dream in high school, but wanted to go to university to escape her "typical coloured

⁶ Boland College is a non-degree granting public technical and vocational training (TVET) college, also sometimes referred to by its previous name further educational and training (FET) college.

⁷ The type of house Katherine lives in is referred to as an RDP house. These government-subsidised houses were provided to South Africans who fulfilled certain socio-economic criteria as part of the Reconstruction and Development Programme from 1994-2001. The RDP scheme has been replaced by a new programme called Breaking New Ground (BNG) housing (Housing opportunities, 2018)

town". Katherine also grew up in a "non-traditional" household, which housed many people without a steady income. This fact made her doubt whether she would be able to attend university, even though she had constant emotional support from her family to do well in school and to have career goals. Throughout our interviews, Katherine reiterated how close she was to giving up on her aspiration to go to university, due to financial difficulties.

Timothy (25) is the eldest of his siblings. He has two brothers, respectively 21 and 5 years of age, as well as a sister aged 16. Timothy and his middle brother, together with his cousin, were raised by his grandparents. Both Timothy's mother and his stepfather's highest educational qualification is Matric. Neither of his parents attended a tertiary institution but worked themselves up into good positions in a factory outside of Wolseley. His mother works as an administrative clerk and his stepfather as a meat classifier at the same company. Timothy's family background is interesting in the sense that after his father passed away when he was seven years old, his mother remarried and moved away to a different town. Timothy decided to live with his grandparents, in order to continue going school in Wolseley. This decision had a marked impact on how Timothy grew up, as both his grandparents possess low levels of schooling and were blue-collared workers, and thus poorly equipped to deal with his academic needs. Thus, Timothy became as he reiterates throughout his interviews: "a very self-motivated person". His grandfather worked for the railway company, Transnet, until he sustained a head injury. His grandmother was a packer at a factory outside of Wolseley until she retired. Both his grandparents retired while Timothy was still in school. Timothy's decision to live with his grandparents resulted in his grandparents playing a more prominent role in the development of his educational subjectivity, and consequently how he constructed his educational achievement route, than his parents.

5.3.2 Birth to Pre-School

Due to the rurality of the *Greater Tulbagh* area, inhabitants of the concerning towns do not have direct access to public facilities, such as universities, hospitals and in some towns, even high schools. All four towns in the *Greater Tulbagh* area do however have public clinic- and library facilities. People from Tulbagh and Gouda seek medical help in Paarl (a large town approx. 60 kilometres away). For

inhabitants from Wolseley, the nearest hospital can be found in the neighbouring town of Ceres. All three of the participants were born in Ceres hospital and grew up in its neighbouring town, Wolseley.

Both Cindy and Timothy attended Blommeland crèche, an informal community playschool which most of the children in the community attend before enrolling into primary school. Cindy describes Blommeland as both informal and playful and mentions she remembers enjoying the activities of the playschool, such as cutting and pasting pictures, colouring, and playing in the sandpit. In the last years at the crèche, there would be more educational activities, such as learning letters, colours, and numbers. However, most of the time was spent playing with doll houses and playing sports. Although there was not much academic structure to the playschool, Cindy enjoyed going to crèche because there she could play with her friends. Contrarily to Cindy, Timothy only attended the playschool for a month, but left thereafter because he was bored and did not want to be there. Timothy describes Blommeland as such: “there was a park where we played, and we drew pictures in class”. After leaving the playschool, he was looked after by his mother at home who taught him the alphabet, as well as up until the 12-times timetable. One can already see that Timothy acquired a self-directed and self-motivated personality towards his schooling, which he seemed to develop in response to his unchallenging environment. Katherine never attended crèche, as her mother could not afford it. She mentioned that her mother was looking after the children in the street while their parents were working. When asked what she did at home with the other children, she exclaims that: “It was the best times because we could play!”. The first time that Katherine went to school was when she went to Grade R at Golden Primary School (pseudonym). Katherine says that because she knew the children and teachers in her school, it was not too much of an adjustment for her. She further says that she felt that the challenge of her not having attended a crèche could be bridged.

5.3.3 Primary school

Both Cindy and Timothy attended Akkerland Primary School (pseudonym), which was located down the street from both Cindy and Timothy’s houses. Katherine attended Golden Primary School, because it was closer to her house than Akkerland Primary School (three blocks from her house). Both Cindy and Timothy describe

Akkerland Primary School as an adequate primary school. According to Cindy, the teachers were all competent and mostly came from the towns surrounding Wolseley. Timothy feels that although the school could sufficiently prepare students for high school, many students did not take their school work seriously. The school offered some extramural activities such as: folk dance (which was discontinued before he went to high school), choir (which Cindy participated in until Grade four), athletics, rugby, and netball. While Cindy continued with netball until she finished primary school, and Timothy loved doing athletics, the extramural activities of the schools were not on par with what the participants refer to as the “previously Model C” schools⁸. Katherine’s school had similar extramural activities, but she says that she preferred to spend her free time at the library nearby her house.

Throughout the interviews, the theme of playing with friends recurs in the participants’ memories of primary school. Cindy says that she loved playing outside and running around with her friends, when it was not school hours. Timothy echoes this sentiment, by mentioning that he always used to play cricket and rugby on the field down the street, as well as catching frogs and tadpoles in the nearby river. While Timothy enjoyed playing outside with his friends, he also enjoyed drawing his favourite animated “Dragonball z” and “Pokémon” characters, and spending his free time at the library reading “Boet en Saartjie” story books. Katherine’s anecdotes also fit into the theme of playing, as she used to enjoy playing “teacher, teacher” with her friends. Katherine says that she discovered one of her greatest hobbies when she was in Grade two or three, which was her love of reading. Katherine says that: “I was one of those kids who got mad because I could only get two books from the library and not three”. Already, one can observe how Timothy and Katherine’s love for reading becomes a key formative part in how they constructed their early educational subjectivities and established their educational achievement routes. All three of the participants attended Sunshine High School (pseudonym), a working class- and predominantly coloured high school in Wolseley.

The previous sections in this chapter provided a context and background from which to interpret the current section, which is the data presentation. The previous section illustrates the structural- and financial challenges (such as poverty, lack of access,

⁸ Schools for white children, now known as Model C schools, provided schooling to white children during apartheid.

limited school-related options, and parental education), that are inherent in the lives of aspiring FGSs. The next section presents the data gathered from the semi-structured individual interviews and informal follow-up interviews, as informed by the research sub-questions listed in the introduction of this chapter. This section draws on the theoretical framework as outlined in Chapter 3, which applies the theoretical concepts of cultural capital (CC), Yosso's community cultural wealth (CCW) framework, and Holland *et al.*'s Figured Worlds (FWs) Theory. As mentioned previously, this study is grounded in an interpretive phenomenological research orientation. Gray (2013:24) states that phenomenology holds that any attempt to understand social reality must be grounded in people's experiences of that social reality. Phenomenology requires that the researcher avoids ways in which their personal prejudices serve to bias the data. This is done to gain the authentic subjective experience of the participants. This chapter thus aims to provide a true account of the participants' high school experiences by exploring how they constructed their educational subjectivities, and how these unique educational subjectivities determined how they established their achievement routes within the rural environments of their family, social groups, and community.

5.4 The students' educational subjectivities in respect of their family circumstances

The following section presents the data relating to how the family environment of the participants influenced their educational subjectivity formation individually and collectively. Three themes relating to the family environment emerged from the data, in the light of the research question and the theoretical framework. These three themes were: the nature of the family context, the impact of family context on the participants' identities as young people, and the family as the foundation for how the participants established their educational achievement routes.

5.4.1 Family context

The three participants in the study come from rural working class households with their parents or guardians either being retired, or currently employed in low paying jobs. While they were growing up, the participants' households were poor and struggling. This determined not only the individuals that they became, but also

became the foundation upon which they established their educational achievement routes in high school. All three participants come from “non-traditional” families, Katherine being raised by a single mother, Cindy by her mother and stepfather and Timothy by his grandparents. Moreover, all of the participants shared their households with extended families, such as aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, etc. In her interview, Katherine mentions that as long as she could remember, there were always people in the house and that it was never a quiet place. Interestingly, she does not refer to this memory in a negative way. For Cindy, growing up in a house with extended family meant that there were more mouths to feed and that there was not always money available for things like school supplies or school trips. However, because she felt close to her uncles and aunt, Cindy says if she knew her mother was struggling, she would ask them to help her financially. According to Cindy, she asked her uncle for help buying school necessities on multiple occasions, when she knew that her mother could not afford it. Even when she wanted to apply to university, which Cindy worked for throughout her schooling career, she thought it might not happen because her mother could not afford it. She explained that,

When I applied, then you have to pay the application fee and my, like, my mom didn't have money at the time to pay for me. So that was (...) I did (...) that was the time that I began to realise okay maybe it won't happen.

Due to the socio-economic conditions of their families, all three participants were enrolled in a public government school where the fees were approximately 600 rand per annum to attend and it was within walking distance from their homes. Thus, the families chose to enrol the participants in schools based on pragmatic factors such as affordability and accessibility, rather than academic excellence and opportunity for the participants. This school choice did not reflect the familial aspirations of their parents, but the limited opportunity that their families could offer them. As the participants were the first family members to go to university; their families did not possess the educational resources and capitals to be able to support them in their educational achievement routes. According to Cindy, coming from a working class household affected her access to academic resources and hence her exposure to middle class academic skills such as information technology (IT). Although her

mother was able to buy a second hand computer for the household, Cindy pointed out that,

...it wasn't as if she knew exactly how to open a Word document and all those things... so there was a little exposure, but not on the level that you need when you get to university. I was here, my level was down here, and they expect like much more from you here.

Coming from working class families also meant that the participants received limited support from their families academically. All three participants mention that although their families tried their best to support them, their academic achievement depended on themselves. Cindy mentions that although her mother could not help her with the content of her homework, she would still check if she did the homework every day. Katherine stated that her mother especially could not support her studying, because she had never finished high school. She explained that she “can't give it [support in schooling] to my mother and brother, because they support you emotionally. But (...) they don't understand that of studying really. Because they don't study with you” Although both his parents finished school, they were not around to support Timothy during high school, as he was raised by his grandparents, who also did not finish school. Timothy describes his grandparents' perspective on his schooling as such:

Grandma always supported me...to work hard and... Grandpa was very strict, he also didn't talk much. He gave you one of two choices: either study hard and sit behind a desk one day or be lazy and go work on a farm...that motivated me.

Throughout his interview, Timothy reiterates the fact that his grandfather was a very strict and authoritarian guardian: “Disobedience was immediately disciplined. So, there wasn't exactly room for disobedience and being naughty” and “my grandpa said if a child wants to be too big for his boots...he will be taken out of school”. Also:” When I was in primary school I had a big group of friends and because of my grandpa's strictness I obviously chose to keep to my academics and not stray off [unlike some of the friends]. Thus, while Timothy's grandparents were concerned

with his schooling, they did not support him directly in his schooling, but rather created a situation in which failure would not be tolerated.

Despite the difficult socio-economic conditions of their households, the families of the participants still provided a measure of financial support to assist the participants in their daily needs. The participants mention that in exchange for doing chores around and outside of the house, they were given a small amount of pocket money to buy snacks at school. While this money did not amount to a large sum (around five to ten rand per day) it gave the participants a feeling of independence and autonomy, which made them resistant to become despondent in their environments. Throughout the interviews the participants always spoke positively about their lives during high school, despite their obvious struggles. I argue that the small sacrifices made by their parents/guardians made them felt cared for and supported to the extent that they were able to carry on with their school work.

5.4.2 Impact of family context on participants' identities

The nature of their family contexts impacted on the identity formation of the participants and the type of young people that they became. The literature study in Chapter 2 indicated that often young people from working class rural backgrounds tend to reject an academic culture, as they do not witness the relevance of tertiary education in their daily lives (Willis, 1977; McFadden & Munns, 2002: 358-359; Ingram, 2009). Moreover, aspiring FGSs encounter several difficulties in achieving their educational aspirations such as: financial barriers, lack of exposure to and prior involvement in tertiary education systems, and a lack of parental support. Being FGSs, the participants were the first members of their families who accessed university and thus were the first individuals from their families to break the intergenerational educational cycle (Gofen, 2009:104).

Their parents and guardians could not offer them academic support, hence the participants found alternative ways to support their school learning. These strategies were supported by the community capitals that they found in their working class home-, social-, and community environments, which enabled them to construct productive educational subjectivities. Firstly, it was evident that all three participants were able to conceptualise how to successfully establish pathways from their rural working class upbringings to university. As he did not get any academic support

from his grandparents, Timothy became as he states, “a fan of the library” and a “self-directed learner”. Timothy explains that,

I always made sure that, because I was shy to ask the teachers questions, I always listened attentively and understood *everything*. And if there was *something* that I didn't understand, then I used what I did understand to help me understand what I didn't understand. That was my skill.

