

# **Gender, Sexuality and Schooling: An Ethnography of Young People in a Secondary School in Kaduna State, Nigeria.**

by

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*Dissertation presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Sociology)  
in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at  
Stellenbosch University*



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April 2022

## **Declaration**

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April 2022

## **Abstract**

Studies in Nigeria have presented schools as complex spaces that provide little or no support for young people with regards to gender and sexuality. The view that young people are passive actors in developing their social world seeks to re-affirm the domination of adult constructed cultural values in schools. These cultural values seek to construct and regulate the behaviours of young people in ways that conform to heteronormative ideas of masculinities and femininities, thereby, denying young people agency in the construction of their social identities. This ethnographic study focuses on young people in a secondary school between the ages of 13-20 years. It explores the ways in which young people understand and construct their gender and sexuality through social interactions with others and how they navigate, resist, and respond to regulations within the school environment. The study is guided by the ideas of social constructivism. It argues that knowledge is created by social interactions among individuals in society. Influenced by the ideas of poststructural feminism, the study engaged with gender and sexuality as fluid concepts that are socially constructed, thereby debunking the essentialist idea that gender is biologically determined. The study also draws on the ideas of the New Sociology of Childhood (NSC). It engages with young people as experts in their reality, in this way, positions young people as active participants in the research process through which knowledge is collectively produced through everyday interaction in the school. The study adopts a child-centred approach to understand young people's constructions of stereotypical forms of gender and sexual identities promoted by heteronormative discourses within the school space. Findings from the study suggest new ways of engaging with young people in research of this nature in Nigerian schools. It further brings to fore the nuances around adults' construction of young people's social identities in ways that do not support the general well-being of young people in Nigerian schools.

## Acknowledgement

To my research supervisors, Professor Dennis Francis and Professor Rob Pattman, I sincerely appreciate your expert guidance, support and advice throughout my study period. Your expertise in the field of gender, sexuality and education impacted so much in me. Thank you for serving as my mentors and friends, your friendship is highly appreciated. I appreciate your sacrifice of time, energy and material resources to ensure I excel in my studies. You were very patient with me through this journey, and I will always be grateful to you.

To my Family, thank you for your support throughout my study. You all are awesome. My Mother, Bibiana Zaggi, thank you for your prayers and support, I love you. My late Father, John Chechet Zaggi, you encouraged me to seek for more knowledge as long as I live, you were excited when I began my PhD study, but you are not here to see me complete it. I made it Dad! May you continue to rest in peace, I love and miss you. My older brother Rev Fr (Dr) Douglas Zaggi, thank you for your support and mentorship. My other siblings, thank you for your support through this journey. To my dear wife, Abigail, thank you for the support and sacrifice through these years. You took care of our daughter while I was away for studies, I appreciate all you have been to us and all you have done for our family. Thank you to all my friends for supporting me and my family during this period. I love you all.

To the Kaduna State Ministry of Education, thank you for granting me permission to conduct this study in one of your schools. I appreciate the principal and students of Zisan Secondary School for accepting me as one of them and allowing me to be part of the everyday interaction in the school. Also, I appreciate the parents and guardians of students who gave written consent for their wards to be part of my study.

The Graduate School, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University, I appreciate you for funding my research. I also appreciate all colleagues in the graduate school for your support through the years, you all made the journey less stressful. Thank you for always listening and discussing our frustrations when the studies became tough. I wish you all well in your future endeavours.

## Table of Content

<b>Declaration.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgement.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of Content.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Abbreviations in the Study.....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>List of Tables.....</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>List of Diagram.....</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>List of Young People who Appear in the Study.....</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>List of Teachers that Appear in The Study.....</b>	<b>xiv</b>
<b>Key to Transcript.....</b>	<b>xv</b>
<b>Chapter One.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Young People’s Understanding of Gender and Sexual Identities in School.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Motivation for the Study.....	4
Conceptualising the Key Research Themes.....	5
Gender, Sexuality and Schooling.....	6
Cultural Heteronormativity.....	7
The Research Context.....	8
Structure of my Thesis.....	11
<b>Chapter Two.....</b>	<b>14</b>
Theorising Gender, Sexuality, and Schooling within the Social Constructionist Paradigm.....	14
Introduction.....	14
Social Constructionist theory: the social construction of gender and sexual identities.....	14
Post-structural Feminism: Conceptualising Gender and Sexuality.....	17

The New Sociology of Childhood: The Role of Young People in Identity Construction.....	22
Theorising Gender and Sexuality in Africa.....	24
Conclusion.....	26
<b>Chapter Three.....</b>	<b>28</b>
Gender, Sexuality and Schooling.....	28
Introduction.....	28
An Overview of Gender, Sexuality and Schooling.....	28
Researching Gender and Sexuality in Schools: The Nigerian Context.....	30
The Construction of Gender and Sexual Identity by Young People in School.....	33
School as Space for Gender and Sexuality.....	33
The Relationship between School and Society in the Construction of Students' Identity	34
The Influence of Heteronormativity in Doing Gender and Sexuality among Young People	
in School.....	36
The Influence of Teachers in the Construction of Gender and Sexual Identities among	
Young People.....	37
Dynamics of Power in Doing Gender and Sexuality by Young People in School.....	39
Organisational Structures and School Routines.....	40
Peer Interaction and Gender Violence.....	41
Regulating the Construction of Gender and Sexual Identity by the Young.....	42
Regulation through Formalised School Cultures.....	42
Regulation Through the Culture of Silence.....	43
Conclusion.....	45
<b>Chapter Four.....</b>	<b>46</b>
Doing Ethnography with Young People.....	46
Introduction.....	46

Research Design: Ethnographic Study with Young People .....	47
Selection of Participants in the Research Process .....	48
Ethical Considerations in the Research Process .....	52
Gaining Access to Zisan Secondary School .....	53
Getting Informed Consent/Assent.....	53
Mitigating Potential Risks in the Research.....	56
Ensuring Confidentiality and Anonymity.....	56
Teachers’ and Students’ Construction of Me as an Adult doing Research with Young People. ....	58
Learning from Young People: Doing a Young Person-Centred Research by an Adult .....	62
Collecting Data in the Ethnographic Study .....	66
Collecting Data through Observations.....	67
Conducting Focus Group Discussions .....	69
Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews with Teachers .....	71
Ensuring Trustworthiness and Accuracy of Data in my Study .....	72
Analysing the Research Data.....	73
Conclusion.....	75
<b>Chapter Five.....</b>	<b>76</b>
Zisan Secondary School: A Site for Construction of Gender and Sexual Identities.....	76
Introduction .....	76
Structural Organisation of Zisan Secondary School.....	77
School Routine: How Students’ Interaction is Organised in the School .....	79
Assembly Structure of Zisan Secondary School.....	80
‘Boys and Girls Could Sit Together but Not all of them’: Classroom Arrangement at School .....	83

‘This should be our Free Time’: Boys and Girls Interacting at Break Time .....	85
Allocation of Responsibility to Teachers and Students of Zisan Secondary School....	86
Teachers’ Interaction with Students in the School and How this impacts on Students and their Self-Identifications .....	89
Teachers Organising Classroom Competitions.....	89
“Girls should be Given Special Attention”: Teachers in Gender-Based Interaction with Students.....	90
Teaching and Learning Sexuality in the Absence of a Curriculum in Zisan Secondary School .....	92
Teacher’s Support for the Introduction of Sexuality Education Curriculum in the School .....	95
Conclusion.....	96
<b>Chapter Six.....</b>	<b>97</b>
Young People’s Understanding of Gender and Sexuality through Interaction in School.....	97
Introduction .....	97
Young People’s Construction and Understanding of Gender Identities through Social Interactions .....	97
“Real Boys Don’t cry”, “Real Girls Are Sexy and Attractive”: Young People’s Construction and Experience of Dominant Gender Categories in Zisan Secondary School .....	100
“Baff-up Guys” and “Slay Queens”: The Construction of Popular Gender Identities in Zisan Secondary School.....	102
Construction of “Bad-boys and Bad-girls” Identities: Intersection of Gender and “Risky” Sexualities.....	105
Construction of Gender Identities through Football in Zisan Secondary School .....	108
“We Play Better when Girls are Watching”: Boys Talking About the Influence of Girls on their Football Performance .....	108

“Like Celebrities, Some girls like them and Others Don’t”: Girls Talking about Boys who Play Football.....	109
Gender Power Relations among Young People in Zisan School .....	110
Boys and Girls Talking On Resistance of Gender Domination in School.....	112
“Transgressing” Gender Boundaries: Understanding Young People’s “Transgressive” Behaviours in Zisan Secondary School.....	113
Young People’s Understanding and Construction of the “Boy-Girl/Charlie-charlie” Identity in the School.....	115
Young People’s Understanding and Construction of the “Tomboy/Agbero” Identity in the School .....	117
Conclusion.....	119
<b>Chapter Seven .....</b>	<b>121</b>
Expression and Regulation of Young People’s Sexualities in School.....	121
Introduction .....	121
Boys and Girls in Sexual Relationships in School .....	121
Boys and Girls Initiating Romantic Relationships in School.....	122
‘The thing is Natural, You Have to Obey’: Young People Talking about Their Sexual Experiences.....	125
“It’s like Having two Sim Cards...”: How Young People Construct Having Multiple Romantic Relationships in School.....	127
Regulations on Young People’s Expression of Gender and Sexuality in School: A Conflict of Values.....	128
Teachers Perception of Young People's Sexuality in school.....	129
“They are Spoiled Kids, they Need Iron Hands to Stop them”: Existing Forms of Regulation on Young People’s Experience of Gender and Sexuality in School .....	131
Policing Young People’s Sexualities through Restrictive Discourses in School .....	132

Regulating Young Sexualities through the Act of Shaming in School.....	134
Regulating Young Sexualities through Corporal Punishment in the School.....	135
How Young People in Zisan Secondary School Navigate Existing Forms of Regulations in doing Sexuality within the School.....	137
Conclusion.....	138
<b>Chapter Eight.....</b>	<b>139</b>
Summary of Research Findings, Recommendation, and Implication for Practice .....	139
Introduction .....	139
Summary of Key Findings.....	139
How Zisan Secondary School Supports Young People’s Performance of Gender and Sexuality .....	140
Young People Doing Gender and Sexuality in School.....	141
The Positionality of Power in Doing Gender and its Bearing on Gender “Transgression”.....	143
How Young People’s Sexualities are Policed in the School.....	144
Recommendations .....	145
Creating a Supportive Environment in Schools for Young People Performing Gender and Sexuality .....	146
Addressing Gender Bullying Among Young People in Zisan Secondary School.....	149
Addressing the Regulation of Young People’s Gender and Sexualities in School .....	150
Correcting Adults’ Perception of Young People and its Implication for Social Practice.....	151
<b>References.....</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Addendum A.....</b>	<b>167</b>
Research Ethics Committee (REC) Approval Letter .....	167
<b>Addendum B.....</b>	<b>169</b>
Institutional Permission Letter .....	169

<b>Addendum C.....</b>	<b>170</b>
Principal’s Consent Letter .....	170
<b>Addendum D.....</b>	<b>173</b>
Consent Forms for Participants .....	173
<b>Addendum E.....</b>	<b>176</b>
Consent Forms for Parents of Minors .....	176
<b>Addendum F .....</b>	<b>179</b>
Assent Form for Minors .....	179

## **Abbreviations in The Study**

AHI: Action Health Incorporated

B Ed: Bachelors in Education

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

FMOE: Federal Ministry of Education

HIV/AIDS: Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

HND: Higher National Diploma

JSS: Junior Secondary

NDHS: National Demographic and Health Survey

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organisations

NSC: New Sociology of Childhood

NYSC: National Youth Service Corps

PPA: Place of Primary Assignment

PTA: Parents Teachers Association

REC: Research Ethics Committee

SS: Senior Secondary

SSMPA: Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act

STI: Sexually Transmitted Infection

UK: United Kingdom

UNESCO: United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UN-MDGs: United Nations Millennium Development Goals

USA: United States of America

WHO: World Health Organisation

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Zisan Secondary School's Timeline.....	79
Table 2: Types of Assembly in Zisan Secondary School .....	80

## **List of Diagram**

Diagram 1: A Sketch Map of Zisan Secondary School.....	77
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## List of Young People Who Appear in The Study

All names are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants

<b>Boys</b>		<b>Girls</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>
Agog	14	Abakasa	17
Agwam	20	Baryat	16
Bakam	15	Doshiya	16
Binyan	14	Gimbiya	16
Chechet	15	Kazanka	14
Danbvo	16	Kunaba	17
Didam	15	Kushenyan	18
Karam	17	Kuyet	17
Katung	16	Kyangchat	15
Kwasu	15	Myirya	18
Yakunat	19	Shiayet	17
Yakusak	18	Shisham	16
Yamai	14	Swatchet	15
Yashim	14	Yachat	16
Zacham	16	Yanang	16
Zibushiya	15	Zigwai	16
Zicham	16	Zikachat	17
		Zinai	16

## List of Teachers that Appear in The Study

I use pseudonyms to represent names of teachers.

Female Teachers			Male Teachers		
Title	Name	Status	Title	Name	Status
Ms	Amara	Subject Teacher	Mr	Abrak	Subject Teacher
Ms	Asmau	Head Teacher	Mr	Bakut	Head Teacher
Ms	Doncy	Head Teacher	Mr	Banenat	Subject Teacher
Ms	Kasang	Subject Teacher	Mr	Kaburuk	Head Teacher
Ms	Kasham	Subject Teacher	Mr	Kazzah	Head Teacher
Ms	Shinai	Subject Teacher			
Ms	Vongs	Subject Teacher			
Ms	Zanak	Head Teacher			
Ms	Zichat	Subject Teacher			
Ms	Zigwai	Subject Teacher			

## Key to Transcript

Italics	Used when a speaker uses a local language other than English. Mostly the Hausa Language or Pidgin English.
(comment)	This contains the translation of the local language used by the speaker and it comes immediately after the local language presented in italics.
...	This is used when part of the quote has been left out.
[comment]	This is used to indicate non-verbal expressions and to outline context during the research process.