The family environments of the participants posed challenges to how they established their educational achievement routes in high school. The participants dealt with these challenges in individual ways, but there were also commonalities in how they were able to do so. Timothy's family environment enabled him to become more of a self-directed, self-motivated, and resourceful student. Cindy found her inspiration to transcend her working class environment within this same struggling home environment. To do this, she realised the extra effort that she had to put into her schoolwork and thus became an autonomous and hardworking student, who would always do the extra practise paper and revision. Katherine became a beacon of hope for her family, as no one in her immediate or extended family ever had gone to university or even had a professional job. This positioning in and expectation from her family led to Katherine making choices strategically: whom she befriended, whom she avoided, as well as building relationships with her teachers. Katherine mentioned that she would choose specifically whom she allowed in her environment, as she did not want to be around people who would derail her educational aspirations. She says that,

I won't become your friend if you party, drink, and use drugs. I won't do these things with you over weekends, because I know myself and I know you, I can see now what you do (...) I learn from your mistakes. If you don't want to learn from your mistakes, I will.

The nature of how the participants grew up had a significant impact on how they constructed their identities as young people, i.e. having to take charge of their schooling and navigating through an environment where academic achievement is

not the norm. Unlike the other rural students who grew up in similar environments as the participants and who did not aspire to go to university, the participants cultivated identities that were driven, focused, and hard-working. What made the participants unique is that they built their identities on their aspirations, rather than being limited or negatively influenced by their surroundings. All three participants had common traits underlying their educational achievement routes, which were the ability to source inspiration from their surroundings and the ability to dream of transcending their first generation status. These abilities acted as a foundation for how they established their educational achievement routes and acted as a constant and intrinsic motivator, which guided their actions and reactions throughout their educational routes as aspirant FGSs. Their ability to circumvent their difficult backgrounds illustrates how goal-driven, committed, and motivated they were to achieve their high educational aspirations by using their community resources. Instead of giving up when they faced financial challenges, the participants kept in mind their eventual goal of going to university. This relates to Holland *et al.*'s theory of Figure Worlds (FWs), which proposes that FWs are sites of possibility, where identities are produced and enacted.

In Chapter 3, I suggested that the students in this study lived out their aspirations for academic mobility in FWs of co-produced activities, discourses, performances and artefacts (Holland *et al.*, 1998:51), as part of the construction of their educational achievement routes. The existence of a FW of educational achievement is evident in the following quotes from Timothy, who explained that; “regardless how small or impoverished the [little] town is where you come from; you are able to reach higher heights. Uhm ... I always knew that... and through motivational speakers that came to our school, I realised it more and more”. Timothy added that, “one thing that I knew for certain was: I have to work extremely hard [chuckles]. Work hard, because I knew marks were crucial”.

5.4.3 Family as foundation for establishing educational achievement routes

The participants drew on of their strong support network of family members to construct fruitful educational achievement routes during their high school years. These educational achievement routes were informed by their CCW, as is illustrated

in the discussion that follows. The three participants tell stories of how family members' involvement in their lives acted as motivation for them to work hard in school and achieve academically. There are several challenges that rural students encounter in their educational experiences such as: poverty, fiscal incapacity, and low levels of adult education, all of which could detrimentally affect the aspirations and achievement of young people. The data shows that familial support and motivation can counteract the aforementioned challenges. According to Yosso (2005:79) family capital acts as a means of emotional-, moral-, and educational support from which disadvantaged individuals, such as FGSs, can draw on throughout their educational achievement routes.

For both Timothy and Cindy, coming from working class homes impacted on the importance that they placed on schooling and academic achievement. The fact that his parents did not possess tertiary qualifications, and thus had relatively low salaries, was a big motivating factor for Timothy to succeed in his schooling. For this reason, he says there was never any option other than going to university. Cindy also says that knowing how her mother struggled to get a college diploma to better provide for her family strengthened her own aspirations for higher education. Cindy says that,

Even when she [her mother] was at Boland College she still worked, and she always told me (...) she would prefer me to study further and go to university, because it means I would be able to offer my children better opportunities than she can give me.

In addition to their families' socio-economic conditions, the emotional support of their families served as a foundation for the educational achievement routes of the participants. For Cindy and Katherine, their mothers' emotional support was instrumental in the establishment of their educational achievement routes during high school. Cindy described her mother as being very involved in her schooling career by checking her homework every day and being interested in her school life. Cindy also pronounced her mother as her main support system during high school: "Definitely my mom. 100%." Katherine never saw herself as a person that would go to university, but this perception changed when her mother, friends, and teachers saw

a significant improvement in her marks during Grade 10. She explained that “the moment that my marks improved, and my mom saw it...I now achieve in the 70s and 80s... they started investing in my future and my teachers and my friends. Then I realised that I can also have dreams.” One can argue that this academic shift that Katherine underwent prompted her allowance into the FW of educational achievement in her high school. She joined the other academically achieving students in this rural town, who were able to foster dreams and visualise a successful future through means of their academic achievement. Her mother supported this FW, Katherine mentions how her mother’s expectations for her started to rise after seeing her achieving in grade 10: “But all of the sudden when I started to achieve...And now I come home with a code six [70-79%] then they are disappointed.” Furthermore, when Katherine wanted to lose hope because the financial cost of attending university seemed to make the prospect unlikely, her family kept motivating her to keep going. Katherine explained that,

The fact that there was not money (...) and they always believed that it can happen. Like they believed more than me... And (...) my brother was adamant; he was like sis (...) keep working hard. There are people out there that are *going* to help you.

Similarly to Katherine’s family, the support that Cindy’s mother offered her seemed to be limited to demonstrating interest in her studies and an affirmation of her hard work, rather than actual support in her schoolwork. Cindy also credits her mother for always supporting her university aspirations. Her mother went to the social work office to find out about social work bursaries and what is needed to apply. Cindy states that even though her mother never liked asking other people for money, she was willing to let go of her pride to help support Cindy’s aspirations. Despite the lack of financial resources in her family, Cindy’s family was able to utilise the social networks that they had access to. For Cindy, the support of her mother, and the sacrifices that she made, heavily influenced her aspirations for higher education. Her mother wanted Cindy to attain a university degree, so she could one day offer opportunities to her own children that her mother could not offer her. Cindy’s mother reiterated this sentiment throughout her life and this became a source of aspirational capital for Cindy to draw on. Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain

future-oriented hopes and possibilities, despite having to overcome various barriers to achieve such aspirations (Yosso, 2005:77). The importance of family support also prevails in international studies on the aspiration and achievement of FGSs.

Timothy's father died when he was young, and he does not refer to his mother often during his interview. In response to the question of the type of support his parents offered him during his schooling he said: "My mom is a very quiet person. She doesn't really talk much. But I think, inside she always hoped for the best for me". The fact that his parents did not play an active role in his schooling also indicates that Timothy constructed his educational aspirations around their absence and the rigid rules and expectations of his grandfather. The fact that his grandfather posed him an ultimatum to either work in an office or on a farm, led Timothy to take his schooling more seriously than other boys his age. Throughout the interview, he described himself as a hard-working, dedicated and self-motivated student. According to Timothy, he always knew what he wanted and that he was able to attend university after school. He said that, "Since I became aware that I could become something in life, I dreamt about becoming something". He also says that nothing else was the determining factor in his hard work, except for his ideals and dreams. From this statement, one can argue that Timothy's aspirational capital was not only grounded in his family's aspiration, but showed a self-belief and confidence in his abilities, similarly to the capitals possessed by students from middle class families. His aspirational capital was crucial for his entry into the FW of educational achievement at his high school.

The three participants showed contrasting relationships to their families, but in all three stories, familial capital played a definite role in how the participants constructed their educational subjectivities. Both Cindy and Katherine often make mention of the supportive roles that their families played during their high school years, but Cindy attributed much of her academic success in school to her mother, who made several sacrifices for her to succeed. However, Katherine was clear that her mother supported her emotionally but not academically. In contrast, Timothy does not speak of his family as particularly supportive, but due to his strict grandfather, who raised him and his brother, he was very motivated to succeed in his studies. Although each of the participants had a unique family dynamic, their identities were all influenced by

their family contexts, which provided the foundation for them to establish their educational subjectivities in a productive way.

5.5 The students' educational subjectivities in respect of their social groups

The following section shows how the social relationships of the participants were integral to their educational subjectivity formation and establishing their educational achievement routes. The two inter-related themes that emerged from the data were that the participants made use of social interactions as strategic choices in their educational achievement routes, and that social groups were fundamental in how they constructed their educational subjectivities.

5.5.1 Strategic social interactions

Astin (1993) asserts that social interactions include both academic (i.e., course-related) and social (i.e., non-course related) aspects. These aspects occur formally and informally within and outside of the classroom environment. All three participants showed ways of strategically pursuing social interactions in- and outside of the school environment. According to Katherine, she befriended the students who were in the top 10 highest percentile of her grade and together they motivated and inspired each other to work hard at their academic goals. Katherine said that,

Then we started growing as a group of friends, so I think they saw the potential in me. And the fact that they saw potential in me awoke like a fire in me [chuckles]. So that played a big role [in her academic success], the fact that *they* could acknowledge it from the outside.

Katherine strategically decided whom she did not want to befriend by paying attention to other students' behaviour and intentionally not associating with those who were not serious about their studies. Katherine had strong opinions about whom to befriend in school. She said the following about the other young people in her school that did not succeed academically:

I think their friends were the problem. I got angry because I thought: change your friend circle. Irons sharpen irons and friends shape each other. And I believe in those sayings because I can see people. Like I had one friend that did very well, but his friend circle was so wrong. And that is how is not academically (...) like his marks went down. And people start chasing the wrong things. Like you become boyfriend crazy and my one friend, oh she was obsessed with her boyfriend. And her marks (...). I know you, since primary school, so I know your potential and I can see that you don't study anymore, because you give attention to what is less important. You drink weekends, you smoke weed because it's cool. Now it's cool to be put out of class with your friends...I am not going to become your friend. I am not going to do these things with you over weekends, because I know myself and I know you. And I see now (..).

Cindy echoes this statement by mentioning that the non-studious individuals in her school made her realise that she did not want to be like them and that: "They made the do's and don'ts clear to me". Katherine and Cindy's choices are reflected in a study done by Reay, Crozier & Clayton (2009:1107), who reported that the research participants in their study put their academics first by actively avoiding groups that they perceived as less committed to learning. Furthermore, where "non-academic" groups constituted most of the school, participants often chose to exclude themselves from peers. Timothy also acted strategically in his social interactions with his classmates. He relates that he would act differently around different groups of friends. He had two academically strong female friends and the rest of his male friends he describes as "frivolous". Thus, he would laugh and joke around like the rest of his male friends to conform to the group dynamic, but when it came to his school work he would communicate and share with his two female class friends. Despite being friends with what he described as "frivolous" male friends Timothy said that: "...if I was frivolous with them, I was frivolous but, in the class even they would say the man [Timothy] almost does not even talk in class". While Timothy did not exclude himself from his non-studious classmates, he chose when to participate in what he calls their "frivolous" activities, and when he focused solely on his work.

Contrary to Katherine, who completely removed herself from the non-studious people in the school, Cindy still befriended her non-studious classmates. Although her interactions with her classmates made her realise the type of student that she

needed to be to achieve academic success, Cindy did not avoid her non-studious classmates. Rather, Cindy acted similarly to Timothy by behaving herself differently around different groups of friends. The phenomenon where Cindy and Timothy applied their social capital differently compared to Katherine, indicates that there is a degree of variation in the possession and application of CCW capitals. Katherine made use of her close friends as her primary support system to navigate successfully through high school (Yosso, 2005:79). Cindy and Timothy used their social skills to befriend even the non-studious people in school and kept these friendships separate from their academic work commitments. Cindy said that “it was rare that I hanged out with the same people at home and at school”. The reason for this was the fact that her school friends did not place the same importance on their schooling as she did because, according to her “they were a little very different than me [in terms of] ... party wise, drink wise, and boys”. Cindy made the conscious decision to separate her home life from her school friends. She seemed to regard them as a bad influence as they never had their homework done on time and were not interested in post-secondary education. While she could not control being allocated to the same classes with her home friends, Cindy did choose not to spend time with her non-studious classmates at home. In terms of peer interactions, Cindy strategically separated her home- and school life, because her home life was educationally productive, whereas her peers at school did not take their education as seriously as Cindy did. Part of constructing her educational achievement route was thus to keep her “non-scholarly friends” separate from her scholarly commitments, in other words, she managed to keep their “bad’ influences at bay in how she formed her educational subjectivity.

Interestingly, the participants in this study did not limit their strategic friendships to their peer groups, but also pursued productive relationships with their teachers. In this light, Astin (1993), found that student-student (i.e., peer) interactions as well as student-faculty interactions involve formal and informal discussions, which contribute to relationships both inside and outside of the classroom. All of these interactions exert influence on student outcomes. In our interview discussions, both Katherine and Cindy made mention of meaningful relationships with some of their teachers. Cindy repeatedly mentions the influence that her Life Orientation teacher, Miss Steyn, (pseudonym) had on her educational experiences in high school. Not only did

her teachers support her by informing her of career options and subject choices, according to Cindy they really cared about helping her to achieve her academic aspirations. Cindy said that,

I just used like my relationships with them (...). The opportunity was there. Miss Steyn's door was *always* open for anyone. I was like okay, at the end of the day it will only benefit me, so why not make use of it. I was the one (..) *I asked*. Even if the teacher says no, at least I asked. There were many kids who felt that I was being privileged by the teacher, then they see me coming back with a textbook, then they ask why does she [Cindy] have a textbook but I don't have a textbook, why does she get extra question papers but we don't get question papers.

Both Katherine and Timothy also mentioned Miss Steyn's personal involvement in their educational achievement routes, particularly the university application process. Cindy mentioned Miss Steyn several times in her interview regarding how the teacher not only helped them with university- and bursary applications, but also took her Grade 11 class to the Stellenbosch University campus by train in her own time. Timothy also mentioned that Miss Steyn was very informed regarding university application dates, and that she was very willing to help them with applications. Katherine recalled Miss Steyn making extra effort to help well performing students to apply to university. She said that,

And I know that my LO [Life Orientation] teacher (...). It wasn't part of her class to do it, but she has always informed us to study further. Because her daughter was in Grade 12 and she was busy helping her daughter. So she helped us to apply. She was very *oppit* [invested] with our Grade 12-group. After that she made sure that we could go upstairs [computer area] to do our applications. We *actually* all applied together in a group for the different three (...). I applied for UWC, CPUT and Stellenbosch. She showed us how to do the applications. I don't believe that I would've been able to do it on my own, because *I don't* know about these things and for me it was just (...). It is a bunch of forms and stuff that the people expect from you.

Timothy also states that his other teachers made extra effort to help him to succeed in his academics. He referred to his teachers as “very supportive” and he mentioned that the vice-principal of the school gave him advice on subject choices, while his Geography teacher helped him to get into Stellenbosch University with a full scholarship even after the application deadline had passed. This event was an example of how his teacher, as an agent in the FW of educational achievement, made use of his social connections to offer Timothy access to academic opportunities. Katherine also speaks of the effort her teachers made to help her, because they were personally invested in her success. She recalled:

My Economics teacher placed a lot of pressure on me (..). But Economics is difficult [laughs]. But he pushed me a lot to do well in his subject. Then I got, like in our region, the only A, code 7. Then he was so happy, he gave me money afterwards [laughs]. But I didn't do it for the money. For me it was like (.) I wanted to make *him* proud. Because he was just very *oppit* [invested]. It means a lot to them if there is just 10% out of the 100 that just try to do better (...). So you also want to make the teachers proud. Like the one time I had an assignment, and I don't have internet access [at home] and one of my teachers downloaded the information at home for me. And it's nice to know that if you need it, that you can count on them. If a teacher sees that you want to be helped, then she will help you. That was *nice*. And if you don't ask for help, Miss won't assume that you want to be helped. I feel like I ask the stupid questions in class and then sometimes the class laugh at me, but I ask because I don't know the stuff. So I was that person: ask, ask, ask, for help and then people will help you, because people want to help you.

This section has demonstrated how the participants did not assimilate into the detached attitudes that most of their peers had towards their schooling. Rather, the students in this study made use of their social capital to strategically build productive relationships with similarly academic students as themselves, and even their teachers. The next section will focus on the dynamics of specific social groups that these students participated in.

5.5.2 Social groups as foundation for educational subjectivity formation

After strategically planning their social interactions to maximise their educational experiences, both in- and outside of the classroom, the participants found ways to

utilise their chosen social groups to construct their educational subjectivities to best serve their academic prowess. These social groups relate to the differentiated groups of individuals mentioned in the previous section who had similar interests and ways of conceptualising their schooling. For example, Katherine described her group of friends as her biggest academic support structure, and she repeatedly credited her friends for continuously motivating her and supporting her in her academics. According to Katherine,

I had good friends (...) we all came out of good households with parents who were motivating... when are you coming to study at our house again, bring your work, come and sit there (...). It was good to have... so we all always met together and did the work together.

As mentioned in the previous section, Cindy made strategic choices with regards to social interactions in school and at home. Her choices reflected the findings of Kapp *et al.* (2014:57) who asserted that participants in their study actively distanced themselves from their peers and deliberately sought out equally serious students as themselves to form study groups with. Cindy distanced herself from her non-studious classmates and friends at school to concentrate on her academics, which indicates that she has a latent individualistic academic personality. Even though Cindy had school friends she clearly stated that when it concerned her academics, she preferred to work alone. Cindy mentioned that even when she had to do group work, she would first go through the work on her own before she even discussed it with the group. She said that,

Even in high school, I would prefer to work alone. Because it is better for me that way, because I had a certain time (,), or a certain style of learning and then I just go through it again (.) over and over and over again. Because (.) it just (.) it worked for me.

Kapp *et al.*'s (2014:57) findings also resonate with Katherine's use of social groups. Unlike Cindy, who consistently credited her mother with her academic success,

Katherine said that:” Your friends are the people who you are really doing it with, who do the same. Like that was my biggest support system that, honestly”. Katherine further distinctly stated that most of her academic preparation and success was due to her involvement in peer study groups. She said that,

My friends right (.) we liked socialising, were naughty (...) but we knew how to balance well. Like weekends we will have fun (..) but that was only on Saturdays. Before we saw each other on Saturdays, we work (..) then when we meet up around five, your work is finished. And Sundays we don't see each other. I can't visit Aisha, because Aisha is studying. So what do you do? You also work. Aisha and I always studied together after school: Business Studies and Mathematics, because we both struggled with it, so we helped each other. Look, we had groups. My Accounting group was my close friends, but we were a few in class. So we would always meet up and study. Those of us who were stronger in Accounting would tutor the rest and then we would help them with the language subjects. So that was a big help. That was my biggest support system, honestly.

As aforementioned, Timothy had social relationships with two female friends that were academically inclined like him, with whom he would share his educational aspirations during high school. Both friends also went to university since to study Law and Geo-Informatics respectively. Timothy seemed to be in a friendly rivalry with them, which facilitated his school performance. Timothy's competitive nature was an early development in his educational subjectivity formation and it seemed to be centred on his masculinity. He recalls that as early as in Grade 7, he did not like to be beaten, especially not by a girl. When another girl received the certificate in Mathematics that year, he made it his life's mission to get the certificate in Grade 8, and he received it every year since. He said that,

...here are these two girls that perform well [laughs] so I won't let them beat me! Because there was this perception that if a girl does better than you then you are seen as weak. I did not want to be seen as weak...then I generalised it to academics as well. Then I thought like that academically too. But it was just nonsense actually.

From his interview it was clear that Timothy saw himself as a self-motivated student, and from the below quote, one can infer that some his self-motivation came from a pleasure in being the best student in his grade. He also did not attribute his competitive nature to his masculinity, but said that it came from the fact that he had ideals for himself and that he was a self-motivated and hard-working person. He does add however,

Yes, but no offense, I always thought that I can't allow a girl to beat me [laughs] (...). Let me put it this way; the reason that I felt that way was because there were these two specific girls in the class that were very intelligent (...) but I saw that the boys (..) they do not work as hard. So I had this thing that in won't let any student beat me. And one can probably say that my gender had an influence, because I thought okay: I won't let a boy *or* a girl beat me.

It is interesting to note that all three participants had different ways to use their social capital to elevate their learning. Social capital is the type of capital that Yosso (2005:79) argues enables working class youth to productively mobilise the resources in their environment to support their personal aspirations. While Katherine actively pursued friendships with academically inclined students, in-and outside of school, Cindy made strategic choices in her interactions with different social groups. While she spent time with her non-academic friends during school breaks, she kept to herself in class and limited her interactions with them outside of school. As a top performing student with very high aspirations, Timothy did not actively pursue close friendships with other students. He did however use his social relationships with other high performing students as a means of motivation, as he was in a friendly competition with them. Thus, what is clear is that each participant had unique characteristics which were ensconced in his or her own educational subjectivity. These characteristics enabled them to utilise their social capital in a way that offered them entry into the FW of educational achievement at their high school, and becoming successful students. Katherine's ability to leverage her environment to achieve success, Timothy's competitive nature, and Cindy's individualistic personality, all committed them to their school work in different ways and led to the successful establishment of their educational achievement routes.

5.6 The students' educational subjectivities in respect of their community environment

The first part of this chapter has given a contextual overview of the community in which these students grew up in. It is indisputable that the rural community environments have a more negative impact on students' rates of participation and achievement, compared to urban areas. This is due to rural environments being characterised by factors such as: low socio-economic status, negative rural community attitudes to education, high staff turnover (i.e. inexperienced teachers), inadequate preparation of teachers for teaching in rural schools where there are low levels of basic literacy skills, restricted access to university subjects, and a perceived lack employment opportunities (Black *et al.*, 2000:59). Furthermore, with regards to the *Greater Tulbagh* area, factors that are common influences in the community are a lack of parental education to support students' learning, as well as access to educational resources in homes. This could be attributed to the disadvantaged history of education in rural areas, as discussed in the first section of this chapter.

5.6.1 Attitudes and views towards education

All three participants held the perception that education was not seen as a top priority in their hometown due to the widespread poverty in their community. However, each participant had a different interpretation of this perception as it pertained to their own educational experiences. Katherine's reflections on her hometown came across as predominantly negative. She said about her hometown,

I am probably stereotyping, but it is a typical Coloured town (..) where, where you can see people around you use *Tik en dagga* [drugs] and you know which houses (..) the areas around you. You know the areas already. You know who sells (...). And when you walk to school then you will see people who are fighting or who walk out of school. Or you here a story about this person mugged this person and its people whom you *actually know*. So yes it is typical in that sense.

In contrast to Katherine, Timothy had a more idealistic view of their hometown as a place of people who are full of potential, but do not apply their agency productively. Whereas Katherine had a more deterministic impression of the town, Timothy

seemed to believe that there were more positive aspects to the town than negative, if one pursued them. When asked to describe their hometown he said,

It is a previously disadvantaged small town (...). There aren't many schools (...). Like there are three primary schools and one secondary school (...). There is huge potential (...), but not everyone believes in themselves, that they can make a success of their lives. And (...) I think the largest part of our town, are people with a relatively low income..... I think the learners could have done better, if they did not allow their circumstances to influence them. Negatively influence them...everyone has a choice, I believe, but sometimes the circumstances can become so overwhelming that people feel that they don't have a choice. Like their circumstances blinds them, or their potential to reach higher levels.

Katherine also recalls the negative experience of a friend when he went to community members for help. Katherine's friend was a gifted long jumper who progressed to the provincial stages of an athletics competition. When looking to the community for help, he could not find any support. She recalled that,

No (...). No (...). You can ask someone to give you a lift somewhere with their car (...). And that is basically it. But you can't ask for more than that. I remember one time, right (..) my friend had to go and jump in a place far away from home, in another province. So he needed money, and he went to go and ask people in the community for sponsorship. Then the one uncle gave him a five rand. And that was even one of our biggest shops. As a Coloured man, you expect him to want to help! But he gave a five [laughs]. So you could not ask anyone for anything on our community, because people are stingy. People feel like:" I can't share my little bit with you". So there is not any openness and confidence to ask for help in our community. You can ask people around you for small things that fit their pocket and they will give it because they are your neighbours. But no, you could not ask the whole of the community because you would get a five rand, and that means nothing.

The aforementioned story had a strong impact on how Katherine perceived her community and how strongly that affected her aspiration to rise above such attitudes.

Cindy had a different experience with the members of her community and makes a distinction between the educational views of the older and younger generation in the community. According to Cindy, the older people in the community, often being part-time or farm workers, attach importance to education and motivated young people such as herself to continue with her education. She said that,

There are many people who are farm workers or who part-time workers. Like the old people will always tell you that they are so proud that you actually go the extra mile and that you finished with school. They always used to ask me like, are you going to study further, what are you going to do and they say (..) it's a good thing that I'm going, because I was one of the few youngsters, the time that I was in Matric, who actually applied to university and that went further than just finishing high school.