## Chapter One

# Young People's Understanding of Gender and Sexual Identities in School

### Introduction

Global interest in the behaviour of young people has increased tremendously in response to the problems they face, such as the contraction of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)<sup>1</sup>, unwanted pregnancies<sup>2</sup>, sexual violence, among other abuses. Studies with young people in schools have presented schools as sites that provide young people space to interact and establish social relationships (Francis, 2010; Grunseit, Kippax, Aggleton, Baldo & Slutkin, 1997; Kehily, 2002; Youdell, 2005). Through these social relationships, young people construct their gender and sexual identities. Their construction of identities is informed by the existence of regulations within the school that promotes compulsory heterosexuality along with heteronormative values (Allen, 2007; Francis, 2019; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Toomey, McGuire & Russell, 2012). This stringent construction of identities within the grips of heterosexual and heteronormative values is not only reductive, it creates an unfriendly environment for students who are likely to identify with non-conforming gender and heterosexual identities (Robinson & Davies, 2008; Ferfolja, 2007; Francis, Brown, Mcallister, Mosime, Thani, Reygan, Dlamini, Nogela & Muller, 2019). Compulsory heterosexuality depicts societal values that support the expressions of sexual desires only among partners of opposite sexes. This informs the conceptions of sexuality, especially in patriarchal societies like Nigeria, by assuming that every individual is naturally inclined to develop sexual desires for the opposite sex. This understanding has dominated the discourse of sexuality and gender in Nigeria, thus featuring as a central category in my study.

In Nigeria, discussions of gender and sexuality have been dominated by the influence of cultural beliefs and practices. These cultures have led to the development of taboos and laws to repress conversations regarding these concepts, especially among young people (Ikpe, 2004; Izugbara &

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<sup>1</sup> STIs in my study refers to all forms of infections that can be contracted through sexual activity, including HIV/AIDS.

<sup>2</sup> Unwanted pregnancy in this context is referred to, not as a disease, but as a situation which could lead to unsafe abortion in the sense that abortion in Nigeria is illegal, it also could lead to severe health hazards and at worse instance, death of the individual.

Modo, 2007; Zaggi, 2014). For example, Ikpe (2004), while discussing the history of sexuality in Nigeria, argues the relative non-recognition of the complexity of gender and sexuality, even in the academic sphere. This is despite the responsiveness of the expressions of gender and sexuality to prevailing social and cultural conditions in Nigeria. Discussing gender and sexuality with young people is seen by society as a deviation from established cultural norms.

The Nigerian school environment is organised to promote compulsory heterosexuality (Babatunde, Bolanle & Akintunde, 2016a). This has resulted in the expressions of violent behaviours towards young people who are associated with non-normative forms of gender and sexual identities in schools (Alimi, Boynton, Struharova & Wood, 2017; Oginni *et al.*, 2018; Okanlawon, 2017, 2020a).

Gender and sexuality studies around the world have emphasised the need to see gender and sexual identities as social constructs which are created, developed and expressed by individuals through the process of social interaction (Butler, 1999; Connell, 1987; Pattman, 2005). Contrary to the essentialist idea of gender and sexuality as naturally determined, studies have emphasised the need to see gender and sexuality as social identifications we construct and practice through everyday interactions (Butler, 1999). It is important, therefore, to understand gender and sexual identities as being created through interactions with social and cultural resources available to individuals in particular societal contexts (Pattman, 2005).

Drawing on this understanding of gender and sexuality, I conducted an ethnographic study among young people between the ages of 13-20 years in a secondary school in Kaduna State, Nigeria. The study explores the ways in which young people in a secondary school construct and experience gender and sexual identities through processes of social interactions within the school environment. Social interaction forms an important part in socialisation processes. It enables young people to learn and express social roles and identities (Mead, 1934). My study explores the various meanings and significance students<sup>3</sup> attach to gender and sexuality and how students navigate, resist, and respond to regulations within the school environment.

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<sup>3</sup> The term student is used in Nigeria to refer to people who are informally or formally involved in the learning process in any trade, discipline or academic institution irrespective of the level of study. The term is often used to refer to learners or pupils in a nursery, primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions of learning.

The study is built around the ideas of the social constructivism theory, which is concerned with understanding how knowledge is created by social interactions among individuals in the society. According to White, W J; Bondurant, B & Travis, (2000), Social Constructivism is the idea that knowledge and reality are created through social interactions with individuals in society within a specific social context. Consequently, human behaviour becomes a product of social interactions in society. In line with this, my study is influenced by the works of poststructuralist feminist scholars such as Davies, (1989); Thorne, (1993); Mac an Ghail, (1994); MacNaughton, (2000) who have worked on young people's culture in schools and how they engage in performances, as well as construct, maintain and negotiate gender power relations through social interaction within the school space. Post-structural feminism questions the categorisation of gender as male and female, and how these are imbued with power. Post-structural feminist scholars are critical about the essentialist understanding of gender, which root gender differences and power relations in nature. They argue that there are no homogenous masculinities or femininities, but different masculinities and different femininities and ways of performing these inclinations in society. In my study, I am interested in exploring and engaging with male and female students and teachers at a secondary school in Nigeria, how they construct, normalise, resist, and position themselves in relation to versions of gender and sexuality.

My research is influenced by the ideas of the New Sociology of Childhood (NSC) as presented by (Corsaro, 1997). NSC seeks to deconstruct the view that children in the research process are passive products of socialisation from whom data could be gotten. It rather emphasises that researchers should view children as active agents who are knowledgeable about issues that concern their daily social life, as well as their behaviours and social relationships from which adults can learn from. NSC foregrounds childhood agency in the socialisation process and seeks to situate children as a distinctive group from whom adults could learn. It is along this line of logic that I engage with students as experts whom I seek to learn from, rather than, imposing ideas on them. This helps in understanding, from their perspective, the meanings they attach to their gender and sexual identities as they construct and experience them through the process of social interaction within the school setting. In my study, I engage with students between the ages of 13-20 years. In Nigeria, this set of students are commonly referred to as children. However, in my study, I refer to them as young people or youth rather than children. I understand the terms young people and

youths to sound adult-like, thus, encouraging a voice to students in my study on issues relating to gender and sexuality, which in Nigeria is culturally constructed as discourses for adult discussions.

### **Motivation for the Study**

My study draws partly from an experience I had as a teen, as well as a research I conducted in 2013-2014 with regards to my Master's degree. As a 14-year-old, schooling in a mix-gender secondary school in a rural community in Nigeria, I remember memorising a song by an American hip hop girl group called Salt-N-Pepper titled "Let's Talk About Sex Baby"; which I got from my elder brother's music collection. The song which was produced in 1990 seeks to promote communication on issues of sex and intimacy among people in relationships. I unconsciously started singing the song the next day in class in the absence of the teacher. I was reciting the lyrics: "Let's talk about sex baby/ Let's talk about you and me/ Let's talk about all the good things and the bad things that may be...". Unfortunately, the teacher who was not far from the class heard me singing. I remembered being flogged 15 lashes of the cane and punished by having to cut grass in the field for three days. My recitation of Salt-N-Pepper's song is gauged as "immoral" in my school. I was also reported to my father, and out rightly accused of trying to corrupt the minds of other "innocent" children in the school. I served another round of punishment at home. Several years later, in 2012 to be specific, I visited a friend who was a teacher at a secondary school in Kaduna and I met four boys under interrogation. I asked why they were being interrogated, and I was informed that two of the boys had written love letters to some female students expressing their desire to have sex with them. One was caught with a pack of condoms, and the fourth boy was accused by another boy of making sexual advances at him.

This incident brought back memories of my experience years ago. I realised that the enduring adult perception of young people is that of beings who should be sexually inactive, as well as those whose sexuality should only be expressed in adulthood. Between 2013 and 2014, I conducted a study for my Master's degree on sexual and contraceptive practices among young people in Federal Polytechnic Kaduna. I embarked on this study expecting that students in tertiary institutions should have had some form of freedom in expressing sexuality and gender identities in the sense that they are more advanced in age and level of study. In my Master's study, I found the continued restriction of the free expressions of sexual desires even among this set of students. The study also found existing tensions posed by cultural heteronormativity. Cultural

heteronormativity is the belief that heterosexual expression of sexuality along with gender binary is the only acceptable sexual orientation in the society (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Robinson & Davies, 2008; Francis, 2019a)

These experiences raised my interest in the subject of young people, gender and sexuality within the school space. It rouses questions such as; What are the ways that young people understand themselves in terms of their gender and sexuality, and how this understanding is shaped in their relationships with other people? How do other people see and perceive young people in society? What are the existing regulations within the school environment with regards to the constructions and development of young people's gender and sexual identities? Is there any form of gender differentiation in the ways young people construct and express their sexualities? These broad questions formed the foundation of my study. It also assisted me to explore the discourse of sexuality and gender within a secondary school in Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Given this brief background and rationale, my research is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the meanings and significance young people attach to gender and sexuality in their accounts of themselves as it relates to others?
2. How, if at all, are gender and sexualities regulated or produced within the school?
3. How do the young people navigate, resist and respond to such regulations?
4. What are the pedagogical implications of engaging in ethnographic research with school attending youth?

## **Conceptualising the Key Research Themes**

The non-supportive environment created in schools with regards to the discourse of sexuality among young people in Nigeria, especially Northern Nigeria, has continued to present challenges on the ability of young people to exercise agency in their constructions and expressions of gender and sexual identities (Aderemi, 2014; Huaynoca, Chandra-Mouli, Yaqub & Denno, 2014; Ikpe, 2004; Odimegwu & Somefun, 2017; Zaggi, 2014). The search for literature has revealed very little works that have been done on the aspect of gender and sexuality among young people in Northern Nigeria. The few research studies that exist have been conducted using a rigidly structured methodology which is not adequate in explaining the position of young people as active agents

that could generate meanings around their reality. An understanding of how young people construct their gender and sexual identities within a regulated school space in Nigeria, requires a reflection on the meanings of key concepts such as gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity as used in my study.

## **Gender, Sexuality and Schooling**

As earlier stated, my study is influenced by the ideas of Post Structural feminism. I view gender as a social construct produced through everyday practices such as sports, music, education and other forms of social interactions in the society, which are often constructed along with ideas of masculinity and femininity (Dunne, 2007; Thorne, 1993). In my study, I explore the constructions of gender identities by young people, focusing on the meanings and significance they attach to being boys and girls through interaction in the school environment. I engage with gender as being socially constructed, rather than natural sets of characteristics that define us as being males or females (Connell, 1995; Youdell, 2005).

From the social constructionist perspective, I see gender as sets of behaviour, attitude, roles and values that have been defined as appropriate for being male or female in each society. This conception of gender emphasises the fluidity of gender as it concerns the varying forms of interactions existing in different societies around the world. Thereby rejecting the view that gender operates pervasively within a homogenous role of being male or female (Butler, 1999; Mac an Ghail, 1994; Rogers & Rogers, 2001).

Sexuality emerged as one of the most complex, most regulated as well as most contested aspect of being human in the contemporary world. In my study, I see sexuality as a central feature of human existence which is deeply individualised and includes sexual feelings, attraction, thoughts, as well as attitudes and behaviours. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines sexuality as "... a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender, identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships" (WHO, 2016). Like gender, I see sexuality as being socially constructed. As such, in this study, I carefully observe and articulate the ways in which and through which students construct and express their sexual identities by the interaction process that exist in the school environment.

Global studies on sexuality among young people have been directed towards correcting the societal notions which see young people as being sexually inactive, risk-laden and capable of making gross mistakes if exposed to issues of sexuality. In a study among young people in New Zealand, Allen reveals the continuous domination of adult's ideas in the discourse of young people's sexuality. The notion that young people lack experience and are incapable of knowing their needs in this regard seeks to legitimise the adult-centred composition of sexuality discourse (Allen, 2008a), this could be problematic because such contents may not reflect the needs of young people and so may not be of much interest to them. Most countries in Africa, especially countries in West Africa (including Nigeria), are dominated by silences in the discourse of sexuality (given the dearth of literature). However, Southern African countries have made relative advancement with regards to the teaching and learning of sexuality among young people. Studies from Southern Africa have revealed the continuous perception of the discussions on issues of sexuality with/among young people in the society as morally and culturally wrong (Pattman & Chege, 2003; Francis, 2010; Francis & DePalma, 2014; James, Reddy, Ruiter, McCauley & Van Den Borne, 2006). These perceptions often lead to contradictions between existing policies on what should be taught to young people and the personal values of life orientation teachers as well as the existing moral standards in the society (Francis, 2011). In my study, in agreement with Pattman (2005) I consider young people as sexual beings capable of expressing sexual desires, and those whose construction of sexuality develops from childhood to adulthood along with gender identities.

### **Cultural Heteronormativity**

From my preliminary review of the literature on gender, sexuality and schooling, I find the concept of cultural heteronormativity important in understanding the ways gender and sexual identities are formed among young people in society. Global studies have revealed the regulations regarding the expressions of gender and sexual identities among young people in schools as permitting the expressions of social identities along a strict line of heteronormativity (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Ferfolja, 2007; Myers & Raymond, 2010). For example, DePalma & Atkinson (2010) posit that heteronormativity, as displayed in schools in the United Kingdom, forms part of students' everyday lives. I understand heteronormativity as the belief in heterosexuality expressed along the gender binary as the only acceptable sexual orientation in society. Schools as sites of heteronormativity establish cultural and institutional norms and expectations for girls and boys. Students' behaviours are often organised along with these norms, both in terms of dressing, a

listing of school records, and the persistent avoidance or erasure of non-heterosexual content in the school curriculum.

Heteronormative norms often support heterosexuality as the only acceptable way of expressing gender and sexual identities in schools, thereby, making heterosexuality to serve as a standard from which other forms of non-heterosexual behaviours are judged (Ferfolja, 2007). Through the socialisation of young people along with heteronormative discourses, they are taught how to navigate the social world along gendered lines; boys and girls are taught to dress and behave as opposites to each other and playing varying but complementary roles (Myers & Raymond, 2010). Heteronormativity creates a form of power relations that characterises boys as active and persistent masculine beings while presenting girls as possessing passive femininity which should be responsive to the masculine sexuality of boys (Eaton & Matamala, 2014).