In contrast to the motivating attitudes that the older people in her community had towards education, Cindy experienced young people's attitudes towards school and university as primarily negative. Cindy remarks that young people perceived her as "uptight" and "judgemental" and that they seemed "envious" of her. She said that they also treated her as if she thought she was better than them, because she got into Stellenbosch University. Cindy said,

That is what I don't understand (..). I feel that they should have been the people who were proud that you are actually going further, because they were the people who finished before me. They did not go to university, they applied to like colleges and now I'm going to university (.) now they feel that I want to be better than them, while that was not the case at all (...). I just feel that they were (..) they were not very supportive.

Timothy also experienced negative attitudes from the community regarding Stellenbosch, which led to him almost not going to Stellenbosch University. He said that other young people in the community described the university as "white" and "racist". In response to the question of what the attitudes and views of her community were towards education, Katherine reiterated Cindy's perception of the young

people's rejection of education in her community, albeit in a more extreme way. Katherine said that,

...there are also those people that do not finish school, or many that do not attend school at all. It was very bad in that sense (...). Or those whom attend school, the young people I would say, those that I saw, they had those *never mind* attitudes. And they (.) they don't really want to be in school (..). They are only in school because their parents send them there. There are few of them who *actually* put in the effort to become better or to be better...[The community thinks] that it is useless, because you will (..) it's so sad because it is expected by everyone that you will go work at *Check in* (...). *Check in* is a supermarket by us. Or that you will have a baby and sit at home."

Furthermore, when young people in the community had the chance to go to university, several people that the participants knew, dropped- or failed out of university. Katherine mentioned that her cousin and a friend went to Stellenbosch University before her and that her other cousin went to the University of the Western Cape (UWC). However, the cousin who went to UWC dropped out. Referring to that incident, Katherine says that "I learn from your mistakes. If you don't want to learn from your own mistakes, I will learn from them." Similarly, Cindy has a cousin who was enrolled at UWC, but then dropped out. Timothy reflected on the nonchalant attitudes of the young people in his community towards education, and he concluded that their environment growing up caused a lack of confidence in the prospects that education could offer them. He further stated that this had a chain reaction which resulted in their lower educational achievement, which in turn caused them to go back into the intergenerational poverty cycle. Timothy said that,

Perhaps they had the aspiration to go to university, but I don't know if they always (..) believed in themselves (..) that it would qualify them for university. And I think that influenced the effort that they put into their studies negatively and thus also their marks. It wasn't that they did not have dreams, but you could see that they didn't chase their dreams (...). Because (...) literally (.) when I was in primary school, I had a large group of friends and because of my grandfather's strictness I naturally chose

to focus on my academics. But many of my other friends, they fell out in primary school already. Uhm (..) some in Grade 8, some in Grade 9 (..) and (..) went to go work on the farm or in a shop (..). Uhm (...) sometimes they just end up loitering around on street corners (...), *loaf* [beg] 50 cent, a rand and stuff like that. So (...) given my observations, it was clear that there were many young people who did not work on a better future.

Although the participants had different ways of perceiving their community environment, all three of them agreed that the community did not offer any support that assisted their educational experiences in high school. Thus, the FW of educational achievement, that the participants occupied, did not arise from the community where they came from. In the next chapter I argue that this FW is centred on the school environment. Although older people encouraged the youth to further their studies, there were not any tangible support systems found in the community with regards to education. One can assume that the FW of educational achievement was formed by the educationally-minded students from this community whom possessed the aspirational-, navigational-, and social capital required to imagine alternative futures to the ones surrounding them.

5.6.2 Role models

Both Katherine and Timothy speak about people in their community who went to university before them. Timothy's uncle was the first person in his extended family that attended university and who became a qualified chartered accountant. Timothy mentioned that seeing his uncle attaining such a qualification was an inspiration that showed him that it was possible to achieve high aspirations, even coming from his community. He said that,

...it was definitely an inspiration, to see someone from my family and especially from our community achieve such a special accomplishment and (...) it inspired me, but it was not the determining factor in my hard work, because I of course had *my* ideals, *my* dreams. He was a role model in the sense that, if he could do it, and he comes from this community, certainly I can do it too. So I was the third one who studied

further (..) . The second one messed up. So I am the second one to receive two degrees.

One can infer that Timothy's self-confidence and assertiveness was piqued by the knowledge that someone from his community could achieve such high aspirations. Cindy spoke similarly about Timothy and her cousin, Ashwill (pseudonym), who went to Stellenbosch University before her and is currently a fifth year medical student. She said:

Let me make an example (..) Timothy (..) he is smart, Ashwill (..) smart (..) like when *they* went to Stellenbosch and people heard (...) and then when I started talking about oh yes I'm considering (.) or I applied to go to Stellenbosch too, it was like oh smart people go to Stellenbosch University.

Following the extracts from Timothy and Cindy's interviews, one can deduce that the participants wanted to attend Stellenbosch University despite their communities' ostracising attitudes towards the people who go to the university. The participants thus transcended the community perspectives to achieve their academic aspirations, which is evidence of their resistant capital. Timothy ended his interview with the following assertion:

Look, the *take home message* for me is: regardless how small or poor your hometown is, you are able to achieve higher heights. Uhm (..) I always knew this (..) and through motivational speakers that came to our school, I realised it more and more. In Grade 8, my Mathematics teacher told us about the students from model C schools and top schools (..), who pass Mathematics with distinction. And he then motivated us to do the same, because at the end of the day the work is the same, it's only different backgrounds and different circumstances. But, as long as your mind is there and the belief in you is there, you are able to achieve anything. So if you, like me, come from a small town, previously disadvantaged (...) where there maybe aren't many role models (...) an important factor for being successful is (...) self-motivation. And self-motivation is to an extent, a product of self-belief and to foster dreams in life. If those things are there, you *can* make a success of your life.

The participants' personal experiences with community members caused independent shifts in their educational subjectivities. These shifts again manifested in positive effects in the development of the capitals that informed these subjectivities. While Katherine only had negative experiences with their community, Timothy chose to focus on the positive aspects in their community, such as identifying role models, and Cindy had both positive and negative experiences.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the out-of-school environments that influenced the subjectivity formation of the selected students in this study while they were growing up in their rural hometown. These environments were the family-, social groups-, and community of these individuals, which became the main sites of their educational engagements whilst growing up. The next chapter will shift focus from the out-of-school environments to the key site of their educational subjectivity formation, which was their high school.

Although their family environments were characterised by their working class socio-economic situations, which were often constraining, this did not affect the familial aspiration of these families. Rather, the difficult and impoverished conditions of their families seemed to strengthen the familial capital that their homes offered the participants. The FGSs in this study assert that their parents/guardians were consistently emotionally supportive of their educational aspirations, however unlikely these aspirations were in their rural hometown.

Contrary to the family environments of the participants which were similar and had a similar effect on the subjectivity formation of the students, each of the participants had a unique response to their social- and community environments. Katherine embraced her outgoing personality by befriending likeminded individuals in her environment, which supported the way she formed her educational subjectivity in an active way. Cindy and Timothy demonstrated more indirect ways of utilising their social groups to form their educational subjectivities. Cindy mostly separated her school work from any social groups, while Timothy had many friends, but strategically chose whom he would interact with in his academic circle. The three participants also used their experiences within their rural community environment in

different ways to form their educational subjectivities. These three participants chose to either focus on the positive- or negative aspects of their community to build their resistant capital, or a combination of both.

This chapter demonstrated the conditions of poverty and poor academic support that these students navigated growing up in a rural town, and provided a sufficient background from which to interpret their high school experiences in the next chapter. This chapter has also uncovered the concurrent and separate ways that these students mobilised their capitals in their out-of-school environments. Each individual had a distinct way of navigating their family-, social groups-, and community in developing their educational subjectivities. These ways diverged in the unique manifestations of their subjectivities and the emphasis these students placed on different CCW capitals. The next section will focus on how these students mobilised these capitals in their high school environment and how the high school became the key location from which these individuals established their successful educational achievement routes.

Chapter 6: Data presentation and analysis of the school influence on participants' educational subjectivities

6.1 Introduction

This is the second data presentation chapter. It presents and interprets the data on how the rural schooling environment of the first generation students (FGSs) in this study influenced the formation of their educational subjectivities, and how they went about developing their educational achievement routes. This chapter builds on the previous chapter, which provided an account of how these students were positioned in, and navigated through, their family-, social-, and community environments which supported them in pursuit of their educational aspirations. By considering these different environments, Chapter five provided a discussion of the ways that the aforementioned students constructed their educational subjectivities in their life contexts outside of the school. The educational subjectivities of the participants distinguished them from those youth in their rural community who did not or could not complete their schooling, or aspire to go to university.

This chapter focuses on key aspects of the FGSs' educationally-based subjectivities in relation to their school going. In other words, the focus here is on how they accomplished their schooling as the key dimension of their educational achievement routes, which enabled them to access university study as FGSs. Specifically, this chapter explores how their rural high school, despite its limitations, provided a productive platform for these students to form their educational subjectivities in a way that lead to their academic success. The data gathered through the in-depth semi-structured interviews and follow-up interviews with the participants, is presented around the research sub-questions set out in Chapter 3:

- 1. How do first generation students establish their educational achievement routes in their rural schooling context?*
- 2. How do achieving first generation students construct their educational subjectivities in the context of their rural town livelihoods?*
- 3. What role does their agency play in how the students successfully navigate their educational achievement routes from a small rural school into an urban university environment?*

The first section of this chapter discusses the high school context of the participants. I provide a background of the high school based on the socio-economic conditions and educational climate of the school. I will further build out the biographic description of the school, based on how the participants described their lived experiences of their high school.

Secondly, I discuss how the participants transformed their struggling high school context into a productive platform, within which they were able to exercise their agency, to form productive educational subjectivities. I will do this by referring to Holland *et al.*'s (1998) Figured Worlds (FW) theory. According to Holland *et al.* (1998:52), a FW is a realm of interpretation and continual participation, which is informed by social- and cultural influences. These worlds are driven by a network of agents who themselves assign significance to certain acts and value particular behaviours. In the context of a high school, the valued acts and behaviours for a FW of educational achievement would be to do your homework, to score high on tests, and these actions are motivated by the desire to one day go to university. Although the FWs theory has not been widely used as a theoretical framework in educational studies, according to Urietta (2007:120) it has the potential to capture subtle nuances in subjectivity formation within structural- and social phenomena.

Lastly, this chapter focuses on how the FGSs in this study managed to mediate the rural working class environment of their high school successfully. They did so by utilising capitals to craft their educational subjectivities in such a way to establish viable educational achievement routes. In Chapter 3, I discussed this study's interpretation of capitals by extending the traditional Bourdieuan conceptualisation of cultural capital by incorporating Yosso's (2005) additional capitals from her community cultural wealth (CCW) framework. Bourdieu's theory on cultural capital states that students enter schooling from different cultural- and structural social positions, associated with distinct cultural dispositions. These dispositions operate as cultural capital in schools. Cultural capital refers to the acquired- and required ways of speaking, acting, and abstract knowing that are possessed by privileged groups in society. This abstract knowledge and capitals provide value, power, and dominance in a particular field. In the context of educational research, the field is represented by the school environment and the privileged groups are represented by the middle class students in schools. Yosso's CCW framework acknowledges the community

capitals operating in working class communities, which the working class have utilised effectively to achieve their educational aspirations. The CCW framework consists of the following capitals: aspirational-, familial-, navigational-, resistant-, social-, and linguistic capital. However, Yosso (2005:70) argues that these working class capitals have not been leveraged productively in the schooling environment.

This chapter is the second of two key research chapters in this thesis. This current chapter is central to answering the main research question of the study in that it focuses on the selected participants' engagement with their high schooling, which was central to them establishing their educational achievement routes. The previous chapter's focus on their family-, social-, and community navigations lays the basis for this chapter school navigation focus. This chapter shows how the FGSs in this study used their high school environment as an operating site to form their educational subjectivities, which was critical in how they established their educational achievement routes from their rural high school into the urban university environment.

6.2 High school context of participants

6.2.1 Biographic context of school

There are three high schools in the *Greater Tulbagh* area: two in Tulbagh and one in Wolseley. The one school in Tulbagh used to be classified as a previously white school (model C), while the other used to be a previously coloured school before 1994. Both schools in Tulbagh are combined schools (i.e. comprising of pre-primary, primary, and high school), while the school in Wolseley is a secondary school. As the neighbouring town of Gouda does not have a high school, most students attend the two high schools in Tulbagh, while some attend the high schools in Porterville. Saron also does not have a high school and most of the students from this town attend high school in Porterville which is closest, while some attend the previous model C school in Tulbagh in search of better educational opportunity. All of the aforementioned schools fall within the Witzenberg municipal school district.

As the three participants attended Sunshine High School (SHS) in Wolseley, therefore this school will be the focus in this study. SHS was classified as a Coloured school before 1994 and is now classified as a Section 21 and Quintile 4 school.

Being a Section 21 school means that the school manages its own finances after the Department of Basic Education deposits the school's allocation in the beginning of each financial year. As a Quintile 4 school, the government pays R590 subsidy per learner to the school (Dass & Rinquist, 2017:143). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the participants paid approximately R600 per annum for school fees. Thus, while they came from an impoverished area, the students were not restricted from attending high school by school fees. However, the limited financial support from the government did have an impact on the participants' perceptions of the quality of their schooling. I will expand on this point later in this section.

In the 2017 socio-economic profile (SEP) of the Witzenberg municipality, the Western Cape Government (2017:4) listed the matric pass rate of the district as 74.5% in 2016. While the pass rate seems positive, the concerning figure is the Grade 12 drop-out rate of 35.5%. The government attributes this high number to economic factors such as: unemployment, high levels of households with no income or an income of less than R515 a month, and teenage pregnancies. From the data gathered from the interviews, SHS graduates fewer than half of the students that enrol into Grade 8. This indicates that the culture of the high school is permeated with the community's historic poverty and negative attitudes towards the prospects of education. According to Timothy, out of a group of 70-100 people, only five to ten matriculates from SHS go to university. He said that,

Per matric class probably like between three and six that go to university. There are probably others that went to go do diplomas, but I'm not sure...[Laughs]. Out of a matric class of (...) we were something in the 70s. We started out in Grade 8 with 250 something. So between Grade 8 and matric, more than 170 students dropped out.

Cindy substantiates Timothy's claim by stating that,

When I was in Grade 12, there were (..) like (...) *yoh* (...) Katherine and I (...). Probably eight or nine people, out of a class of a hundred and something, came to study something. But many of us flunked out of course. Of those who went [to

university], like Katherine's cousin, he went to UWC and he also dropped out to go work (..) And there was another cousin of mine, he also went to UWC and a few months after he started, he left everything.

It is notable that the estimates made by the participants do not match the data from the SEP of the Witzenberg region. This can be due to the fact that in 2016 the Witzenberg region comprised of 54 schools, which could skew the perceptions of the individual schools in the district. Of these 54 schools only 14 schools were equipped with libraries, and there were no mention of other facilities like laboratories (Western Cape Government, 2017:5). Moreover, the SEP only referred to the Western Cape Education Department's 2016 Annual Survey of Public and Independent Schools. Upon further investigation, I found no mention of the Witzenberg region, or SHS, in the annual survey mentioned above. Therefore, this chapter relies on information provided by the participants to gain an insight into the schooling culture of the *Greater Tulbagh* area.

As highlighted by the above discussion, there is a culture of rejecting schooling prevailing amongst many students in the participants' community. This culture of rejection accompanies the students from the onset of their secondary schooling and is exhibited in their disregard for tertiary education. From SHS's minimal school fees one can infer that the school also suffers from the poverty in the community. I argue that this school rejection culture runs deep in their community, rooted in the socio-economic circumstances of the students in the school, and produces a profound cultural capital misalignment that they experience between their home worlds and the educational requirements of the school.

6.2.2 The participants' description of their school

The participants' did not convey a favourable impression of the rural context of their high school. They reported that their school was subject to the common elements of a poor community such as: low student participation rates and high dropout, neglect, burglary and vandalism, amongst others. Katherine explained that,

The fact that there was so much vandalism. There was extreme vandalism in the toilets (..). You only go to the toilet if it is really an extreme need (..) because it just

looks so (...) you just get the idea that you could pick up an infection or illness here. Everyone writes stuff like *Katherine was here*, not that I wrote stuff (...). Why does that have to stand there? (...). Everyone has to write there, because it's cool. I didn't like that about the school. So the vandalism was real. Oh and there were a lot of burglaries at the school, so it wasn't completely safe. Because at night people would jump over the gates (..) because our safety was not what you would call the best. There it was broken into yes (...). And sometimes the gates would be open during the day and then people walked in and out of school. I didn't like that because it means that any person could walk into the school and it was supposed to be a *safe environment* for the eight hours that you are there for... I don't know if the teachers were strict enough with us (...) but (.) like (.) children still do whatever they want (...) when no one cares.

In addition to their experiences of SHS as a poor rural school, the participants conveyed that the rural context of their school had a negative impact on their educational opportunities. Cindy described the average classroom as having a student-teacher ratio of approximately 50:1, which is contrary to the Western Cape Government's SEP (2016:4), which estimates the average student-teacher ratio to be 35.1. Moreover, the participants described SHS as under-provided in terms of resources and subject choices. According to Cindy, due to a lack of qualified teachers, the school was not able to offer subjects like Computer Application Technology (CAT), Drama, and Music. Timothy described SHS as "previously disadvantaged" and Katherine described it as a "typical public school", which lacked many things such as; information technologies; infrastructure; and opportunities for extracurricular activities, such as sport and culture. Katherine asserted that: "if there was an A-class, we would be in the B-class. Like our kids (...) never dreamt further". Cindy agreed that the fact that the school was not well equipped had an influence on her academic potential. She said that,

There were times when I felt like I missed out because (.) our school had limited resources and you can't do everything that the other schools. Like Drama and uhm computer classes, because we did not have that. So I feel like that was quite a lot that I missed out on.

For Timothy, SHS's infrastructural deficiencies had a practical bearing on his ability to learn. He said that,

The school did not offer CAT, the computer subject, but if you wanted to do something on the computer they would not refuse you. Yes, there was a computer room... our school did not have a lot of (...) chemistry equipment, so we would typically do only one or two chemistry experiments for the whole year. So I never really got a feel for the practical side of chemistry.

Timothy also mentions that his negligible school experience with Chemistry had led to him making misinformed decisions later in his academic career, which was the reason for his change in degrees at university. Cindy further spoke of the fact that the impoverished circumstances of SHS affected how well she could learn. She pointed out that,

We had to share the textbooks with each other. And they are not the best textbooks. So (.) if you wanted to (.) if you could not to finish your work, obviously (..) both of us cannot take the book home with us. So you have to work much faster to be able to write everything down or to finish everything in time [before the period ends]. Because you can't finish the work at home, because you have to consider the other person too. Okay (..) you take the book this week, I take it next week or we have to find a way to meet each other outside of school. And it's not that everyone stays in the same vicinity, some of them stay on farms nearby. So (..) that doesn't always work out.

The participants declared that they did not feel that SHS prepared them academically for university. Despite the basic education offered by the school, all three participants had been top achievers at SHS and were accepted into Stellenbosch University. The reason for this could be that their scholastic achievement was attributable more to their personal dedication to their school work, than to their schooling environment, or even in spite of their school. When asked about the contribution their high school in itself made to their educational achievement, the participants tended to have negative responses. Cindy explained that,

The only (.) the only thing with which (..) like from the school's side (..) was that they allowed us to do our applications there. That was about it. There was nothing else really that you could (...).

The participants generally attributed their success to personal commitment and making academically-driven choices in high school. According to Katherine, being a committed and hard-student in high school was the key factor to knowing that she would get into university. From the below extract, one can see how she distinguishes the top students in her class, whom were arguably participants of her FW, from the rest of the students in her community. She said that,

I think with my group [matric group] it was at least 10 or 12 [who ended up going to university]. Our group did really well. But after that it was (...) five. And I think last year it was even four. And it keeps getting worse and worse... like with us, we were the biggest group. We were 100 and (...) 30 or something (...). We were a big group. But out of that group (...) I'm not sure right now, but I know that it was basically the top 10 that went on to go study. And the years after that (...) last year it was 60 [in the matric class]. But from that group probably only four went to university. It becomes increasingly more (...). The people are not motivated to do well anymore. I don't know if the work is more difficult [laughs] or if everyone is just more comfortable now.

The above indicates that although there is a small group of academic achievers in each Matric groups at SHS, this group seemed to grow smaller ever year. Katherine relates this phenomenon to the community's relationship to education. However, this section has shown how the participants defied their community's perception of schooling by illustrating the lived experiences of the participants with regard to their rural high school. While the impoverished circumstances of the school had a negative effect on their academic experiences, the participants expressed that through personal hard work and commitment, they were still able to utilise the

school's resources effectively to build their educational achievement routes. This latter aspect is addressed below.

6.3 School as Figured World

The previous sections demonstrated the deprived environment in which the participants completed their secondary schooling. This section shows that despite the relatively poor opportunities that their school could offer the participants; these students still recognised and credited the positive aspects of the school. I argue that the students in this study were able to identify and utilise the opportunities in their schooling, and these capabilities enabled them to achieve their academic success. The participants used the positive aspects of their school as a source of hope, motivation, and support. In this way the school became their FW for accomplishing their educational achievements. Timothy's opinion of his rural high school experience was that it was not any different from any other high school. He said that,

Other schools are probably only stricter in terms of discipline. Uhm (..) with students that perform better overall. But I think the students could have done better, if they did not allow their circumstances to influence them. Negatively influences them.

Similarly, Katherine expressed that SHS did the best that they could with what they had and the school supported the students within its means. She again refers to the incidence where the community refused to help her friend pursue his athletics career in the Northern Cape. Ultimately, the school used their influence to help raise money for this student to pursue his athletics. Observing this type of support from the school improved the perceptions that Katherine had of SHS. Katherine also said that: "there were teachers that really tried their best. Like I believe that (..) in our town we received the best possible education. They [the teachers] did the best that they could with what they had to work with". Cindy affirms Katherine's statement by saying that,

Uhm (...). I would say (..) [sighs]. I don't know how to describe it (...). It all depended on how you chose to approach your work and how you did it. There was enough support to do well if you only made use of it. Like the teachers (..) they were willing

(..). like on weekends our Afrikaans teacher gave us extra classes and did extra work with us. After school our Business Study teacher would go through old exam papers with us, *if* you decided that you will actually do it. So they are willing to (..) to walk that extra mile for you. If you decide that okay I will sacrifice two three hours of my Saturday morning to go. They were willing to do that. So it was not from the school's side, but from the teachers.

Cindy reiterates Timothy and Katherine's view that the school in itself was not perfect, but that it was up to the individual to make the most out of what the school could offer. It seemed that the biggest resource that the participants recognised in the school was the teachers. The previous section showed that the school in itself offered limited opportunities to its students. However, for the participants as academic achievers, the school became a FW within which they were able to live out their identities as aspirational young people. These aspirational identities were uncommon in their impoverished community, but were acknowledged within the FW of their high school, and manifested in their productive educational subjectivities. As I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, a FW is operated by a network of agents who perceive certain acts as important and who value particular behaviours. In the FW of the SHS, the agents were the academically achieving students who were orientated towards the same goal (going to university), the teachers who recognised and supported these students' aspirations, and significant others such as their parents and family members who played peripheral, but substantial roles in their education.

The school presented particular benefits and opportunities to students who actively participated in its FW. All three participants stated that if it were not for the school, they would not have been able to learn how to work on computers, do research for assignments, or even apply to university. As mentioned, the commonality between the participants, as agents in the FW of the school, was that they were all academically-inclined students with the aspiration of going to university. As occupants of their educationally-focused FW, the school supported them in achieving their educational aspirations. Cindy said that she felt supported by the school in that,

... I feel like they did not have to help us with our applications. And they gave us extra information. Like Miss Steyn definitely, but the principal would also talk to us about studying further and where to find information. So there definitely was (...).

For the context of this study, the valued acts and behaviours for a FW of educational achievement included doing their class work and homework well, and on time, and scoring high on tests and examinations. As agents operating in the FW, the participants learnt how to act and become academic achievers at an early age. Timothy recalls how he felt in Grade 7 when he did not receive the certificate for achievement in Mathematics. He said that,

I have always had a passion for Mathematics, but I really wanted to get it in Grade 7. Then there was a girl who received it instead of me (..) and then I realised that in Grade 8 I will have to study much harder. I decided, any other advice that the Mathematics teacher gave me I will follow, because he knows what he is talking about. And I followed his advice to the point. I was the top achiever in Mathematics in Grade 8, I carried it through up until Grade 12.

Similarly, Cindy refers to how the teachers valued her as a good student, which made her more apt to complete her work on time and to do well in tests and examinations, as not to disappoint them. Cindy mentioned that,

The teachers (..) I would say I was (..) not to brag, but I was like the best in the class. Because I was always the person who they would ask if I wanted to work out extra exam papers. Like they make it available to everyone, but that's not to say that everyone will take them after class. Like I would always be the one that asks, aren't there any extra exam papers of last year? Or if I need a textbook, then I would ask if there wasn't perhaps a textbook that I could use. Or they would like ask my books to write out the work for the rest of the children in the class.