## **The Research Context**

This study was conducted in Zisan Secondary School<sup>4</sup>, a government-owned secondary school located within Kaduna Metropolis, the capital city of Kaduna State, Nigeria. Zisan Secondary School is a mixed-gender Secondary School that divides its body of students in two sections. The first section is the Junior Secondary School (JS)<sup>5</sup> which has students in their first three years of secondary school (ages between 10-13 years) JS 1, JS 2, and JS 3, with each of these occupying at least three classrooms labelled, A, B and C. The second section is the Senior Secondary School (SS)<sup>6</sup> (ages between 13-20 years) which comprises of SS 1, SS 2, and SS 3. Each of the year-set in the SS classes has four classes (Arts 1, Arts 2, Commercial and Science classes) with each of the classes having well over 70 students.

Zisan Secondary School was established by its host community on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2006 as a community secondary school. The community is a heterogeneous community populated by average income earners who are mostly employed in the civil service as well as traders. The school was established out of necessity to cater for young people who had to travel long distances to attend school in other communities. The school's mission statement states: "To develop the totality of a complete child intellectually, morally, physically and socially, to be useful to oneself and the

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<sup>4</sup> Zisan is a pseudonym I use to protect the identity of the school where I conducted my study.

<sup>5</sup> JS means Junior Secondary, and it is used in Nigeria to refer to the first three years of secondary school.

<sup>6</sup> SS means Senior Secondary and is used within the Nigerian context to refer to students in their last three years of study in the secondary school.

society at large”. The school, upon its establishment, had only two blocks of buildings. One was used as a classroom, and the other as the Staff Room with only two teachers and a Principal who was appointed by the community. To support the effort of the community, the government of Kaduna State later took over the school and has been assisting in its development.

As of the end of 2019 (when I conducted this study), the school had 12 classrooms, two Staff Rooms, a hall, laboratory, and library. Although these structures show some level of development, they are not in good shape and cannot efficiently meet the needs of the staff and students. As at the time of this study, the student population was 2,147, of which the majority (1,350 students) were girls, as against 797 boys. Similarly, the population of teachers in the school was dominated by the females, numbering up to 50, with only 13 male teachers. I conducted semi-structured interviews with four teachers (two males and two females) The students with whom I conducted this research belong to the senior classes (SS 1 and SS 2) within the age bracket of 13-20 years of age. This set of students numbered to about 697, of which a majority of 487 students were girls as against 210 boys.

Due to the high number of students and teachers in the school and the lack of available structures, the school operates in shifts. One of the sections attend the morning shift (from 7: 30 am – 12: 30 pm), and the other attends afternoon shift (1: 00 pm – 6: 00 pm) for two weeks, after which they change. Each shift starts with an assembly which takes the first 30 minutes, after which the students have four subject periods of 30 minutes each. They then go out for a 30 minutes break before returning to their respective classes for another round of four subjects before closing. It is during the break periods on Thursdays that students converge for clubs and societies. Clubs in the school include Entrepreneur club, Red cross, HIV/AIDS club, Young Farmers club, Road Safety club, Jets club, Child’s right club, Press club and the Drama/Dance club which was suspended by the school authority reason being that students hide under the guise of the drama/dance club to engage in immoral acts like going nude or sharing such pictures, kissing, fondling of private parts among others.

As of 2019, the annual school fees for boys was N750 (R33), while the girls were admitted for free. This is a policy (Free Education for the Girl Child) implemented by the Kaduna State Government to provide free and accessible education to the girl-child who in the state is considered vulnerable (Msue, 2018). The girl child lacks the freedom to attain greater heights in education as

well as being exposed to early marriage and the dangers of early childbirth. However, all students are responsible for the purchase of their books (both note and textbooks) as well as other things the students need to learn. Interestingly, many students still struggle to pay their school fees and purchase study materials by themselves, which they always attribute to the level of poverty they are experiencing in their homes.

In Zisan Secondary School, the blocks of classrooms, staff rooms as well as the hall and library are arranged in a rectangular form. This provides a large space in the middle where students meet during the break to associate with one another. During break periods, students typically organize themselves in different groups of boys only, girls only and other mix-gender groups. Although there is no specific formal time allotted for sporting activities in the school, students (especially senior students) organise little or no sporting activities during the break period. They are always sitting on the grass in the open space within the school compound or standing and sharing stories. While others walk around the school environment, others remain in their classes eating and waiting for the break time to be over.

As earlier stated, sporting activities are usually not formally organised during the school term except for the bi-annual inter-house competition<sup>7</sup> that is usually organised by the school. Here, students are distributed into different house groups (majorly, Blue House, Green House, Red House and Yellow House), and they compete among themselves in track events (organised according to gender categories) and field events, predominantly football, played by only boys. The school does not have the facilities for these sporting events and had to use the football field (not a standard field) located at about half a kilometre from the school. The land which is used as the football field is privately owned by an individual and is also being used by other members of the community. The track events are usually conducted within the open space of the school using make-shift tracks drawn out by the students under the guidance of the sports master. The lack of available sporting facilities is one of the major problems at Zisan secondary school. Other challenges include the lack of efficient structures such as classrooms, and staff rooms. The lack of a solid fence in the school makes it easy for students to sneak out during school hours. In like manner, the lack of facilities such as tables, chairs, books for the library and a well-equipped laboratory affects the students' scholarship and educational aspirations.

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<sup>7</sup> I was fortunate to conduct my study at such a time that the bi-annual inter-house competition was conducted.

The choice of Zisan Secondary School as my research site was informed by the peculiarities of the school, which is located within a heterogeneous community with people coming together from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Also, for the reason that no study of this nature has been conducted in any school within this location that attempts to understand the position of young people as active agents in their construction of gender and sexual identities within a regulated school space. It is in line with this that my study seeks to understand the various ways that young people construct and experience their gender and sexual identities through the schooling process.

### **Structure of my Thesis**

This introductory chapter provides a background to my study on exploring young people's understanding of gender and sexuality in school. It explores how my experience as a child in school, and the findings of research I conducted as an adult motivated me to conduct a study of this nature. The chapter presents the research questions that my study seeks to answer and further contextualises the key research themes of gender, sexuality, schooling and heteronormativity. The chapter also provides a contextual description of the research site, Zisan Secondary School. Lastly, the chapter presents the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two discusses the theoretical background of my study. The chapter presents how the social constructionist paradigm is significant in understanding the social construction of gender and sexualities through social interaction. The chapter further presents discussions of the relevance of post-structural feminism in conceptualising the gender and sexuality of young people. Here, I adopt the ideas of the New Sociology of Childhood (NSC), and how it informs good research practice with young people. Finally, the chapter presents discussions on theorising gender and sexuality within the African context.

Chapter Three is concerned with the review of the empirical literature on gender, sexuality and schooling. First, the chapter presents an overview of studies conducted on gender, sexuality and schooling among young people around the globe and within the Nigerian context. The chapter also provides discussions from the findings of research on the complexity of young people's construction of gender and sexual identities in school. Chapter Three also presents a literature review on the dynamics of power in doing gender and sexuality and how young people's experience

of gender and sexuality is being regulated in the school space through formalised school cultures and a culture of silence.

Chapter Four discusses how I engaged in the ethnographic study with young people in Zisan Secondary School. First, I discuss the research design I adopted for the study and the kind of relationships I engaged with young people in the school. I also explain how these relationships informed my selection of participants for the interviews and FGDs with teachers and students respectively. The chapter also presents the ethical issues involved in my research and how I addressed and overcame them in terms of gaining access to the study site, getting informed consent/assent from participants, mitigating potential risk and ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of responses and respondents in the research process. In this chapter, I also explain how I engaged in child-centred research as an adult and its bearing on my entire data collection process. Finally, the chapter explains how I analysed the research data collected from the field through observations, informal conversations, interviews and FGDs.

Chapter Five provides an analysis of Zisan Secondary School as a site for the construction of gender and sexual identities by young people. The chapter discusses how the school is organised in terms of school routines, assembly structure, class sitting arrangement, the construction of break time activities, and the allocation of responsibilities in the school to reflect gender categories. Chapter five also discusses the kinds of interactions teachers engage with students along gender lines and its implication on students, and self-identification. Lastly, the chapter provides insight into the non-existence of a sexuality education curriculum, and teachers' support for its introduction in the school.

In Chapter Six, I present findings on how young people in Zisan Secondary School understand their gender and sexuality through interaction in the school. The chapter explores the meanings and significance young people attach in their construction of dominant gender categories, popular forms of masculinities and femininities, the intersection of gender and risky sexualities and young people's construction and understanding of social identities through sports. The Chapter further discusses existing forms of gender power relations and how young people understand and react to gender "transgressive" behaviours in school. Here, I discuss the positionality of power in dominant masculinities and how girls and other boys with alternative masculinities experience and resist the domination of hegemonic masculine boys. I also document how young people understand and

construct “transgressive” gender identities as the boy-girl/charlie-charlie (transgressive boys) and the tomboy/agbero (transgressive girls) identities.

Chapter Seven presents a discussion on young people's sexualities and how their sexualities are being regulated within the school. Here, I present evidence that debunks the adult-centric conception of young people as innocent and inexperienced with regards to gender and sexuality. In this regard, I explain how boys are culturally constructed as initiators of relationships and how girls negotiate this masculine position and serve to influence boys to like them. In this Chapter, I also document young people's sexual experiences and their engagement with multiple sexual partners. Further discussions in the Chapter provide accounts of how young people's sexualities are being regulated in the school through restrictive discourses, shaming practices and corporal punishments. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how young people navigate existing regulations by performing gender and sexuality in and around the school.

Chapter Eight, which is the conclusion, presents a summary of my research findings, recommendation, and the implication for practice. Here, I present the key findings from my data analysis. I present recommendations that raise implications for the reorganisation of the school to provide a supportive environment for young people's agency in doing gender and sexuality. I also make suggestions on ways that adult teachers and researchers can engage with young people by recognising them as experts in their reality, and how this could promote good pedagogic practices in schools.

## Chapter Two

### Theorising Gender, Sexuality, and Schooling within the Social Constructionist Paradigm

#### Introduction

This chapter discusses gender and sexuality in line with the ideas of social constructionist paradigm. The social constructionist paradigm accounts for how young people understand and construct their gender and sexual identities through social interaction. In line with this, I also draw upon the ideas of post-structuralist feminist theories and the New Sociology of Childhood (NSC) to explain the conceptions of gender and sexuality from the perspective of young people. I consider young people as knowledgeable about issues that concern them. Post-structuralist feminist theory understands gender as a social construct rather than being biologically determined. It is with this understanding that I frame my study to view gender and sexual identities as being complex and formed through social processes. The New Sociology of Childhood sees young people as active agents in society. The understanding of young people in this manner makes it possible for me to understand the various roles they play in constructing their gender and sexual identities through social interactions within the school space. This chapter, therefore, provides a discussion on the theoretical perspectives guiding the conduct of my study. The chapter also presents a discourse that situates gender and sexuality research within the African context.

#### **Social Constructionist theory: the social construction of gender and sexual identities.**

Current debates in the field of gender and sexuality have moved away from the essentialist views that present gender and sexuality as fixed, natural, and biologically determined. They now assume a more social constructionist perspective that emphasises the fluidity of gender and sexual identities. This new perspective insists on seeing gender and sexuality not as biological traits but as being created through social processes in society. The essentialist's view of gender and sexuality emphasises that each gender category comes with a set of psychological, physical, and emotional traits. It is these traits that distinguish it from the other (opposite gender). By this, gender and sexuality are viewed in terms of dualism. The essentialist perspective seeks to provide room for

the reinforcement of compulsory heterosexuality, a sexual policy widely held in societies that make non-heterosexual relationships illegal and unacceptable (Kehily, 2002).

In my study, I move away from this essentialist conception of gender and sexuality as encompassing opposing characteristics. I frame my research study in line with the arguments of the social constructionist theory. Arguably, the theory has its origins from the works of Herbert Mead, Karl Marx, Alfred Schutz, and Emile Durkheim. These scholars used the interpretive/constructivist approaches in their analysis of society. A more recent influence on the development of social constructionism as a theory is a work by Berger and Luckmann (1991) in their classic work on the social construction of reality. Their work was concerned with understanding how knowledge is being created by social interactions among individuals in society. An argument that is central to the social constructionism theory. Interestingly, several modified versions of social constructionism have emerged since then and are being used in different intellectual movements such as ethnomethodology, psychology, philosophy, linguistics, etc. (Burr, 2004; Galbin, 2014). Irrespective of what discipline it uses, all versions of social constructionism must conform to certain key assumptions. Firstly, it must take a critical stance by challenging the idea that conventional knowledge is obtained objectively. Secondly, social constructionism must also appreciate the fact that all ways of understanding are historically and culturally relative. Thirdly, whatever form of knowledge we claim to have, should be a product of our interactions with other individuals in society. And lastly, every form of knowledge construction comes with a corresponding form of action (Burr, 2004).

Thibodeaux (2014) differentiates between three versions of social constructionism: Contextual constructionism, debunking constructionism, and strict constructionism. Contextual constructionism argues that “while reality leading to claim-making activities is objectively valid, the reality constructed by claim-makers is constructed through social processes” (Thibodeaux, 2014:831). Debunking constructionism has dual meanings: on the one hand, it sees social constructions as reflecting reality and, on the other, not reflecting reality. For example, Best (2008:47) argues that “although language is a social construction, most words are social constructions that denote empirical phenomena. However, other terms are unanchored to empirical reality”. In the third version, strict constructionism holds that reality in society is socially defined through interactions. It is these social definitions that enable us to understand what constitutes reality. My study is built on the strict version of constructionism giving that I seek to understand

young people's construction of social identities through the social interactions with the social environment.

As earlier stated, I situate my study within the argument of strict constructionism. I see knowledge and reality as being created through interactions with people in society within a specific social context. This consequently makes human behaviour a product of interactions with the external social world (White, Bondurant & Travis, 2000). This theory suggests that individuals' reality is informed by the knowledge they acquire through the interactive process of learning with other people and the social environment. My study thus explains how students construct their gender and sexual identities through interaction within the school space. In line with the postulations of social constructionism, Connell (1987) argues that both gender and sexuality are socially constructed and should not be understood as natural sets of biological characteristics. In agreement with Connell, I argue that gender and sexuality do not exist before or outside the social practices in which people create and sustain relationships. Gender and sexuality should, therefore, be understood within the context of historical processes that involve the body in interaction with the social environment.