It appears that the students were required to possess certain characteristics to allow them to access and remain in their educationally-supported FW. The previous

section illustrated that the teachers were very willing to help students who were hard-working, and as Cindy mentioned, were willing to go the extra mile. Moreover, the next extracts show that to belong to the FW, it was important to dream and to foster high educational aspirations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Timothy had very high aspirations since he was a child. He reiterated this fact by saying that,

And (...) in high school I had a bunch of dreams. I wanted to become a Mathematician. And when I started to like Physics, I wanted to become a physicist. Then I switched between mathematician and physicist, mathematician and physicist. And then I ultimately, I don't know where it happened, I think Grade 10, 11 (...). And I started *really* to like Chemistry. Then I chose to study Chemistry at university.

Likewise to Cindy and Timothy, Katherine had high academic aspirations and she mentions that it was very important to her to achieve in school, as she wanted to ensure that she could get into a good university and achieve her career aspirations. She said that,

I thought it would help me (...). To be able to get a professional job, one probably needs a university qualification (...) for the job that I want. I can't be a teacher if I just finished high school. And I felt that if I got an education, it has to be the best. I didn't want to go to an FET. I wanted to be here. It is an achievement to come from my community, it is an achievement to know that you went to university (...) such a good university. So I wanted to have that, so that I know one day when I go work I did it thanks to this university.

From the quotations above, it is clear that there existed a commonality among the participants, which was the pride they had in themselves as a result of being top achieving students at SHS. In the previous chapter, I described the impoverished and difficult conditions within which the participants lived out their educational aspirations. Their ability to have pride in their achievements and to maintain high aspirations, despite their limiting environments, can be described as a type of capital which not only enabled their entry into the FW of SHS, but supported their continued

aspiration. I would ascribe these unique attributes of the participants to their possession of resistant capital. According to Yosso (2005:80), resistant capital is an amalgam of attitudes and behaviours that challenge the status quo and is a means of maintaining and passing on community cultural wealth capitals in the face of race-, gender-, and class inequality. Although Yosso theorises resistant capital in terms of racial-, gender-, and class inequality, I argue that the participants demonstrated similar resistance to their environmental oppression, having been able to maintain their educational aspirations despite adverse community attitudes, poverty, and lacking parental support due to low levels of education.

Another feature of FWs is that they are historically-informed and as seen in the participants' interviews, the participants emulated previous academic achievers from SHS who went on to study at Stellenbosch University. This phenomenon is in line with Urietta's (2007:109) assertion that:

Because figured worlds are socially organized and performed, they are dependent on interaction and people's intersubjectivity for perpetuation. In them, people "figure" how to relate to one another over time and across different time/place/space contexts. Holland et al. state that these ways of interacting become almost like "roles", but not in the static sense of the older concept.

Thus, those who exited the physical FW of SHS continued to play significant symbolic roles through the legacies that they left as examples for the students that remained. Cindy mentioned the other students that she looked up to, who had belonged and graduated from the SHS FW and went to university. She mentioned that,

Yoh (...) very few (...). I know when I was in Grade 8; Timothy was the only person that came here that I knew of. And after him was Ashy [Cindy's cousin]. Like the others (...) the other people I don't know of. You don't hear about this one went to UCT or to UWC. But it's very few.

This section has proved how important and relevant their participation in a FW was in how the participants in this study established their educational achievement routes. The previous chapter indicated that the participants did not always receive the necessary support to maintain their high educational aspirations in their out-of-school environs. Thus, the school as a FW of educational achievement became the space in which they developed and powered their educational achievement routes. The FW allowed the participants to position themselves in a way that was not restricted by their physical environments and thus offered them the opportunity to further develop the capitals that were already embedded in their educational subjectivities. This phenomenon is explained by Holland *et al.* (1998:3) as such: “People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are”. The next section considers the concepts of educational subjectivity, capitals, and FWs as a whole, and how these concepts intertwined in the way that participants ultimately established their educational achievement routes during high school.

6.4 School as platform for establishment of educational achievement routes

In the previous chapter, which discussed the family-, social-, and community contexts of the participants, I indicated that young people from this area generally do not grow up in supportive educational environments. Those who manage to establish such environments for themselves, such as the participants in this study, positioned and ingratiated themselves into a FW of educational achievement which offered them possibilities for future success. This section demonstrates how the FGSs in this study were participants in a FW, in which they were able to develop and use various capitals as key constitutive components of the educational achievement routes that they established during their high school years.

For the participants, the school was where they realised the possibilities of what they could become in life and that there was more to life than what they saw in their communities. Cindy mentioned that everything she knew about possible career options, she found out in her Life Orientation teacher’s (Miss Steyn), classroom which had a range of booklets and brochures about different careers. Throughout Cindy’s high school career, she wanted to become amongst others things: a teacher,

a lawyer, and a nutritionist. Katherine also credited the school for helping her to maintain her aspirations for success in school, and especially the fact that her Business Studies teacher believed in her academic capabilities. She said that:” So (..) I was inspired then I also inspired others. But it is thanks to my Business Studies teacher. Out of all my teachers, I remember her the most. She had the biggest impact on my schooling”. Timothy also mentions that his aspirations started in kindergarten, when his teacher told the class about various career choices. Although these aspirations changed through the years, the important point to take note of is that these symbolic interactions were the catalysts for the development of these students’ aspirational capital, as they did not have access to many sources of inspiration. Timothy recalled that,

Primary school uhm (...). In primary school I always dreamt about becoming a medical doctor. That was my dream up until Grade 7. Yes that was my dream, to become a medical doctor and to find a cure for AIDS. That was my dream in primary school. So I dreamt big [laughs].

According to Cindy, the school was the main source of motivation and support for her to work hard and to pursue academics after school. This support from the school became a crucial foundation for the participants to develop productive educational subjectivities. Cindy says that,

That was the time for me (..) Grade 11, when it clicked: okay you actually have to start now (..) like there is a certain standard that they can expect, so I have to adhere to it and I have to get there...My friends would describe me as a “goodie two shoes” because my work was always done on time. If they asked me anything about the work then I knew it. I was like (..) I was *oppit* [on top of it]; I was that person [laughing]... I have always been hard-working (...) because I know I’m not smart, I wouldn’t describe myself as the smartest, but I would always put in that extra because I know (..) okay I’m not that good in Mathematics, so I have to put in extra time. To (..) work out those extra stuff and to practise, so I know (..) okay I will struggle with this so I’ll always put in much more time, instead of being a know-it-all.

It is clear that Cindy had a remarkable sense of self-knowledge and that she was able to identify her strengths and weaknesses, and to take the necessary actions to achieve academic success. This sense of self, and awareness of what was required to achieve academic success, was also be remarkable in how Katherine and Timothy spoke of themselves as high school students and the factors in their success. Katherine said that,

The only thing that you could do was make sure of your marks (...). Your marks were the only thing that you could go on. Like I knew I had to do extremely well at the end of Grade 11, as well as in June in Grade 12. Those are the two marks, because those two marks say whether you will be provisionally accepted. So all that I had to go on were my marks and I had to hope that it would be enough (...). I did not have anything but that, and then I could count on the school. That's it.

Timothy stated a similar appreciation for the school as a support structure while he established his educational achievement route. Moreover, he showed the same sense of self-knowledge as Cindy, as he attributes his success to himself as a particular student during high school. Furthermore, similar to Katherine, he also mentions his role in the FW of the school as someone who is an example to others and that could help other people succeed. He said that,

One thing that I knew for sure was: I have to work extremely hard [chuckles]. Work hard, because I knew that marks are very important and I don't know whether the university were interested in a few extramural activities back then. But hard work was the thing. I worked hard and I picked the fruits of my labour...So I worked very hard (...) uhm (...) inspired many people, helped many people and I had very supportive teachers... So I was basically a nerd in high school. I would say that I am a hardworking, committed, self-motivated student. Uhm (...) I don't want to sound like I'm boasting, but [laughs] to answer your question (...) so I describe myself as an academic student... And (..) I am a very patient person; I have a passion for tutoring other students. When I tutor a student, I do it out of passion. I try to explain the concepts as clear as possible. I don't mind explaining a concept over and over again. Uhm (..) because my goal is to invest in this student, so they will pass above their expectations. Yes, that's me.

The participants showed an ability to navigate their schooling environment in a way that best supported their educational achievement routes. This ability enabled the three students in this study to pursue their academic- and career aspirations by engaging their rural- and working class schooling environment, and responding positively to the limitations of this environment. Yosso (2005:80) refers to this ability as navigational capital, i.e. the strategic movement through social institutions. Through the use of their navigational capital, these students were able to identify the actions required of them to overcome the challenges associated with their rural school and to utilise the resources at their disposal.

In Chapter 3, I asserted that the artefacts which the participants of a FW use to operate within it were not only measurable objects such as grades, but also intangible materials and relations. These included: the hope that they offered their families as a way out of their poor environments; the relationships that they had with teachers and peers; the possibilities that these relationships offered them; and also the potential change they could make in the community as success stories. The meaningful relationships that they established with their teachers and peers were crucial in the establishment of their educational routes and included cultural- and symbolic acts that did not pertain directly to their high school experiences. However, these actions appeared to play a significant role in how the participants formed their educational subjectivities, as well as developed their capitals. In the extract below, Katherine describes such an event,

The one thing that I did [outside of school], was the *Cancer Relay for Life*. We were a group that did it together in Grade 11, Grade 12 and Grade 10. And then we did many functions to raise money for it (...). We sold stuff. It was always fun. We were a team. And then we went to the companies in town and asked the manager for money and we had to explain our cause (...). And then we used to (...). In Ceres is the big event (...), and then we had to walk all through the night around a track. Around the track were candles in holders and then you perhaps put a family member who died of cancer, or a friend who is battling with cancer in solidarity. So that was very beautiful. Then we would walk around the track all night (...) and there always had to be someone in your group who is walking. And you could talk to other people, and

people would tell their cancer stories. That was the best to see that. My grandmother died of cancer, so it meant a lot to me. That function made my heart very glad. That all that's all in which I partook [laughs]. That function made my hear very glad and I had a passion for it. And to be vulnerable together brings you closer to others. I still communicate with those people; they became my friends- someone with whom I share something special.

Both Timothy and Katherine had such events in their life that had a symbolic meaning for them as individuals. I argue that they were able to draw on these cultural resources in the construction of their educational achievement routes. Timothy refers to a cultural experience that had a meaningful impact on his life as an academic achieving student in school. In response to the question of whether any community organisations offered them any support or assistance as a rural aspirant FGSs he said that,

I know of myself. I can't think of anyone else. Financially, no because our school fees were very low. Spiritually, I went to catechisation classes in Grade 7 and (...) I don't know if I can state it like this but (...). I think I developed a love for bible study and a love for God by the time I reached Grade 8. I don't know if a positive change in my spiritual life also motivated me to achieve academically (...). I don't know if there is a correlation between the two. Uh (...) but I do know that now there is a correlation between my spiritual life and my self-confidence... Yes, my self-image is much better since I had a positive spiritual experience, which I still maintain. For example, I could not talk in front of people, but today I lecture in front of a class and tutor Mathematics as if I've been doing it for years. And even the first time that I did it, I did it like it was nothing.

The symbolic interactions mentioned by Katherine and Timothy relates to Bourdieu's (1986:18) argument about how some forms of cultural capital may be acquired in society, but go unrecognised by others. According to Bourdieu's (1986:18), the nature of how cultural capital (as an intangible capital) is transmitted and acquired in society is more hidden than that of the transference and acquisition of a tangible capital, such as economic capital. Thus, some forms of cultural capital is predisposed to function as symbolic capital, i.e. in a form of cultural know-how that is not aligned with the dominant culture in society and is thus unrecognised as capital.

The aforementioned symbolic artefacts operated outside of the schooling environment, but both students utilised these experiences as resources to support their motivation and perseverance; Katherine as a means to develop her social capital and for Timothy a way to strengthen and build his educational subjectivity. Thus, the participants made use of symbolic capital (which was unrecognised by their school) in their constant self-making processes, to be able to operate as academic achievers amidst the challenges they experienced in their rural high school.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the school as primary educational engagement platform for how the FGSs in this study established their educational achievement routes. The chapter showed how the FGSs in this study used their high school environment as the core environment in which to form the productive educational subjectivities that enabled them to successfully establish their educational achievement routes in their rural high school (SHS). Due to the fact that their family-, social-, and community environments were not able to offer them sufficient academic support, the participants ingratiated themselves into the FW operating in SHS. These students were allowed into the FW of SHS based on the community capitals that they accessed in their working class home-, social-, and community environments, which empowered them to construct productive educational subjectivities. These educational subjectivities enabled the FGSs in this study to become top performers at SHS and thus become active agents in this FW of educational achievement.

The chapter proffered arguments showing that key requirements for entry into the FW of SHS were to be dedicated and hard-working students who have dreams and foster high educational aspirations. I have shown that all three participants were motivated, committed, and had high future-oriented aspirations, despite their impoverished environments growing up in a rural town. Moreover, it was evident that all three participants were able to conceptualise ways to successfully establish pathways from their rural first generation upbringings into university, as their families were not equipped with the middle class capitals to prepare them for the middle class university environment. Regardless of the physically impoverished state of the school, the participants mobilised their resistant-, navigational-, aspirational-, and

social capitals to construct successful educational achievement routes. They were able to use their future-oriented vision to utilise the resources in their limiting environments productively. These resources included the community library, the school computer laboratory, and their teachers. This academic orientation enabled them to become successful students and to gain access to university. The participants also positioned their teachers as mentors and relied heavily on these individuals for continued support and encouragement in the establishment of their educational achievement routes. By accepting these mentoring roles, these teachers became active agents in the FW of academic achievement at SHS and in this way allowed the participants to construct productive educational subjectivities, from which their educational achievement routes emerged.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I recap and conclude this study. The focus of the study was on the educational subjectivity formation and achievement routes of three first generation students (FGSs) during their high school years in the *Greater Tulbagh* area, a small rural town in the Western Cape, South Africa. As a FGS from this geographical area, I was inspired to conduct this study to ascertain whether other young people, who grew up in similar circumstances as myself, encountered the same challenges and obstacles associated with being a rural-origin FGS. In this thesis I have aligned myself with Groenewald's (2013:146) perspective that isolated small rural towns in South Africa are neglected when it comes to educational research pertaining to aspirations and achievement. I aimed to make a contribution to the understanding of the educational experiences of the aspirant FGSs in order to assist policy-makers in their work of providing equitable educational opportunity for young people from all social groups and economic backgrounds. This study therefore specifically focused on the lived environments within which the participants constructed their productive educational subjectivities, which allowed them to establish educational achievement routes into Stellenbosch University. I focused on the family-, social-, community-, and school environments of the participants, which were instrumental in their education pathways.

This study concurred with literature that indicate that parental education levels have an effect on the educational attainment of FGSs, but that this effect is not deterministic in the educational trajectories of aspirant FGSs. In a study on the graduate aspirations of 267 first-generation university students, Hayden (2008) found that parental educational backgrounds were only tangentially related to aspirations. Moreover, Hayden found that there was no difference in graduate aspirations between first- and non-first- generation students. This finding suggests that the FGSs who are drawn to elite institutions and/or are selected by elite institutions may possess a sense of self-efficacy and drive that, despite their humble beginnings, puts them on par with non-first-generation peers. The aim of this study was to investigate how selected rural-origin FGSs transcended their underprivileged backgrounds through establishing productive educational achievement pathways.

7.2 Overview of thesis

Chapter one introduced the background to the study and discussed the significance of the study. This chapter further provided the rationale of the study and the motivation which necessitated this research. In response to the main research question: *How do first generation students from a rural town construct their educational achievement routes during their high school years to gain access to university?*, this study has researched the personal accounts of the high school experiences of three FGSs who were the top-achievers in their high school, SHS. This chapter also provides context to understand the educational paths of the majority of FGSs in South Africa. The chapter further positions the phenomenon of differential aspiration and achievement between students of different social classes, in the light of South Africa's historically unequal racial educational provision, which is still entrenched in the educational trajectories of underprivileged South African youth.

Chapter two offered a systemic analysis of international- and South African literature which relate to the research topic. This chapter discussed central concepts such as social class in education systems and how the social classification in school systems perpetuates the inequalities between the aspirations and achievement of middle class versus working class students. The literature review further investigated the nature of the schooling experiences of a particular group of working class students, i.e. rural FGSs. International literature on FGSs indicated that much of the success of these students amounts to personal dedication and individual aspirations. This notion was developed further in the data analysis chapters (Chapter five and six). In my research I found very little literature on the schooling experiences of South African FGSs from rural environments. Moreover, most educational studies focused on the educational failure of working class students, rather than their aspirations and educational achievement routes. Thus, this chapter indicated a gap in the South African research done on the sociological influences on educational achievement in rural contexts.

In Chapter three I presented the theoretical framework of this study. I made use of a combined framework of Bourdieu's conceptualisation of cultural capital and Yosso's (2005) interpretation of capitals as part of her Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital has been widely used as a sociological lens to explain the disparities between the educational success of

middle class and working class students. However, critical researchers have criticised Bourdieu's theory for being limited in its deterministic conceptualisation of how capitals operate in social structures, especially in terms of agency and individual subjectivity formation inside of such structures, for example schools. To address the aforementioned limitation of Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, I incorporated Yosso's CCW capitals into this study's consideration of capitals. Yosso's CCW is significant in the sense that it values capitals from the lifeworlds of the working class. These capitals include: familial-, social-, linguistic-, navigational-, resistant-, and aspirational capital. However, I found that the CCW capitals could not account for the differentiation in the aspirations and achievement of the South African working class population, which was a key consideration that motivated this research. The question remained: why were there so few rural-origin FGSs at Stellenbosch University at the time of my study? To answer this question, I applied Holland *et al.*'s (1998) less-utilised Figured Worlds (FW) theory. The significance of a FW is that it is a social reality that lives within specific dispositions. Moreover, this reality is mediated amid relations of power. As FWs are peopled by individuals from collective imaginings (in my study, a shared aspiration for university education), the agents participating in them form their identity and agency dialectically and dialogically inside of the FW (Urietta, 2007:109). Holland *et al.* (1998:53) further describe FWs as a historical phenomenon and each FW is organised by 'cultural means', or narratives, storylines, and other cultural genre that help organise the FW. Urietta (2007:109) argues that these narratives provide cultural resources, which are durable and socially reproduced, to the participants in a FW. The concept of FWs is therefore useful in answering the aforementioned question of why the FGSs in this study were able to enter an elite university, unlike their peers from the same rural environment.

Chapter four described the research design and methodology of this study. In this chapter I validated my choices of using a qualitative approach and interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) for conducting and analysing my research. What differentiates qualitative research from quantitative research is that qualitative research is concerned with attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them, while quantitative research is mainly concerned with observations that are translatable into discrete units (Pandey & Padnaik, 2014:5744). Thus, the qualitative approach was suitable to address the

research questions for this study. I chose the IPA-approach to direct the research process as IPA-studies aim to examine how people make sense of their major life experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009:1), by being participant-oriented and showing respect and sensitivity for the lived experiences of each research participant (Alase, 2017:10). I found in-depth semi-structured interviews and informal follow-up interviews to be the best way to gather the in-depth narratives required for a qualitative study of this nature. Being in regular contact with the participants helped to establish the rapport needed for the open communication that was necessary to gather data about the under-investigated topic of the educational aspiration and achievement routes of rural-origin FGSs.

Chapters five and six presented and analysed the data. The two chapters both answered the main- and sub-research questions of this study, but had different foci. Chapter five focused on the rural out-of-school influences on the educational subjectivity formation of the three FGSs in this study, namely the role of the family-, social-, and community environments in how they established their educational achievement routes during high school. The most pertinent finding of this chapter was that although the family-, social-, and community environments of these students were impoverished in the Bourdieusian sense, i.e. relating to economic-, social-, and cultural capital, these environments were rich in Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). The participants all attributed the development of their own capitals (aspirational, resistant, social, and navigational) to the emotional support and encouragement of their families (familial capital). Thus, even though these students had the agentic capacity to develop and mobilise the aforementioned CCW capitals in their schooling, this capacity was grounded in the knowledge that their families supported their aspirations and dreams.

The family-, social-, and community environments markedly influenced the subjectivity formation of the three FGSs in this study. The fact that their families could not support them in an academic sense catalysed the development of navigational-, social-, resistant-, and aspirational capitals in their educational subjectivities. The main findings relating to the social environment of the participants were that they each made use of social interactions as strategic choices in their educational achievement routes, albeit in different ways, and that social groups were fundamental in how they constructed their educational subjectivities. Thus, their

development of social capital manifested in deviating ways, but in all three cases led to them forming productive educational subjectivities. Similarly, to their social environment, the participants all had different experiences within their community. These experiences either led them to reject their community, which fuelled their aspirational- and resistant capitals, or led to them aspiring to become like the few success stories that they saw in their community environment, thus also maintaining the same capitals but in a different way.

In Chapter six, I presented and analysed the data which illustrates how their high school became the foundational operating site for the FGSs to form their educational subjectivities in a way that enabled them access to university study. This chapter proved significant as it illustrated that although the participants acknowledged the poverty and lack of opportunity in their high school, they were able to identify and take advantage of the limited opportunities offered by SHS. Thus, the participants perceived their high school differently than their peers, as they possessed the capitals that allowed them entry into the FW of educational achievement operating in their school. Another notable point was that it was not the school in itself that had value as a FW, but particular actors within the school that participated in the FW of academic achievement with the participants. Particular teachers who were motivating, supportive, and went above and beyond duty for these students, were repeatedly mentioned by all three participants, which shows that these teachers played a major role in the school's FW. As aforementioned, FWs are historical phenomena, which are occupied by individuals from collective imaginings organised by 'cultural means', or narratives, storylines, and other cultural genre (such as educational success stories). These narratives provide cultural resources, which are durable and socially reproduced and provide an adoptive support system for those students with the upward aspirations for social success, but not the cultural know-how.

7.3 Knowledge contribution of thesis

This thesis is an attempt to contribute to the field of education by offering insights into the schooling experiences of FGSs. According to Springer, Vaeger, Pascarella, and Nora (1996:2), literature exists on "new" and disadvantaged students regarding inter alia: the relation between parents' education and university choice, persistence, and performance, however little is known about FGSs. Moreover, literature

concerning the aspirations and educational achievement of South African FGSs is thin. The existing literature focuses mainly on the university experiences of FGSs or on their schooling experiences, rather than on their routes to university. One such study is a longitudinal study conducted by Bangeni and Kapp (2005:11), which focused on the school-to-university transition experiences of urban FGSs, but touched on their schooling experiences. One participant in this study asserted that early in his high school career he resolved to use his academics to transcend his impoverished and crime-ridden community. The participant further described his high school as a typical Cape Flats' school, which had limited resources and literacy instruction. However, like the participants in my study, the success of the FGS in Bangeni and Kapp's study was in large part thanks to personal encouragement from teachers, which impacted on the academic aspirations of this student. Another study by Diab *et al.* (2012:1) found that South African health science students of rural origin face specific challenges (including academic, financial, emotional and social stressors), which are related to the contrast between rural and urban life. Rural FGSs thus face additional challenges other than the general adaptations that confront all students upon entering tertiary education.

While the existing studies on FGSs address imperative issues in the South African higher education sector, I felt that the study of the educational achievement routes, which enabled such students from non-conducive home- and schooling environments to achieve academic success, is necessary to understand how it is possible to transcend those environments. In this way educational policy-makers and administrators could address the root of social class inequality, which is embedded in South Africa's education system. Subsequently, I will offer the theoretical insights gained from this study in response to its research questions.

7.3.1 Environmental influences on educational subjectivities

An important finding of this research study was that although many other studies (Bourdieu, 1977; Willis, 1977; Reay *et al.*, 2001; McFadden & Munns, 2002; Gale & Parker, 2015; Willis, 2003; Reay *et al.*, 2009; Dwyer, *et al.*, 1998; Alloway, *et al.*, 2004, & Burns *et al.*, 2015:83) on the aspirations of working class young people report that limiting environments, such as poor socio-economic environments, low levels of parental education, and unfamiliarity with the middle class university

environment have a negative influence on their educational subjectivities, this is not the case for the particular FGSs in this study. As discussed in the previous section, the FGSs in this study demonstrated resilience in confronting the negative environmental influences around them. I have argued that this resilience was grounded in their ability to recognise the value and opportunities for achievement in their family-, social groups-, community-, and school environments, impoverished as it may have seemed to others. Moreover, these students were able to mobilise the resources that they were apt at identifying in their environments (family support, academic social groups, symbolic meaningful events in their personal lives, and the extra help of teachers), to shape their educational subjectivities in a way that enabled them to become top students in their school.