Tamale (2011), in researching and theorising sexualities in Africa, emphasises the interconnectedness of gender and sexuality and the role they play in maintaining the relations of power in society. Tamale asserts that;

...gender provides a critical analytical lens through which any data on sexuality must logically be interpreted. Things that impact gender relations, for instance, history, class, age, religion, race, ethnicity, culture, locality and disability, also influence the sexual lives of men and women. In other words, sexuality is deeply embedded in the meanings and interpretations of gender systems (Tamale, 2011).

I broadly agree with Tamale's idea on the interconnectivity of gender and sexuality, as one cannot be discussed without the other. I see sexuality not just as a concept that explains sexual orientation, but as encompassing many factors such as beliefs, values, behaviours, procreation, desire, power, etc. These are often defined in society majorly along gender lines. In line with this, through my research, I conceive gender and sexual identities not as the same but as being intertwined, with both being constructed through social interaction. Although I see gender as social constructs, I recognise the existence of social expectations peculiar to societies in ways that gender should be constructed and lived. Social expectations often transcend into defining acceptable sexual practices within society. I further consider gender relations as part of young people's everyday lives in

schools and serve as a medium through which gender/sexual identities are constructed, performed, and accomplished (Butler, 1990). It is in line with this argument that I find Tamale's idea significant for my study.

### **Post-structural Feminism: Conceptualising Gender and Sexuality**

As I mentioned in the introductory section of this chapter, my research is influenced by the post-structural feminist ideas of gender. The theory emphasises the importance of understanding the fluidity of gender. Butler (1999) argues that gender is performative; that is, gender is learned and performed through social processes that exist within the society. I therefore see gender as a social construct produced through everyday social practices, including ways of behaviour in line with social expectations alongside ideas of masculinity and femininity.

Drawing from the works of post-structural feminist scholars like Thorne (1993), MacNaughton (2000), Kehily (2005), Dunne (2007), Connell (2009), and Martins (2011), I distance myself from the essentialist assumptions of gender and sexuality as well as the sex-role socialisation theory of gender and sexuality. Rather, I adhere to the post-structural feminist perspective that emphasises the social constructions of gender identities, thereby highlighting the non-universality of gender categories of being a man or woman. In line with this argument, I understand gender and sexuality as complex and created through social processes in society.

The ideas of post-structural feminism take a critical stand against the essentialist notions that gender and sexuality are biologically determined and the place of nature in determining the differences that exist between boys and girls. Cultural definitions of masculinities and femininity in this way portray these concepts along binary lines. Masculinities are often associated with strength, authority, dominance as well as the notions of being breadwinners and decision-makers. In contrast, the feminine is often associated with being weak, submissive, and subservient, as well as being caring, industrious, gentle, and self-sacrificing (Connell, 2009; MacNaughton, 2000). These binary forms of defining gender are being reinforced through forms of social interactions among individuals in society, which only makes sense when viewed from a heterosexual perspective. This perspective views women as being sexual subordinates to men (Butler, 1999; Foucault, 1990). Jackson (2009:152) argues that "what confirms masculinity is being (hetero) sexually active; what confirms femininity is being sexually attractive to men". By this, I see boys and girls being taught to be opposites of each other by adhering to heteronormative definitions of

what gender and sexual roles/identity they must adopt. Sexual desires understood along these gender divisions are premised on the traditional ideas that men should only be attracted to women while women should – or be permitted to, only be attracted to men.

Taking a post-structural feminist stand, I again distance myself from the sex-role socialisation theory of gender and sexuality. The sex-role theory sees young people as passive agents in the socialisation process. For example, MacNaughton (2000), in her work on gender and sexuality among young learners, took a critical stand against the sex-role socialisation theory. To her, the theory sees young people as learning gender and sexuality by observing images, gestures, and symbols as well as listening to messages of gender and sexuality from their social environment. They simply adopt and reproduce these features in their behaviours during social interactions with other people in society. Although the sex-role socialisation theory is in line with the ideas of post-structural feminism with regards to viewing gender and sexuality as being learned and performed, it fails to consider the complexities involved in the construction of gender and sexual identities. It rather sees these as static and natural sets of identities that are passed down from adults to children.

The sex-role socialisation theory fails to recognise the exposure of young people to multiple messages from variant sources in society about who they are or who they should become. From these messages, they negotiate and take decisions with regards to which message they should reject and which they should accept and use in defining their identities. MacNaughton (2000) argues that young people receive messages from parents, grandparents, siblings, teachers, school and playground friends, among other sources. Each message comes with a different orientation and from different contexts and seeks to explain how to act in an acceptable way. The sex-role socialisation approach becomes more problematic because it assumes that young people unanimously acquire a unified gender and sexual identity from the existing social world. However, it fails to explain the adoption of different forms of masculinities and femininity when young people interact with other people in different social contexts.

In this vein, post-structural feminism provides an alternative approach to understanding gender and sexuality, which goes beyond binary and natural differences. This alternative approach conceives identities as being constructed by boys and girls through social interaction within specific social contexts (Dunne, 2007; Kehily, 2002; MacNaughton, 2000; Martins, 2011; Thorne, 1993). For example, MacNaughton (2000) emphasises the need for any discussions on gender to

recognise the influences of everyday practices on the understanding and constructions of gender identities among young people. Being that reality is a product of social processes situated within social contexts, one can argue that no social phenomenon can be given any naturally determined explanation (Burr, 2004).

Post-structural feminist theory also provides us with alternative ways of understanding our identities by capturing the complexities of the social interactions that exist between us and the social environment. MacNaughton (2000) regards the relationship between the person and existing social institutions in the society as inseparable thus:

“In the process of building identities, the individual and social world do not just interact-instead they are interdependent and mutually constructing. We are born into a social world with pre-existing social structures and meanings. We are, therefore, always, and inevitably social. The individual does not and cannot exist outside of the social. Deciding who we are is a complex process that happens within us and without us, but is always social” (MacNaughton, 2000:24).

Understanding the interaction between the individual and the social environment helps to advance the argument that the social construction of gender is an active and continuous process. It seeks to define gender categories, gender-based groups, gender divisions as well as gender meanings through active participation and collaboration in everyday life (Thorne, 1993).

Thorne (1993) notes that as children grow from birth, they are socialised into existing gender arrangements along the lines of masculinity and femininity. This socialisation process often takes a one-directional pattern where younger, less powerful children are socialised by older, powerful adults. However, children socialised by adults within this context should by no means be perceived as passive subjects in the socialisation process. Rather, they should be seen as active participants who employ agency in adopting adult sexual and gender roles by modifying these roles to suit their current reality (Thorne, 1993; MacNaughton, 2000). In my study, I do not see young people as only being socialised by adults in a society based on existing cultural norms with regards to gender. I see young people as being active participants, as well as experts in the ways they construct and experience their gender and sexual identities through the process of social interaction with one another. Thorne (1993) further argues that the organisation and meanings of gender identities in society is influenced by age, race, sexuality, ethnicity, and class. These meanings change and are relative to social contexts.

MacNaughton (2000) emphasises the need to capture and understand the complexities of the relationship that exist between the individual and the social environment in the formation of identities. This can be achieved by understanding gender as a social process involving active conversation with others in society. MacNaughton argues that there is no fixed, consistent, and unchanging gender identity that young people are expected to learn. Rather, young people are active participants in conversations. They select and interpret each message that comes to them. In line with this understanding of constructing gender identities, Davies (1993) argues that constructing identities involves:

learning to read and interpret the landscape of the social world, and to embody, to live, to experience, to know, to desire as one's own, to take pleasure in the world, as it is made knowable through the available discourses, social structures, and practices (Davies, 1993:17)

In constructing gender and sexual identities, young people are often exposed to different meanings available to them in what MacNaughton calls the 'market place of ideas'.<sup>8</sup> From these varying ideas, they select, interpret, live, and adopt those desirable ideas and make it part of their identity. I understand that young people do not freely construct their identities within free space. They are often being guided through the process of identity construction by ideas from existing social structures from which they could select alternatives that fit their choices in defining who they are as regards gender and sexuality.

Connell (1987), Butler (1999), Jackson (2006), Dunne (2007), and Tamale (2011) in their studies emphasise the interconnectedness of gender and sexuality. Neither gender nor sexuality could be discussed without the other. In line with their arguments, though taking a critical stand against the essentialist view, I argue that sexuality cannot be biologically determined, rather, sexuality like gender, is socially constructed and embodies complex features. Understanding these features makes possible the understanding of sexuality as a concept. Understanding the complexities of sexuality would mean understanding sexuality not as being natural or biological. It is a product of changing historical circumstances beyond the normative forms of sexual identities and encompasses other forms of marginalised sexualities (Kehily, 2002).

Weeks (2012), *Sex, Politics, and Society* provides a significant insight into ways that sexuality could be understood within a socio-historical perspective. Weeks presents a wide-ranging analysis

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<sup>8</sup> MacNaughton use the phrase "Market place of ideas" to refer to an imaginary space where many and varying ideas are made available for children to select, interpret and adopt in the formation of their social identities.

of sexuality as being formed by varying social forces and has gone through different historical transformations. Sexuality is a social construct and covers a wide range of complex elements; therefore, it cannot be understood as a single fixed object or phenomenon. Weeks emphasised the need to understand the different social factors that shape sexual meanings in relationships and provides a space for developing and experiencing different forms of erotic life. Weeks (2012) points to the ways that sexuality could be understood from a socio-historical perspective. This will help to make sense of how sexuality is developed through social processes. For Weeks, to understand sexuality:

Sexual history must be acutely alive to the inextricably linked but different experiences of women and men, to gender hierarchies, and changing gendered meanings that determine what is meant by masculinities and femininity and how they are lived at any particular time. And it must be alert to the economic, social, geographical, religious, political, ethnic, and racialised factors that shape sexual beliefs, practices, and cultures. (Weeks, 2012:1).

Weeks strongly suggests the need to understand sexuality as transcending beyond the binary classifications of being male or female which is determined by biological traits. Sexuality should be a complex set of social practices that could vary over time, place, and existing social relations within specific social contexts.

I draw on the arguments of the post-structuralist feminist scholars in my research because it provides me with a better understanding of the ways young people understand and construct their social identities. Post-structural feminism counters the limitations of the biological determinism ideas of the essentialist theorist who sees gender and sexuality as products of nature. Also, the sex-role socialisation theory views children as passive participants in the socialisation process who only accept, and live under whatever form of existing social identity passed down to them by the adult social world. Post-structural feminism provides me with the insight to understand young people as active participants who go through a complex process in constructing their gender and sexual identities through social interaction in society. I also draw on the ideas of the New Sociology of Childhood (NSC). The NSC helps me to engage with young people as active participants and understand the place of agency in their constructions of social identities.

## **The New Sociology of Childhood: The Role of Young People in Identity Construction**

Earlier research on children and childhood suggests the marginalisation of children in academic and social spaces. Children are often conceived as subordinates both in terms of theoretical conceptualisation and their place in society (Qvortrup, 1994). Children are viewed differently, given the status of future adults who are expected to grow into adulthood, occupy their place in society, and contribute to society's wellbeing. The current needs, desires, and lives of children are often taken for granted. Children are viewed as social problems that, if not resolved by adults, can threaten the wellbeing of society. This conception of children could be linked to the theory of socialisation. The theory sees children as individuals with the potential of becoming useful adults in the future who will contribute to the growth of society. It is concerned with the medium through which children internalise already existing ideas in society. Children are seen as "novices" that society must shape, regulate, and guide to ensure they become fully functional adults (Corsaro, 1997). Although this argument about children seems convincing, it has drawn a lot of criticisms from scholars who argue that children in society are active agents. Children apply the use of agency in constructing their social reality and also contribute to the production of the adult social world (Thorne, 1993; Qvortrup, 1994; Corsaro, 1997; James & Prout, 1997; Burman, 2008; Mayall, 2013).

These scholars advocate for a paradigmatic shift from conceptualising children as 'incomplete adults' to new ways of thinking about children as active social agents. Children can creatively produce their unique cultures, at the same time, contribute to the understanding and production of adult society. This new way of thinking about children is captured in what James & Prout (1997) call the "New Sociology of Childhood" (NSC). James and Prout argue that childhood must be understood as a social construction. The NSC provides a platform for understanding the social lives of children as worthy of being studied. By so doing, children's lives should be independently understood without the perceptions of adults. Conceptualising children as active agents must transcend to the understanding that children, through social interactions, are actively involved in the production and construction of their social lives, as well as the lives of people around them and the society where they live. This is because, "They can no longer be regarded as simply the passive subjects of structural determinism" (James & Prout, 1997:4).

Conceptualising children as active agents means understanding childhood as a social category in society, such as age, grades or social class (James & Prout, 1997). Childhood should be understood as an existing structural form in society. Like other structures, it never disappears, but its members continuously change, and its nature varying within historical contexts. Children should be understood as active members within this existing structure who are actively involved in the production of social reality as well as the development of society (Qvortrup, 1994; Corsaro, 1997; Mayall, 2013). Viewing childhood from this perspective, provides the opportunity to understand children not as individuals who are being trained to become adults in the future, but as individuals who are currently and actively involved in the construction of social realities in society. Hence, the need to focus on the roles they play as well as the meanings they attach to their behaviours during social interactions. In emphasising the agency of children in the social construction of reality, Corsaro (1997:18) uses the concept of 'interpretive reproduction' to explain how children collectively participate in societal development and therefore submits that:

"The term interpretive captures the innovative and creative aspects of children's participation in society... Children create and participate in their own unique peer cultures by creatively taking or appropriating information from the adult world to address their peer concerns. The term reproduction captures the idea that children are not simply internalising society and culture but are actively contributing to cultural productions and change. The term also implies that children are, by their very participation in society, constrained by the existing social structure and by societal reproduction" (Corsaro, 1997:18).

Interpretive reproduction as a concept defines children not as passive objects of socialisation but as active agents and eager learners who actively engage in the construction of their social world and determining their place in it. Although interpretive reproduction recognises children's agency in their construction of social reality, it suggests that children often experience some form of constraints in the form of societal cultures within their social environment. This means that children's construction of their social life, despite having agency, is influenced by the cultures of the societies of which they are members (Burman, 2008; Corsaro, 1997).

The NSC suggests new ways of thinking about children as active agents in the construction of their social world. Thus, it provokes researchers into developing new approaches to social research about children that seek to place the child at the centre stage in understanding aspects of childhood experiences from their point of view. Several researchers have been influenced by the ideas of the NSC; these researchers have employed different child-centred approaches in understanding different aspects of childhood. For instance, by allowing young boys to give explicit comments

and references about pornography, Allen (2006) was able to establish insights into the construction of masculinities and the deficit of erotic discourses in sexuality education.

Other African scholars have also adopted this approach in studying young people. Morojele (2011), in a study on the implication of boys' experiences in a school in rural Lesotho, engaged with the school students as experts in their reality and tried to understand the meanings they attach to their identity. Through this approach, the study reveals that being a boy is linked to certain unique qualities of masculinities that boys must demonstrate. Failure to have these qualities is often seen as a source of embarrassment for them. Also, Pattman & Chege (2003) studied the problems involved in the teaching of HIV/AIDs among young people in selected countries in Southern and Eastern Africa. They engaged young learners in a non-judgmental way, interacting with the young people as experts of their social reality from whom they (the researchers) are trying to learn. In their study, they found that researching children in this way liberates them and allows them to speak freely about their experiences and concerns as regards gender and sexuality in ways that one would not have expected. In a similar study focused on the ways young learners in a township primary school in South Africa construct and experience schooling and play, Mayeza (2015) adopted a critical child-centred approach. His study advances critical implications for ways that researchers and educationists should engage with children to understand their constructions of masculinities and femininity through the process of play. These studies influenced my decision to engage with young people in ways that make possible the understanding of agency in their constructions of gender, and sexual identities within the school space. In this way, I closely worked with and learned from young people in Zisan secondary school as active agents who are consciously involved in their constructions of social identities. Situating the conceptualisation of gender and sexuality within context. The next section presents an analysis of my understanding of these concepts within the African context.

### **Theorising Gender and Sexuality in Africa**

There has been a global scholarly acceptance of the complexities of gender and sexuality as well as the social constructions of these concepts. This debunks cultural perceptions of essentialism in the discourse of gender and sexuality. However, the domination of Western theories of gender and sexuality has been observed by non-Western scholars in this field. Non-Western scholars emphasise the recognition of contextual relativism of cultures and meanings attached to these

concepts. This has led to advocacy for the development of new home-grown theories of gender and sexuality. These new theories are expected to capture societies' peculiarities concerning issues of gender and sexuality. For example, Smith (1999), in her work on decolonising methodologies, emphasises the importance of indigenous people around the world (especially those colonised through imperialism) to develop their own stories or narratives that seek to 're-write and re-right' their historical positions in the world stage.

African feminist theorists such as Acholonu (1995); Amadiume (1987); Ebunoluwa (2009); Helle-Valle (2004); Mama (1996); Nnaemeka (2004); Ogundipe-Leslie (1994); Oinas & Arnfred (2009); Opara (2005); Oyewumi (2005); Tamale (2011) seek to develop theories with African socio-cultural backgrounds that espouse the uniqueness of Africans. They argue that Western theories of gender and sexuality, although relevant in some ways, cannot effectively explain the African experience. Western theories present the sexualities of Africans as different, primitive, rapacious, lascivious, and inferior when compared to Western sexualities (Ikpe, 2004; Tamale, 2011). Tamale (2011) emphasises the denigration of African systems of knowledge regarding gender and sexuality in the domains of mainstream theoretical research. These knowledge systems are embedded in African songs, folklores, dance, arts, body markings - scarifications, jewelry, names, etc.

Until the early 20th century, these perceptions of gender and sexualities in Africa has, to some extent, caged the discussions on gender and sexuality to the biomedical and public health domain. The advocacy for African theories of gender and sexuality has led to the development of theories such as 'Motherism' (Acholonu, 1995); 'Stiwarnism' (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994); 'Nego-feminism' (Nnaemeka, 2004); 'Femalism' (Opara, 2005) among others. Although these theories are yet to gain wide popularity as indigenous African theories (Ebunoluwa, 2009), they situate the discourse of gender and sexuality in Africa within spaces of intersecting factors such as ethnicity, religion, cultures, age, socio-economic status and their peculiarity to Africa.

Emphasis on the influences of intersecting factors on the discourse of gender and sexuality in Africa suggests, despite the existence of certain unifying ideologies across African societies, we cannot make harmonised assumptions. In this regard, given their uniqueness in cultural practices and experiences Helle-Valle (2004), avers that:

On the one hand, there seem to be certain aspects of sexual practices and ideology that are widely shared among Africans (in contrast to other regions of the world), but on the other hand, we also find such diversity that simple and conclusive statements about 'African sexuality' must by necessity be oversimplifications and essentialisations (2004:195).

Given these diversities, experiences of gender and sexualities cannot be unified even within one cultural community. Understanding it in this manner can serve as an efficient analytical tool for the studies of gender and sexuality in Africa.

Although, African scholars caution against the uncritical application of Western theories in studying gender and sexuality in non-western countries like those in Africa, they emphasise the need to develop indigenous theories. They have also recognised that Western theories cannot be completely ignored in this regard. Taking the first example, Tamale (2011) argues that we cannot completely reject Western theories because there is an enduring influence of colonial tradition on our contemporary codes of sexual morality and laws guiding sexual practices. Buttressing this point, Bakare-Yusuf, (2004) contends that:

Africa has been part of Europe as Europe has been part of Africa, and out of this relation, a whole series of borrowed traditions from both sides have been and continues to be brewed and fermented. To deny this inter-cultural exchange and reject all theoretical imports from Europe is to violate the order of knowledge and simultaneously disregard the contribution of various Africans to European cultural and intellectual history and vice-versa (11).

Secondly, due to the progressive importance in generating knowledge, and the relative relevance of certain aspects of Western theories to Africa, it is better to use existing Western theories as a starting point, then correct and revise them to fit into the contextual realities of African societies. Thirdly, "the hierarchical construction of sexuality in either context is linked by the force of gender to labour, authority, and performance against the backdrop of capitalism and patriarchy"(Tamale, 2011:26). Irrespective of the similarities and differences between African and Western theorisations, a unifying factor is that both approaches view gender and sexuality as social constructs located within social practices. Hence, the relevance of Western theories in researching gender and sexuality in an African context. In my study, I adopted this unifying understanding of gender and sexuality as social constructs to understand the ways young people construct and experience their gender and sexual identities.

## **Conclusion**

Researching and understanding the construction of gender and sexual identities among young people is premised on the assumption that, social reality is a product of interaction among

individuals, and the social environment. This understanding suggests the fluidity and complexity of the concepts of gender and sexuality in the sense that people engage in social interactions in different social contexts. These social contexts are defined and influenced by varying cultures and traditions that produce different identities that cannot be limited to gender binaries as pure forms of femininity and masculinities. To adequately grasp the meanings and constructions of gender and sexuality among young people, we need to recognise these contextual differences in individual interactions and experiences. This can be achieved by appreciating the agency that young people have in constructing their social identities. Recognising young people's agency suggests a shift from understanding young people's behaviours as a form of guided transition to adulthood. This in a way, is understanding their behaviours within the context of the meanings they attach to their behaviours and relationships. Given this understanding, the next chapter presents a review of studies conducted within the context of gender, sexuality, and schooling. It is expected that this review of literature will provide an empirical understanding of the application of theories discussed in this chapter, and elaborate on the justification for conducting a study of this nature within the Nigerian context.

## Chapter Three

### Gender, Sexuality and Schooling

#### Introduction

Concerns for the education and well-being of young people have been given renewed emphasis on the global stage. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UN-MDGs) emphasise the need for a basic formal education system that provides an all-round knowledge for young people concerning their well-being, gender and sexuality. Research in diverse contexts have examined the processes that young people in school understand, construct and experience social identities (Haywood & Mac an Ghail, 2003; Redman, 2001; Renold, 2004; Youdell, 2005; Kehily, 2005; Mayeza, 2015). These studies connect the construction of gender and sexual identities in schools to dominant forms of masculinities and femininities expressed along with heteronormativity. Institutionalised forms of gender relations form a part of everyday life in schools, and a means of constructing and reinforcing gender and sexual identities (Dunne, 2007). Gender and sexual identities are constructed within a complex school space marked by regulations that are enforced through various forms of social and material control (Hall, 2002; Parker, 2000; Allen, 2007, 2008).

Considering the foregoing, this Chapter explores the experiences of young students in schools around the world. It first presents an overview of research on gender, sexuality and schooling, followed by a discussion on the dearth of scholarship on the discourse of gender and sexuality in Nigeria. This creates the space and justification for the domination of non-Nigerian literature in the Chapter. The dearth in Nigerian literature also indicates the necessity for a study of this nature. Furthermore, the Chapter discusses the heteronormative practices of gender and sexuality in schools illustrating how young people and teachers (adults) understand and give meanings to their social identities along heteronormative lines; the dynamics of power in doing gender and sexuality in schools; as well as the form of regulations young people face in their construction of social identities.

#### An Overview of Gender, Sexuality and Schooling

In this study, the conceptualisation of schools as sites that provide space for the construction of gender and sexual identities is influenced by the works of Thorne (1993); Mac an Ghail, (1994); Dunne (2007) and Mayeza (2015). These studies address the various constructions of gender and

sexual identities among young people through the processes of interaction in school. Thorne (1993), in an ethnographic study of a primary school in the United States of America (USA), reveals the deployment of agency by young people in learning about gender and gender relations within an adult-controlled environment. Though subjected to adults' interpretations of reality and regulations on their behaviour, young people are able to construct an identity based on the understanding of what constitutes reality. Similarly, Mac an Ghail (1994), in an ethnography of a secondary school in the United Kingdom (UK), explores how masculinity and sexuality are produced in the school environment. The study presents the school as a complex arena where material and social practices are understood as having a significant influence on the construction of young people's gender and sexual identities.

Furthermore, Dunne (2007), in an ethnographic study of junior secondary schools in Botswana and Ghana, illustrates how young people construct and regulate gender and sexual identities through everyday normative practices in schools. The study discovers that very little attention is paid to the construction of gender and sexual identities among young people. Gender and sexuality are considered to be natural and biological phenomena that should be learnt and expressed within a heterosexual framework. Mayeza (2015) in his study on how boys and girls construct and experience schooling in a Durban primary school in South Africa, discovers strict regulation on boys' and girls' behaviour along gender lines. This is in addition to differentiation in terms of the kinds of play that boys and girls participate in at break time. The study also foregrounds how boys sexualise their performances during sports to appeal to girls and how girls evaluate the performances of boys. Thus, the study reveals the importance of interaction (play) in the construction of gender and sexual identities among students in schools.

In line with these studies, I situate my study within the context of understanding the meaning and significance young people attach to gender and sexuality in their account of themselves and their relation to others through social interactions within a regulated school space. Studies conducted among young people in schools across the globe such as Kent (2004); Allen, (2005); Youdell, (2005); DePalma & Atkinson, (2006); Bhana, (2007); Dunne (2007) and Mayeza, (2015), reveal the school environment as a complex space wedged by social practices that impact on students' negotiation of gender and sexuality through existing gender and sexual parameters. These parameters limit or enhance sexual relationships and the expression of desires and pleasures.

Kent (2004), particularly studied a high school in Durban, South Africa and observed that students who go beyond the set gender and sexual parameters are subjected to some form of control, including public shaming, ridicule and sometimes corporal punishment. Similarly, studies in Southern and Eastern Nigeria reveal strict regulation attached to involvement in sexual behaviour by students in schools. Students are socialised to refrain from all forms of sexual activities through the inculcation of morality (Babatunde, Bolanle & Akintunde, 2016b; Mukoro, 2017). Morality in this context is adherent to a distinct way of dressing that suits one's gender; keeping one's sexual organs from public view; restriction on the length of time spent and places visited with the opposite sex; and the denial of the space to discuss sex-related topics. The next section of this Chapter provides insight into the key themes on gender, sexuality and schooling in the Nigerian context.

### **Researching Gender and Sexuality in Schools: The Nigerian Context**

The discourse of gender and sexuality have been tied to existing cultural beliefs and practices across various societies in Nigeria. These cultures situate gender and sexuality within the realm of marriage (Izugbara, 2005). The dominant assumption is that gender and sexual identities are only fully developed, understood, and practised within marriage (Abdulraheem & Fawole, 2009; Boladale, Olakunle, Olutayo & Adesanmi, 2015). This assumption has made various societies to proscribe such discussions among young unmarried people (Ikpe, 2004). Efforts were made to introduce sexual education programmes in Nigerian schools under the National Population Policy of 1988. The policy was designed to educate adolescents on issues of sexuality linked to such sexual threats as HIV/AIDs and sexual violence and enlighten citizens on the problems of overpopulation in Nigeria. It rarely addressed the advantages of sexual knowledge on the overall well-being of young people (Oloworekende, 2019).

In Nigeria, sexuality is often regulated and allowed only within the context of marriage and recognised among heterosexual partners. This restriction was further strengthened when, in 2014, the Federal Government of Nigeria passed the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA) that criminalises the expressions of non-heterosexual desires with a penalty of 10-14 years of imprisonment. The SSMPA was passed into law by the Nigerian Legislature in December 2013 and approved by the then President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in January 2014. The act relates to the prohibition of a marriage contract, or civil union entered between same-sex persons, solemnisation of same, and related matters. The act prescribed a 10 years jail term for any

convicted person “who registers, operates, or participates in gay clubs, societies and organisations, or directly or indirectly makes public show of same-sex amorous relationship” as well as “any person or group who administers, witnesses, abets or aids the solemnisation of same-sex marriage or civil union”. The act also prescribed a jail term of 14 years for any convicted person who enters a same-sex marriage contract or civil union.

This regulation against non-heterosexual relationships is also captured in the Sharia Penal Code as some states in Northern Nigeria practice. The Sharia Penal Code is a set of laws that is derived or has its origin in the Islamic religion. It has existed in Muslim-dominated areas even during the colonial era in Nigeria alongside the Nigerian (English) Criminal Code, which the colonial masters enacted in other regions and Christian-dominated communities in the North. Although the operations of the Sharia Penal Code were criticised for being repugnant to the laws of natural justice due to its religious underpinnings, it has been reviewed over time and eventually codified in the early 2000s to capture the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution while simultaneously retaining its religious foundations. This set of laws has since received wide acceptance by Muslims across Nigeria as it reflects the basic tenets of Islam as contained in the Hadiths (Sayings and deeds of the Holy Prophet Muhammed (SAW)). Under the Sharia Penal Code, involvement in any form of a non-heterosexual amorous relationship upon conviction is punishable by death.

More recently, the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education (FMOE, 2017) adopted the national policy on inclusive education. The policy provides equal opportunity for all Nigerians to participate in the teaching and learning processes that ensure their overall well-being. Despite implementing this policy, the Nigerian education sector is yet to achieve considerable success in this regard. Gender and Sexuality studies in Nigerian schools such as Babatunde, Bolanle & Akintunde (2016); Fawole, Balogun & Olaleye (2018); Okanlawon (2019), reveal little or non-existence of formal discussions on gender and sexuality. This inhibits the ability of young school goers in Nigeria to acquire adequate knowledge about their gender, sexual rights, sexual desires and sexual identities.

Studies conducted among Nigerian youths such as Abdulraheem & Fawole (2009); Cadmus & Owoaje (2009); Egbochuku & Akerele (2007); Izugbara & Modo (2007); Odimegwu & Somefun (2017) are organised around discussions about youths' sexual activities and other issues of reproductive health in Southern and Eastern Nigeria. Very little or no attention is paid to

understanding how young people construct and live sexual identities. The Northern region of Nigeria is silent about sex and sexuality with regards to young people, as evident in the lack of literature. This silence, as presented in some Nigerian studies, such as Vaughan & Banu (2014); Huaynoca, Chandra-Mouli, Yaqub & Denno (2014); and Mukoro (2017), is related to the broad historical influence of religious and cultural beliefs on sexuality. These beliefs portray young people as “innocent” and vulnerable, thereby implying that exposing them to issues of sexual desires will only promote promiscuity and the contraction of STIs. As a result, discussions on or about sexuality are mostly permitted within the context of adulthood and marriage (Duze & Mohammed, 2006)

The influence of cultural beliefs with regards to gender and sexuality among young people in Nigeria extends to the academic sphere. Even in academia, discussing gender and sexuality with young people is a deviation from established cultural norms. Therefore, sexuality among young people does not form any part of the formal school curriculum. This has made a lot of respectable academics in Nigeria shy away from the subject of sexuality. Few Nigerian scholars such as Boladale *et al.* (2015); Mapayi, Oginni, Akinsulore & Aloba (2016); Oginni, Mosaku, Mapayi, Akinsulore & Afolabi (2018); Okanlawon (2017, 2018, 2020a,b) have dared to engage in discussions around counter normative forms of gender and sexuality in Nigeria. However, most Nigerian scholars situate their discussions on sexuality as a public health issue that deals with risky sexual behaviour, unwanted pregnancies and the spread of diseases.

The non-involvement of Nigerian scholars in discussions around young people’s sexual rights, sexual desires and sexual orientation has marginalised the diversity of gender and sexuality to the domain of historical silence (Ikpe, 2004). It has accounted for the lack of literature on the construction of gender and sexual identities among young people in schools. Given this dearth of literature, the need to conduct a study in this regard becomes imminent. My study hopes to provide new knowledge that will enlighten people on the need to understand young people as “legitimate sexual subjects” that have the capability to be sexually active (Francis, 2010c). I also hope that the study will break new grounds for further studies for the overall interest of understanding the place and agency of the young across developmental stages. Due to the dearth of literature in this area in Nigeria, discussions in the subsequent sections of this Chapter will draw more on studies conducted in non-Nigerian societies. However, studies from Southern Africa are reviewed with

the hope that despite the differences in cultures, certain unifying cultural ideologies around Africa could suffice (Helle-Valle, 2004).

Given the restrictive school environment in Nigeria that situates discussions of gender and sexuality in the public health domain, young people's sexualities are understood as a social problem that requires intervention by adults. I consider this assumption about young people as problematic; and therefore, argue for the need to understand young people in schools as capable of being sexually active. My study explores how young people in schools engage with, as well as express and navigate gender and sexuality within the school context. I draw on Foucault's idea that forms of sexual repression in society do not make sexuality disappear; rather, it intensifies people's awareness of its existence so that it arises in particular contexts and forms of everyday interactions (Foucault, 1978). In my study, I am interested in the significance gender and sexuality have for young people in Zisan Secondary School, and how this is expressed in social interactions and in relations young people establish in schools. The next section discusses the literature on the experiences of young people and how they construct gender and sexual identities along with existing heteronormativity.

### **The Construction of Gender and Sexual Identity by Young People in School**

In line with the social constructionist argument, I engage with gender and sexuality as products of social interaction through everyday practices such as education, sports, among others. Schools are composite sites that provide space for the production and reproduction of gender and sexual identities. In this section, I contextualise schools as spaces where young people perform gender and sexuality. I then explored the relationship between the school and society in the construction of students' identities. Furthermore, I present how young people develop social identities through social interactions in the school space as is influenced by heteronormativity and the influence teachers exert on young people's understanding of gender and sexualities.

### **School as Space for Gender and Sexuality**

Understanding the interplay of gender and sexuality within the school entails, recognising the influence of the material and social practices of schools on the students' construction of social identities (Mac an Ghail, 1994; Kehily, 2005; Mayeza, 2017; Thorne, 1993). Francis, Brown, Mcallister, Mosime, Thani, Reygan, Dlamini, Nogela & Muller, (2019), in a study on gender and sexuality diversity and schooling in Southern Africa, argue that to ensure a sustainable school

environment, the teaching and learning of gender and sexuality must be considered a key element. Schools have been found to provide normalising space for young people to perform gender and sexuality. These spaces include classrooms, libraries, hallways, cafeteria, gyms, locker rooms and even parking lots and playgrounds (Bhana & Pattman, 2010; Fields & Payne, 2016; Mayeza, 2015; Ullah & Skelton, 2016).

Studies on how young people construct gender identities in school have conceptualised schools as sites of prescribed behaviour and attitudes that children are expected to imbibe and live (Pattman & Chege, 2003; DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Francis, 2017a; Francis, 2019). Myers & Raymond (2010) in their study of heteronormativity among elementary school girls in the USA argue that boys and girls are often taught to be opposites of each other through the way they walk, dress, speak and act. This process presents them to the social world as opposites with complementary roles that reinforce each other. For example, boys and girls are taught to adhere to heteronormative ideals; though they are different, girls will have to partner with boys sexually and vice versa. This was considered as the proper way of doing gender (Jackson, 2009). According to Foucault (1990), this dynamics is supported by the process of social interaction among individuals and society. Developing from the ideas of Myers and Raymond (2010), my study argues that schools are in constant interaction with the external environment; as such, the forms of interactions and relations in schools influence and are influenced by the social beliefs and practices of the wider society. Therefore, to consider schools as sites for performing gender and sexuality, entails understanding the roles they place in the reinforcement of and challenging existing gender inequalities in society.

### **The Relationship between School and Society in the Construction of Students' Identity**

The interconnectedness of school and society has been emphasised by DePalma & Atkinson (2010). For them, school cultures are often influenced and shaped by the broader society within which they are located. Through this, cultures of heterosexuality and gender normativity are reinforced. In line with this, I argue that heteronormativity should not only be understood as influencing social interactions in schools but that it should also be understood as part of the everyday practice which individuals engage before attaining school age. Thorne (1993) emphasises the need to recognise children from age one as able to creatively negotiate and imbibe adult forms of gender and sexual identities.

Recognising children in this way emphasises the need to appreciate the influence of society on the student and the heteronormative structure of schools. For example, in a study conducted on the implication for boys and girls schooling experiences in Lesotho rural schools, Morojele (2011) describes how societal gender expectations reflect within the school system that reinforces gender divisions and contestations among students. In this study, the position of boys in school is associated with what they are expected to be in the larger society. Boys are considered to be 'real men' only when they possess and reflect the characteristics of what Connell (1995) terms 'hegemonic forms of masculinities'. Boys who are found to perform alternative forms of masculinities face some form of humiliation. This makes the attainment of hegemonic masculinities non-negotiable among boys in school.

Furthermore, Morojele (2011) reveals in a study that, on the one hand, boys always adhere to stereotypical forms of gender construction within and without formal school processes. This is due to the domination of social identity construction that favours them in both situations. On the other, girls are found to express different forms of femininity within and outside the formal school process. Due to the restriction from teachers during formal school hours, girls often conform to the dominant forms of gender construction by being tidy, calm and gentle, respectful and polite. Interestingly, outside formal school hours and in the absence of the teacher, girls challenge the dominant forms of gender and sexual constructions by being repulsive to the masculine dominance of boys (Morojele, 2011b, a). Studies on gender and sexuality reveal the dominant values of the concepts in schools, especially in African countries which ascribes boundaries on the expected behaviour of boys and girls within the school space. Boys are expected to be physically strong, tough, competitive, being anti-school, rough and uncaring. While girls are expected to be gentle, polite, respectful, tidy, being pro-school, caring and showing respect to males and adults (Ferfolja, 2007; Izugbara, 2005; Morojele, 2011a,b; Mukoro, 2017).

Different societies have developed parameters around the expressions of gender and sexuality in Nigeria. These parameters generally prescribe and proscribe ways of behaviour among people, thereby indicating what is appropriate and what is inappropriate, what is morally right or wrong, and what is abominable or not abominable (Ikpe, 2004; Izugbara, 2005; Mukoro, 2017). These studies reveal the impact of culture, religion, and socio-political practices on the discourse of sexuality in Nigeria. In most Nigerian cultures, the socialisation of children centres heavily on the "proper" way of behaving as boys and girls, adopting "appropriate" gender roles and ways of

dressings. These socialisation processes, as noted in a study conducted in South-Eastern Nigeria by Izugbara (2005), are often skewed towards privileging men. In the said study, Izugbara discovers that young people are taught to adhere to this teaching as it assures their security and peaceful co-existence within the cultural space.

Ikpe (2004), in studying the history of human sexuality in Nigeria, reveals that most cultures in Nigeria allow the man to marry as many wives as he could afford, a practice that is culturally expected, among other reasons, to satisfy his sexual needs. (No evidence of literature on the satisfaction of the sexual needs of the woman in such cases). In a recent study by Mukoro (2017), such cultural beliefs and values have been found to have a huge impact on the sexuality knowledge of young people. In the study, which focuses on the cultural influences of sexuality education in Nigeria, Mukoro states that young people are taught about the traditional conceptions of sexuality that presents sexual expressions as primarily geared towards procreation in marriage between heterosexual partners.

### **The Influence of Heteronormativity in Doing Gender and Sexuality among Young People in School**

Young people interacting in social relationships often navigate an already organised adult world along with gender binaries. In this way, gender categories are presented as opposites - boys in opposition to girls, and masculinities in opposition to femininities (Butler, 1999). These opposing categories are often understood when viewed through social interactions as existing within a compulsory heterosexual context (Francis, 2018a; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Msibi, 2012). In such instances, traditional contextualisation of gender and sexuality considers the proper practice of gender and sexuality as conforming to heteronormative ideals. It compels young people to comply and adopt already prescribed heterosexual behaviour that continuously reinforces gender differences and, consequently, inequalities. DePalma & Atkinson (2010) argue that strict and continuous adherence to norms that produce such inequalities would mean that young people in school are restricted to only a few ranges of behaviour that only supports normative heterosexuality.

DePalma & Atkinson (2010), while studying the nature of institutional heteronormativity in primary schools in the United Kingdom (UK), define the concept as institutional structures that reinforce the adoption of heterosexuality as normal while other forms of non-heterosexual identity

are deviant. Heteronormativity reifies the belief that gender and sexuality operate in opposites. Furthermore, understanding sexual and romantic relationships must be within the scope of a boy-girl or man-woman relationship. Any other form of non-heterosexual relationship is regarded as non-conforming to existing societal values. Heteronormativity could manifest in some subtle ways when people generally assume that a boy and girl going out for a movie date are involved in a romantic relationship to more harmful expressions of homophobia. For example, an earlier study conducted by Dyson, Mitchell, Smith, Dowsett, Pitts & Hillier (2003) among schools in Australia linked heteronormativity in schools with self-harm, depression and dropping out of schools for non-heterosexual students. More recent studies in Africa reveal the continuous domination of discourses of danger, disease, damage, violence, among other negativities within the framework of discussing non-heterosexual identities both within the school environment (Bhana, 2015; Francis, 2019b, a; Okanlawon, 2017, 2019) and the society at large (Tamale, 2013).

### **The Influence of Teachers in the Construction of Gender and Sexual Identities among Young People**

Schools are conceptualised as composite spaces for the production and reproduction of gender and sexual identity. This translates to the understanding that schools are expected to provide appropriate information on matters that relate to the well-being of its students—both in terms of navigating and constructing gender identity through the teaching and learning of sexuality education. Unfortunately, as studies reveal, this is not the case with many schools around the world (Allen, 2007; Cameron-Lewis & Allen, 2013), especially in Africa (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Francis, 2019a; Okanlawon, 2017). For example, Ngabaza & Shefer (2019), in a study on sexuality education in schools in South Africa, discover the teaching and learning of sexuality education as dominated by discourses of regulation and discipline expressed towards young sexualities that seek to reinforce gender binaries and heteronormativity. Okanlawon (2017) report the existence of homophobic reactions to non-conforming heterosexual practices in Nigerian schools by students, teachers and the school authorities.

The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) comments on the need to equip young people with adequate knowledge of their reproductive health, including sexuality and gender. UNESCO emphasises the adoption of new pedagogical approaches that teach these discourses without being judgmental or policing and controlling young people's gender and sexual practices (UNESCO, 2018). On the contrary, findings from studies in Europe (Abbott, Ellis

& Abbott, 2015) and Africa (Bhana, 2015; DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis & Msibi, 2011; Francis, 2017; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019) reveal the organisation of discourses around gender and sexual diversity by teachers as deviating from policy recommendations. Discourses are somewhat organised in ways that uphold heteronormativity by silencing non-normative sexualities. For example, in a study among teachers in secondary schools in the UK, Abbott, Ellis & Abbott (2015) report how certain Sex and Relationship Education teachers reinforce heterosexuality and problematise non-normative sexualities. They construct them as isolated cases that should be treated outside the realm of mainstream sex and reproductive education guidelines.

In a similar vein, Francis (2019a), in a study on the teaching and learning of sexuality education in South African schools, reveals how teachers responded in support of the inclusion of non-normative sexualities in the curriculum. However, in their teaching process, they continue to privilege heterosexuality as legitimate and natural. The study by Francis (2019a) further reveals teachers' construction of young non-normative sexualities as 'child-like, hypersexual, and rebellious requiring discipline and intervention' (pp 406). In a similar study with life orientation teachers in South Africa, Francis (2016), found that teachers negotiates the teaching of sexuality education to accommodate aspects of sexuality they felt comfortable to teach. Teachers did so by approaching sexuality education as the same with HIV and AIDS prevention programmes. In doing so, teachers in his study avoided discussions that they considered capable of triggering discomfort and anxiety. Rather, they "worked within the realm of comfort zones, drawing on a didactic and punitive structure that privileges information giving, maintaining strong control and avoiding possibilities for new perspectives and learning" (Francis, 2016:140).

The teaching of sexuality education is strongly influence by the predisposition of teachers in schools. Haas & Hutter, (2019) in their study among teachers in Uganda reveal the influences of cultural and religious beliefs on teachers' attitudes towards teaching sexuality education in schools. In this case, teachers would rather teach abstinence-only and avoid other discourses such as desire which conflicts with their cultural and religious beliefs. In this way, conflicting ideas about young people emerge. Young people are seen as both sexually active and "innocent". Teachers' approaches to sexuality education in the school also prevents and encourages sexual activity. Consequently, "teachers' cultural schemas and institutionalised morality limit and define young people's sexual citizenship and the opportunities for teaching comprehensive sexuality education" (Haas & Hutter, 2019:243).

Gender and sexual stereotypes have taken centre stage in discussions around gender and sexuality in schools. Divisions along gender binaries reinforced by teachers in schools continue to dominate young people's experiences in schools through the use of 'language of consequence' in discussions around sexuality (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). Emphasising the use of 'language of consequence' in schools, Ngabaza and Shefer (2019:429) argue that:

Young women, in particular, through what has been called a 'discourse of responsabilisation' are told that they are responsible for their sexuality and well-being and will bear the consequences if they are not cautious in managing both their own and their male partner's sexual desires and practices.

On the above pedestal, young women are portrayed as a vulnerable category who are susceptible to the victimisation of the male category, otherwise positioned as sexual predators. The discourse of responsabilisation heteronormatively places girls in a place of responsibility to curtail the excesses of male masculinities. Girls are instructed on the 'ideal' ways of behaving, such as their mode of dressing, walking, talking and sitting as well as the kinds of relationship they engage (Ngabaza, Shefer & Macleod, 2016).

Following the preceding section, teachers are recognised as influential in the process of categorising, regulating or reinforcing different forms of sexuality. There is a need for inclusiveness of ideas around the increasing fluidity and variability of young people's gender and sexual identities. These ideas have somewhat been ignored by the culture of silence in the discourse of gender and sexuality, thereby creating a form of power relations that characterises boys as active and persistent masculine beings. While on another plain, girls are presented as possessing passive femininity and should be responsive to the masculine sexuality of boys (Eaton & Matamala, 2014). The next section explores how young people perform and negotiate the forms of power dynamics within the school space with regards to gender and sexuality.

## **Dynamics of Power in Doing Gender and Sexuality by Young People in School**

Through social interactions in schools, young people develop social relationships with one another in relation to the social environment. Thorne (1993) emphasises the centrality of power in the understanding of social relationships among young people in schools. Below, I discuss the

gendered aspects of schooling and how it shapes the attitude and behaviour of young people in school as they interact with one another.

### **Organisational Structures and School Routines**

Organisational structures and school routines are significant features that contribute to young people's ideas about gender norms for behaviour and authority. Structures such as the positioning and interaction between male and female teachers in school continue to reify the concept of 'gender regime' of schools by Connell (1987). They demonstrate traditional forms of gender distribution among staff, where female teachers occupy less prestigious positions compared to their male counterparts (Connell, 2010). This form of gender regime reinforces patriarchal patterns of power and authority. To explain how this gender regime works in schools, Stromquist (2006:148) states:

Authority patterns foster the mindset that men are naturally endowed to control and lead... Numerous gender codes in schools serve to recontextualise what is appropriate gender behaviour in the family and community and translate it into appropriate gender academic and social practices in educational environments.

The positionality of female teachers is a salient feature of the school structures that have received global attention. A 2006 UNESCO report emphasised the importance of female teachers serving as role models and advocates for girls by occupying sensitive positions of authority within the school (UNESCO, 2005). More so, studies in Europe by Carrington, Francis, Hutchings, Skelton, Read & Hall (2007); Drudy (2008); and Martino (2008) argue that having women occupy positions of authority in their professional capacities in schools helps to develop in boys and girls ideas on the appropriate roles for women.

The differences between boys and girls in schools is reflected in school routines and practices. This is enforced by adult behaviour such as labelling groups of students and segregating them along gender lines. Such adult behaviour could vary from seemingly trivial ways of greetings such as "good morning boys and girls" to more salient forms of categorisations in terms of grouping boys and girls separately to perform specific tasks. For example, Thorne (1993: 35), in her ethnographic study of two elementary schools in America, argues that by continuously using gender labels such as boys and girls when interacting with young people, "adults make being a boy or a girl central to self-definition and the ongoing life of the school". Global studies such as Aikman & Unterhalter (2007), Desai & Kulkarni (2008), Leach & Humphreys (2007) present the gendered forms of chores assigned to boys and girls in school to reinforce the dominance of the

perception about boys as being stronger than girls. Where girls are often given the task of sweeping classrooms and serving food, boys are only given these tasks as punishment meant to demean their masculine identities. Boys who are assumed to have higher status are instead, allocated tasks that involve the use of physical strength.

### **Peer Interaction and Gender Violence**

Through the process of social interaction in schools, young people devise various means of self-identification in response to the actions or inactions of the opposite gender. Leach & Humphreys (2007) argue that these interactions often reinforce male domination of both physical and verbal spaces in schools across the globe. Johnson-Hanks (2006) studies classroom interactions in Cameroonian schools and discovers the domination of boys over girls in both aspects of relevant contributions as well as disruptions in the normal school processes.

While several studies emphasise sexual harassment and violence against girls by boys in schools, broader conceptualisations have reified the expression of aggressive behaviour to assert masculine power over femininity. Expressions of aggressive behaviour also regulate the actions of young people who are found to deviate from normative gender and sexual roles (Leach & Humphreys, 2007). The expression of gender power through violence, as conceptualised by Leach & Humphreys (2007), translates to the understanding of violence as an acceptable way of resolving identity conflicts. It is also a way of reinforcing dominance and control in the face of existing inequalities between boys and girls in schools. For example, Morrell (2001) argues in a study of corporal punishment in 16 schools in Durban, South Africa, that the system is informed by hegemonic masculinities, which secures the hierarchical dominance of boys. This dominance is achieved by teaching boys to be tough and uncomplaining, while girls are to be submissive and unquestioning. Violence in school, commonly perpetrated by peers, is often gender-based. Such forms of violence are often related to boys proving their masculinity as well as regulating the behaviour of others who are found to perform non-normative gender and sexuality (Meyer, 2009; Pascoe, 2007). Drawing from the literature on the forms of gender relations in schools and how school cultures enforce it, the next section will explore how young people's construction of social identity is regulated within the school space.

## **Regulating the Construction of Gender and Sexual Identity by the Young**

The teaching and learning of gender and sexuality should be directed at the attainment of holistic emotional and social development of the learner. It should equip young people with the necessary knowledge, attitudes, skills and values of a healthy and social life (Allen, 2006; Francis, 2011). Despite reported global high cases of unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, STIs, and sexual violence, the teaching of sexuality and gender has not been adequately developed to address these issues. Teachers are reluctant about issues of sexuality in schools. Discussions with young people on sexuality are often taken as cultural taboos (DePalma & Francis, 2014). Young people are viewed as innocent and incapable of displaying sexual desires. Hence, all forms of sexual discussions with young people are structured along with moral injunctions. It is believed that any discussion around sexuality, if not within the moral ambit of abstinence, is naughty and should be avoided (Pattman & Chege, 2003; Francis, 2011).

### **Regulation through Formalised School Cultures**

There has been some relative progress in the practice of gender and sexuality around the globe. In societies where this progress has been recorded, relative safety has been created for young people to express and practice gender and sexuality in diverse ways. However, where this is not the case, formalised school cultures have been dominated by contradictory ideologies about the sexuality of young people. This contradiction has, on the one hand, positioned young people in schools as sexual decision-makers on the practice of safe sex. On the other, it positions young people as child-like who should not be sexually active until they become adults. This view suggests the need to protect young people from the potential harm associated with engaging in sexual activities (Ferfolja, 2007). This leads to the discourse of danger in how young people practice sexuality as a dominant aspect in school curriculums around the world.

Denying young people's sexuality under the assumption that exposing them to sexual activities is risky, makes it difficult, if not impossible for students to attain the kind of sexual agency they need to lead healthy lives. Emphasising the influence of school cultures in New Zealand, Allen (2007b; 2007:225) suggests that school cultures often see young people as susceptible to the dangers and adverse outcomes associated with sexual activities, and as such, the need to protect them. On this pedestal, Allen asserts that:

Young people are seen to be especially susceptible to their bodily urges as they negotiate the period defined as adolescence, which is characterised by emotional volatility. This perceived 'turmoil' renders

young people less capable of making decisions that will support their sexual well-being, increasing their vulnerability and thus 'need' for protective guidance from school and family. A protective discourse also carries an assumption that sexual activity is an inherently 'risky business' rather than a potentially positive and pleasurable experience.

Despite recognising the inevitability of the existence of gender and sexual relationships among young people, schools are more interested in defining and interacting with young people as non-sexual beings. The discourse of desire in the information they pass to young people is not considered relevant since they are dependent on sexual discourses dominated by abstinence. Allen (2007b) maintains that positioning young people as sexual subjects would make it possible for them to access the kind of sexual agency they need to practice safe sex.

### **Regulation Through the Culture of Silence**

Discourses of gender and sexuality in schools have been left unaddressed in the school curriculums of most countries. This is despite its importance to the well-being of students and teachers (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006). The dominance of cultural silence in the discourse of sexuality among young people both in and out of school is a barrier to effective teaching and learning gender and sexuality, especially in developing countries. For example, DePalma & Francis (2014) study the place of culture in sexuality education in South Africa and reveal how teachers understand their role as educators and explain the sexual beliefs of people as products of culture. They argue that silence around issues of sexuality is a social practice rooted in historical inequalities. Thus, such cultures are currently seen as movements towards reclaiming the imaginary pure forms of African cultures from Western interruptions. Other South African studies reveal the inhibition of discussions among teachers and students in schools. Teachers find it discomforting to discuss sexuality with students (Francis & DePalma, 2014; Ahmed, Flisher, Mathews, Mukoma & Jansen, 2009), especially on sexual diversities (Francis, 2012). Students too, feel unsafe and embarrassed to discuss such issues with teachers (Francis, 2010b) for fear of being punished (Morrell, 2001).

In Nigeria, studies reveal diversities in the educational sector along gender, cultural and religious lines. The bearing of these factors in the understanding and expressions of sexuality among young people presents the need to understand how social interactions among students reinforce the production of gender and sexual identities (Huaynoca *et al.*, 2014; Mukoro, 2017). The Nigerian school environment, as reported in studies conducted among students in different parts of Nigeria, presents strict regulations against the discussions and expression of sexuality among young people. These studies further reveal the connectedness of these regulations to the prevailing cultural and

religious beliefs and practices among Nigerians. By these beliefs and practices, young people are sexually inactive and should not be exposed to issues around sexuality to avoid “promiscuity” (Oyinloye, 2014; Tayo, Akintola, Babatunde, Adewunmi, Osinusi & Shittu, 2011; Tchokkossa & Adeyemi, 2018; Ugoji, 2013).

Despite these regulations, recent studies on the youths of the Southern part of Nigeria (Adanikin, Adanikin, Orji & Adeyanju, 2017; Makinde, Olaleye, Makinde, Huntly & Brown, 2017; Nwosu, 2017; Odimegwu & Somefun, 2017), reveal a consistent increase in the level of sexual activities in young people. This is accompanied by decreasing age of sexual initiation and a significant increase in the incidences of teenage pregnancies, most of which, as reported by the National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS 2013), have significant negative effects on the girl. This leads to dropping out of school, societal shaming and sometimes complications arising from lack of proper pregnancy care.

Notwithstanding these reports and in line with other global studies, silence on the discourse of sexuality in Nigeria has also dominated the sexual space. It depicts young people as non-sexual beings. The implication of this is a denial of the basic information needed to access the kind of sexual agency they require to negotiate the practice of safe sex. For example, Orji & Esimai (2005) reveal the lack of sexual agency about gender and sexuality as it affects girls in sexual relationships. It is revealed in the study that most girls in heterosexual relationships assume the position of passivity/sexual objects that seek to satisfy the sexual desire of the boy. This assumed position makes it almost impossible for such girls to negotiate their sexual rights, thereby exposing them to risky sexual experiences and gender-based violence.

The patriarchal nature of Nigeria reinforces the pronounced domination of men in decision-making involving heterosexual relationships. This male dominance has greatly influenced the information passed to young people on the construction and expression of sexuality along gender lines. It is against this background that I engaged a student-centred ethnographic study to ascertain what it means to be a young person of their age. It also focuses on the significance attached to gender and sexuality as sources of identification and dimensions of power and inequality within the school space.

## Conclusion

The review of existing literature as illustrated in this Chapter, presents a dearth of Nigerian studies that aim at understanding the construction of social identities from young people's perspectives. Existing literature in Nigeria reflects the historical influences of traditions and culture on the discourse of gender and sexuality. First, the traditional conception of gender and sexuality is situated within essentialist ideas that see gender and sexuality discourses not just as being naturally produced, but also as a prerogative for adulthood. In this way, young people are constructed as innocent and incapable of playing an active role in the construction of their reality. The chapter further draws on literature from other regions that have questioned the issue of young people's gender and sexuality.

Irrespective of regional differences, there has been the continuous influence of cultural norms that seek to hinder the acknowledgement of young people as agential beings regarding the construction of their gender and sexual identities. This exposes young people to forms of regulations, especially within the formal school space that ensures young people to behave in culturally defined ways. In this way, young people are forced to act in ways that reflect heteronormative ideals. Gender polarity is encouraged in schools. Forms of gender regimes ensure that masculinities are favoured over femininities. Forms of "transgressive" gender behaviours are frowned at and policed both by students and teachers. Consequently, propagating silences regarding the discourse of sexuality and sexual desire among young people.

Heteronormative constructions of young people's gender and sexual identities do not only support heterosexual relationships as the only acceptable form of relationship between boys and girls, but it also favours the cultural conception of young people as innocent, and therefore positions them as incapable of expressing sexual desires until they become adults. This creates a gap in understanding the needs of young people as agential beings and the ways that society could operate to provide for the overall well-being of young people effectively and efficiently. It is in line with this that I engaged in young person-centred research to understand the meanings young people attach to their gender and sexualities within the school space. Thus, the next chapter presents the kinds of relationships I established with young people in Zisan Secondary School in the process of collecting data for my study.

## Chapter Four

### Doing Ethnography with Young People

#### Introduction

This is an ethnographic study with young people anchored on the qualitative method of generating data, including observation, interviews, and focus group discussions. Although Bryman (2012) argues that qualitative research studies are often criticised for being subjective, lacking reliability, generalisation and transparency, this study builds on the strength of qualitative methods. Such methods involve providing an in-depth rather than broad understanding of a social phenomenon. I also took steps to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy of data (I discuss this in a later section of this chapter). In conducting this study, I used a young person-centred approach that views young people as authorities about their lives, interests and concerns. Therefore, I engaged young people as active participants in the research process through which knowledge is collectively produced from their everyday interaction within the school space (Corsaro, 1997; James & Prout, 1997; Pattman, 2013; Pattman, 2015)

James & Prout (1997:4) emphasise the importance of recognising young people and children as active participants in the research process as follows:

Childhood and children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right and not just in respect to their social construction by adults... they can no longer be regarded as simply the passive subjects of structural determination.

In this study, I emphasised the need to understand young people as active participants in their construction of social identity and of people around them as well as the larger society. Therefore, the study engages with young people as experts to learn about their social lives and identity construction. An ethnographic research design is adopted and explained in detail in this chapter.

I explained the ethnographic research I conducted by focusing first on the concept of ethnography as a research design, and why I adopted it in this study. Secondly, I discussed how participants were selected for the study. Ethical concerns, that is, gaining access to the study site and informed consent and protecting participants' confidentiality and anonymity, are also discussed. I further situate myself in the research process by discussing teachers' and students' construction of me as an adult researching with young people. I further explain how I deconstruct the existing adult-

youth relationship to learn from young people. I also discuss how these forms of relationship reflect in my data collection process and finally, I explain the methods of analysing the data collected from the field. I recognise that this chapter is unusually lengthy, but this reflects the relatively long period (Six Months) I was engaged in the fieldwork. During this period, I established different relationships with young people that aided my learning from them about their understandings and experiences as young women and men attending school. Due to the importance of these relationships, I detailed this section to explain the dynamics of my engagement with young people in a study of this nature. I expect that this detailed information will serve as a reference for future researchers who will want to conduct similar studies with young people in schools.

### **Research Design: Ethnographic Study with Young People**

I adopted an ethnographic research design for this study. Ethnography, according to Bryman (2012), entails the study of people in their environment using methods such as participant observation and face-to-face interviews. It involves the researcher immersing themselves in the social setting, observing behaviours, listening to conversations, and asking questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Fouche, 2005). An ethnographic study is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the circumstances of the people under study, in this case, students of Zisan Secondary School in Kaduna State, Nigeria. Ethnographic research design is arguably a suitable method for conducting studies with young people. James & Prout (1997: 8) sustain this thought in positing that:

Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood. It allows children a more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data than is usually possible through experimental or survey styles of research.

According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), all forms of ethnographic study are unified by their focus on people's social and cultural lives. This often involves the researcher acting both as an active participant and an observer in the research setting. In this study, I adopted the dual role of a participant and observer. I participated and interacted with students of the selected school in their daily activities. I also observed how the students negotiated and made meaning of their external social world with regards to the construction and understanding of gender and sexual identities. My active involvement in and observation of everyday interaction of students in the school resonates with the practices of participant observation in an ethnographic study.

Participant-observation is a method of qualitative research that entails the researcher to be involved in the social life of the study population (Strydom, 2005; Bryman, 2012). DeWalt & DeWalt (2011) define participant-observation as a method of study where the researcher becomes part of the everyday activity, inter-action, rituals and events of the people under study in order to learn every aspect of their lives and cultures. This process entails paying close attention to the social behaviours of people in the research setting, engaging in conversations with them and partaking in their daily routines and practices (Fife, 2005).

### **Selection of Participants in the Research Process**

In selecting participants for the study, I adopted a purposive sampling method. Strydom (2011) states that purposive sampling is a form of judgmental sampling where a researcher selects participants based on certain characteristics that suit the purpose of the study. For Maxwell (1998), purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method that individuals selected for the study would have to possess certain unique characteristics considered as useful in such a study as determined by the researcher. In this study, I engaged and collected data with students in their Senior Secondary (SS 1 and 2) classes, majorly ranging within the ages of 13-20 years. I consider these students old enough to understand, interpret, and make sense of interactions between them and adults in society.

I exempted students in their final year (SS 3) because this set of students were busy preparing for their final examination and did not engage in the normal school routines as other students. Their schedule of activities differed from those of the other students. This made it impossible for me to include them in my study sample. This therefore means students in SS 1 and SS 2 in the school, automatically become participants in the study, especially the unstructured observation process and informal conversations I engaged with the students. However, participants who engaged in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) sections were those with whom I established close relationships during the interactions and were permitted by their parents to participate in the discussions.

The students who were mostly part of my study, were those with whom I often hung around while in the class and during the break but within the school compound. At first, it was difficult to break through the groups. Students saw me as a stranger and an adult with whom lies equal power and authority as their teachers. Outside the classroom, it was easier to break into the group of boys than the girls. The boys spoke freely with me, and always came around during break hours to discuss

the girls, football, and other boys. This group of boys, initiated discussions around football, especially on Mondays when football matches must have been played during the weekend. Other times, they spoke about girls whom they had initiated or hoped to initiate relationships with, as well as girls whom they referred to as "holier than thou"<sup>9</sup>. They also spoke about other boys in their class whom they referred to as "not man enough" to approach girls to establish relationships. Through these conversations, young people constructed their peers in the above-named categories in relation to gender and sexuality and distanced themselves from these. We also spoke about technological developments (most recent phones, laptops, cars, and so on). While the relationship with boys was mostly outside the classroom, I established a good rapport with the girls in the classroom. I made conscious efforts to always look for an empty seat close to a girl during classes. Through this means, most of the girls became curious about what was at stake, especially when I was always writing in my field notebook. After informing and assuring them they were part of the research findings, most of them came around during classes to discuss how they were better than the boys in academic activities and how boys enjoy playing 'roughly' with them, which they often dislike. The relationships I established with the girls in class gradually transcended into the playground where we sometimes sat or moved around with a group of boys and girls or with one gender at a time. This group of students who always sat with me in class and came to play with me during the break were those I referred to as my friends.

Through the various interactions, other quiet students who would not be part of the discussions initially started to show interest. I consciously engaged with these students both within and outside the classroom through conversations about their academics and friendships with other students in school. These conversations inspired them to participate in the study. During these interactions, I observed the positioning of some students was non-conforming to the strict normative gender expectations of masculinity and femininity by not doing what "real boys" or "real girls" are known to do. To be a "real boy", one is expected to engage in culturally defined masculine activities that require physical strength, being rough, dominating, and competitive.

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<sup>9</sup> The "holier than thou" refers to boys and girls who will not want to engage in sexual relationships in school. However, other students believe the "holier-than-thou" secretly engage in sexual relationships and will not want others to know about it; and therefore, see their attitude as pretentious.

On the other hand, “real girls” are expected to express ‘gentle’ and ‘calm’ femininities by not engaging in physical activities, such as football, play-fighting, running and chasing each other within the school, known to be associated with boys. Boys and girls who violated such normative expectations were called derogatory names by other students, such as “boy-girl<sup>10</sup>/Charlie-Charlie<sup>11</sup>” for boys and “Tomboy/Agbero<sup>12</sup>” for girls. I discussed the construction of these identities in detail in Chapter Six.

I developed an interest in this set of students and befriended the very few that I identified with the help of my friends. I observed that this set of students (especially the boys) who other students are teasing for not being ‘real boys’ and ‘real girls’, often operate within a small circle of friends. I always approached them and engaged in conversations with them. After a while, I invited them to join the other set of students I interacted with during break time. At first, they were reluctant to join due to the fear that other students might not be receptive to them. Zicham expressed his concern when I invited him to join the other boys and me during break time thus:

Sir, those boys, especially Peter and his friends, don’t like me; they always call me boy-girl because they say I behave like a girl. The other day that’s how they were laughing at me because I cried when the teacher flogged me. So, I don’t want their trouble; that’s why I just stay around with my guys that understand me.

Although Zicham and other students constructed in this way, expressed fear to associate with other boys, I convinced them to join me when I was with other students that often teased them. I assured them I would not allow other boys to ridicule them. Interestingly, when they joined the group with other students, they were not ridiculed as they expected. At first, I thought this was because of my presence as an adult; however, I observed that after a while, these students began coming together during the break, even without me being part of the group. One of the non-hegemonic boys, Kwasu, later mentioned to me how delighted he was to be able to mix with other young people in school without being teased. “Uncle,” said Kwasu, “we are fine now oh, they don't call me 'boy-girl' again.

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<sup>10</sup> Boy-girl is a term used by young people in Zisan Secondary School to refer to non-hegemonic boys in order to ridicule them. I discussed extensively the construction of the boy-girl identity in Chapter Seven.

<sup>11</sup> Charlie-Charlie is a concept used in Nigerian pidgin English, probably derived from Charlie Chaplain the English comedian, to refer to persons who behave silly, unwise and imprudent, and sometimes used to refer to a clown.

<sup>12</sup> Agbero is a Nigerian term used to refer to a destitute usually a member of a loosely organised group of street boys who roam the streets in major Nigerian cities. They extort money from people, serve as informal security guards in exchange for compensation, engage in menial jobs and sometimes participate in illicit activities such as drug peddling or gang violence.

In fact, we are now friends. I think you made them to understand my personality and they are cool with me. I am very happy about it.”.

By consciously integrating students who positioned themselves or are positioned by others as different with groups of “real boys” and “real girls”, I ensured that they became active participants in the study. With continuous interactions, my number of friends increased. More students came to join the group of friends with whom we interacted both within and outside the classroom. By adopting an open-minded approach to befriending students positioned by themselves and others as introverts and non-normative gender-conforming in the school, I was able to get information from a larger sample of students that were representative of various social categories within which the students positioned themselves.

Although I engaged in observations and informal conversations with all students in SS 1 and SS 2, the selection of key informants was made among the students I referred to as my friends. Key informants who participated in FGDs, in single sex and mixed gender groups, were selected through purposive sampling. Although most students indicated interest being key informants, selection was first based on getting informed consent from parents. I also ensured that selected key informants could provide information that will help to address the research questions. Hence, the intentional inclusion of boys and girls who were seen to be transgressing normative gender norms. The study sample is dominated by students (boys and girls). They provided information on their experiences and constructions of gender and sexual identities within the school. However, I acknowledge the importance of influence of societal cultures on students' experiences. This is enforced and reinforced by the forms of regulation teachers and the school environment exert on the students.

In line with this understanding, I included four teachers (two males and two females) in the study sample. These teachers were also purposively selected due to their position in Zisan Secondary School. Their status in the school placed them at positions of authority in terms of guiding students in the ways they interact, develop, and express their gender and sexuality within the school environment. Using a semi-structured interview guide, I interviewed two teachers (one male and the other, female) from the Guidance and Counselling Unit of the school. Also, a male teacher in charge of sports and a female teacher in charge of student's welfare in the school.

Interviewing these teachers provided an understanding of the perception of teachers as adults on how the formation of students' gender and sexual identities are, and should be regulated within the school space. Findings from these interviews, as I discussed in subsequent chapters, revealed opposing views among teachers. Some teachers argued in favour of the existence of free, less regulated spaces for students to interact and construct their identities. In contrast, others insisted on the existence of a highly regulated space that positions young students as problematic individuals.

## **Ethical Considerations in the Research Process**

Good research practice in the social sciences and humanities is one that is guided by professional research ethics. Ethics in social research are moral principles and guidelines that prescribe the ways that researchers must conduct research without impeding the rights to free participation. It provides maximum benefit and minimum risk to participants in different contexts (Isreal & Hey, 2006; Loue, 2002; Mauthner, Birch, Jessop & Miller, 2005; Babbie, 2016). For Strydom (2005b) ethics in social research is:

a set of moral principles which is suggested by an individual or group, is subsequently widely accepted, and which offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students (2005:57).

In conducting research, a social researcher is expected to be responsible to those who participate in the research and to ensure integrity in the research process. I conducted my study in line with the standard ethical principles as contained in the Stellenbosch University Policy Requirement on social research. I received approval to conduct my research from the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee (REC) Humanities. REC ensured that I obtained a permission letter from the Kaduna State Ministry of Education in Nigeria, as well as the principal of Zisan Secondary School. The letters indicated approval for the study to be conducted at the secondary school in Kaduna, Nigeria. I also ensured that informed consent forms were drafted for all potential participants in my