The aforementioned finding is consistent with studies concerning the ability of FGSs to exercise their agency within social structures. A South African study examining the relationship between mentorship and agency of 63 rural-origin FGSs, found that participation in supportive relationships, that offer learners recognition and status, are crucial contributors to academic success (Luckett & Luckett, 2009: 470). Luckett and Luckett (2009:471) further assert that this is particularly relevant for FGSs who often do not receive the appropriate support and social- and cultural capital from their homes and primary socialisation environments. Although their study was also based on the university, rather than the high school experiences of FGSs, the findings are indicative of the educational subjectivities of FGSs as a whole. In the case for the FGSs in my study, I found that the external mentorship, acknowledgement, and motivation of their academic social groups and particularly teachers, enabled the participants to exercise their own agency to construct their productive educational subjectivities despite the limitations of their rural environments.

7.3.2 Role of agency and CCW capitals in developing educational subjectivities

In the data analysis chapters, I have illustrated how the participants in this study each possessed a unique sense of agency encapsulated in their educational subjectivities. In Cindy's interviews she constantly refers to the fact that she did not really have close friends in school as her classmates were not very studious. Thus,

she would hang out with her classmates during break times, but not during periods. She added that when she chose to associate with others, she would strategically separate her school friends from her academics for example, she mentioned that she did not spend time with her school friends while at home. Cindy's reflections indicated that although she was not aware of it, she used her agency to regulate her social-, home-, and school environments in a way that best served her academics. Cindy's way of controlling her learning environment is indicative of her possessing navigational capital, as she figured out how to position herself in her surroundings to maximise her learning.

Timothy's agency manifested in his competitive and motivated educational subjectivity. He mentioned the existence of a friendly rivalry between himself and two girls whom he was close with and this rivalry seemed to encourage his school performance. Timothy's competitive nature played a role in his early educational subjectivity formation and it seems to be centred on his masculinity. During his interviews Timothy consistently referred to himself as a self-motivated student and in my analysis I inferred that some of his self-motivation came from a pleasure in being the best student in his grade. This again affirms Lockett and Lockett's (2009:470) finding that recognition and status is vital to the academic success of FGSs. Timothy's pride and competitiveness in his grades are evidence of his highly developed aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005:77).

Katherine demonstrated the most vigorous use of her agency in the way she developed and used her social capital (Yosso, 2005:79) as part of how she established her educational achievement route. Katherine directly credited her friends for offering crucial support in her educational achievement route. She explained that most of her academic preparation and success was due to her active participation in peer study groups. Apart from the differential application of the aforementioned capitals amongst the three participants, they all used their familial-, aspirational-, and resistant capitals to rise above the harsh realities of their rural and poor backgrounds. Moreover, their possession and utilisation of these capitals enabled them entry into the FW of educational achievement at their high school.

7.3.3 Role of FW in establishing educational achievement routes

Chapter six illustrated that the role of the school was most significant in its function as a FW. Although the rural working class school offered limited opportunities to its students, for the participants as academic achievers, the school became a FW within which they were able to construct their educational subjectivities as aspirational young people. As a FW, the school acted as a safeguard against the rural community in which it operated. The support of their teachers as active participants who reinforced this FW, and the success stories of past participants of the FW, allowed the students in this study to maintain and nurture their educational aspirations and motivation. As argued in the previous chapter, these students were allowed into the FW of SHS based on their agentic use of CCW capitals, which empowered them to construct productive educational subjectivities. Their unique educational subjectivities allowed the participants in this study to become top performers in SHS, participating agents in this FW of educational achievement, and to establish their educational achievement routes from their rural environment into the unfamiliar urban university context.

7.4 Main findings and recommendations

This research study has provided insight into the educational achievement routes of FGSs who successfully entered university, despite their rural and educationally-limited backgrounds. As mentioned in this chapter, the main finding relating to the family environment of the participants was that because their families were unable support them academically, the participants in this study developed navigational-, social-, resistant-, and aspirational capitals in their educational subjectivities. The ability of the participants to acquire and apply these capitals led to the establishment of their successful educational achievement routes. Another crucial finding was that in their social environment, the participants engaged in social interactions with nuance and a sense of discrimination to constructively establish their educational achievement routes. Moreover, social groups were fundamental in how they constructed their educational subjectivities. The participants all had different identifications with, and relations to, their community environment. These experiences manifested in unique individual choices: the participants either rejected their community by disengaging from its activities, which fuelled their aspirational-

and resistant capitals; or it renewed the participants' aspirations for upward social mobility. Thus, each of these choices maintained the same capitals, but in a different way.

Another significant finding of this study was that although the participants acknowledged the poverty and lack of opportunity associated with their high school experiences, they possessed the unique ability or capitals to identify and exploit the limited opportunities offered by SHS. By identifying the aspects of their educational environments that supported these FGSs to construct viable educational pathways within their FWs, I was able to make relevant recommendations about how such students can be assisted in establishing successful educational achievement routes.

This research illustrates the importance of external environments (family, social, community, and school) in the subjectivity formation and educational achievement routes of rural-origin FGSs. Further research should go into understanding how these environments can be used to strengthen the learning that takes place within the schooling environment, insofar recognising and connecting the outside learning environments and CCW capitals of students inside of the classroom. Following the findings of the study, I recommend that further research investigates the impact of external environments on the school-going experiences of the rural aspirant FGS.

Educational practitioners, policy-makers, and universities should consider and support the role of FWs (in this study the school and its teachers) in how FGSs acquire the middle class capitals necessary to succeed in schools. Although these students are required to possess the CCW capitals to be allowed entry into the FW of the school, their CCW capitals were not sufficient to establish their educational achievement routes. The cultural- and social capitals that they acquired through the relationships with previous agents, teachers, and current participants of the FW, were crucial in the establishment of their educational achievement routes.

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Addendum 1 Interview schedule

1. Demographic/educational environment

1. How would you describe your home town and the community that you grew up in?
2. How would you describe your high school?
3. How would you describe your schooling experience growing up in a rural town?
4. In your opinion, how did your teachers and friends perceive you as a student?
5. How did you pass Grade 12 (B degree pass or diploma pass), and what were your main subjects?
6. Where did you access information about university while you were in school?
7. Describe your university history.

2. Individual aspirations

1. What were your dreams for your future when you were in primary school?
2. When you were in high school what did you want to become?
3. Did you always know that you wanted to go to university after school? (Please explain answer).
4. What was your biggest support system during your schooling years?
5. How do you perceive yourself academically?
6. Did you prefer to do academic tasks alone, or with other people?
7. Why did you choose to attend Stellenbosch University?
8. What did you think you would gain by going to university?
9. Did you apply to any other universities?
10. Did anyone close (family/friend) to you attend university before you?
11. Were your aspirations for higher education influenced by anyone in any way?
12. Did you experience difficulties in trying to access your aspiration of going to university? (Probe for financial, personal, academic, barriers).

3. Family environment

1. Can you describe your immediate family environment (parents, siblings, grandparents)?
2. What level of education does your parents and siblings have?
3. What kind of support did your family offer you in your schooling (especially during high school)?
4. What role did your family play in your decision to pursue higher education?
5. Describe the role of your family in the process of you applying and getting into university.
6. How would you describe your family's views about pursuing higher education?

4. Social environment

1. What kind of social activities did you partake in while you were in high school?
2. What kind of friends did you have growing up: scholarly or non-scholarly people?
3. What were the attitudes and views of your friends towards education?
4. How many of your school friends aspired to go to university?
5. How many of your friends ended up going to university?
6. What kind of impact did your friends have on your academic aspirations?

5. Community environment

1. What were the attitudes and views of your community towards education?
2. On average, how many people that come from similar circumstances as you, go to university?
3. Were there any community initiatives/supportive networks that supported you academically when you were in matric?
4. In your community were you able to ask people for help or assistance as you made your plans to study at University?
5. Were there any religious, political or other organisations that assisted you students financially to study at University?

6. Establishment of educational achievement routes

1. Tell me about your educational experience with your high school.

2. What role did your school play in providing support and motivations for your studies?
3. How did you manage to get good enough grades to be accepted into Stellenbosch University?
4. Describe the preparations you made and the strategies that you employed to get accepted into Stellenbosch University.
5. How did you find the process of accessing university?
6. Which kind of extra-curricular activities did you partake in during school?
7. What kind of access did you have to academic opportunities outside of school?

Addendum 2 Respondent consent form



UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are invited to take part in a study conducted by Venita Januarie, from the Department of Educational Policy Studies at Stellenbosch University. You were approached as a potential participant because the target group of this study consists of first generation students from Tulbagh who are currently attending Stellenbosch University.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to investigate the educational aspirations of first generation high school students from a rural town, as well as the achievement strategies they employ to gain access to university. I will do this by interviewing enrolled first generation students who went to school in a rural town (Tulbagh). The interviews will focus on what they did during their high school years to get to where they are now.

2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in individual and group interviews (in the form of focus groups). The researcher would require your participation in one or two individual interviews, depending on data gathered. An interview would last 45 minutes to an hour each. There will only be one focus group, of the same duration as the individual interview, with the other participants in this study. Interviews will be held at a time and place of your preference within the study period of the researcher.

In addition to the individual and group interviews, participants will be asked to assist the researcher in selecting a significant other that the researcher will interview.

Significant others will be selected on the basis of the significant role that they played in the participant's high school career. The selection of the significant others would take place as part of the individual interviews. The reason for this interview is for corroboration of the findings of the individual interviews with participants and assurance of validity of data retrieved.

3. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The researcher does not anticipate any risks throughout the course of the study. All interviews and communications will be held in confidentiality. Should any participant feels uncomfortable at any time, that part of the communication will be erased.

4. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO THE SOCIETY

Your participation in this study would be greatly valued and is appreciated by the researcher. This study might offer educational researchers better insight on the educational practices of rural school children, a topic that is not widely investigated in South African literature. By participating in this study, the respondents will enable the researcher to contribute to a body of knowledge that can be used to influence educational policy and in this way better society.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no payment for participation in this study.

6. PROTECTION OF YOUR INFORMATION, CONFIDENTIALITY AND IDENTITY

Any information obtained throughout the research process will be kept anonymous and confidential, and will only be made public with the permission of the participant. Individual interviews and focus groups will be recorded through the use of sound recordings, to ensure validity of data. Participants will have the opportunity to listen to and review the recordings.

Confidentiality will be maintained in the following ways:

- Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to data.
- Prior to data analysis of interview recordings all recordings will be locked in the storage of the researcher, to which only she has the key.
- After the data analysis process of each recording, the recording will be erased.
- The published thesis will make use of pseudonyms, thus participants' identities will never be revealed in the research project.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you agree to take part in this study, you may withdraw at any time without any consequence. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw a participant from this study should circumstances necessitate it.

RESEARCHERS' CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact:

Venita Januarie

Main researcher

Cell: 0712672133

E-mail: 16235797@sun.ac.za

Aslam Fataar

Supervisor

E-mail: afataar@sun.ac.za.

8. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your

participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

As the participant, I confirm that:

- I have read the above information and it is written in a language that I am comfortable with.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been answered.
- All issues related to privacy, and the confidentiality and use of the information I provide, have been explained.

By signing below, I _____ agree to take part in this research study, as conducted by Venita Januarie.

Signature of Participant

Date

DECLARATION BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

As the **principal investigator**, I hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition, I would like to select the following option:

	<p>The conversation with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent.</p>
	<p>The conversation with the participant was conducted with the assistance of a translator (who has signed a non-disclosure agreement), and this “Consent Form” is available to the participant in a language in which the participant is fluent.</p>

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Addendum 3 Ethics approval Stellenbosch University



NOTICE OF APPROVAL

REC Humanities New Application Form

12 October 2017

Project number: REC-2017-0738

Project Title: The educational achievement routes of first generation students in a rural town.

Dear Ms Venita Jamarie

Your REC Humanities New Application Form submitted on **03 October 2017** was reviewed and approved by the REC: Humanities.

Please note the following about your approved submission:

Ethics approval period: 27 September 2017 - 26 September 2020

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: Humanities, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number (REC-2017-0738) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

FOR CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

Please note that a progress report should be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary)

Included Documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Research Protocol/Proposal	Venita Master's proposal	23/07/2017	1
Data collection tool	Interview schedule	02/08/2017	1
Data collection tool	Focus Group Questions	02/08/2017	1
Proof of permission	Institutional Permission_ Standard Agreement V20170313_Venita Jamarie	28/09/2017	1
Informed Consent Form	Informed consent letter_Participants	28/09/2017	2
Informed Consent Form	Informed consent letter_Significant others	28/09/2017	1
Data collection tool	Interview schedule_Significant others	03/10/2017	1
Default	Response to REC stipulations	03/10/2017	1

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at cgraham@sun.ac.za.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.
The Research Ethics Committee: Humanities complies with the SA National Health Act No.61/2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: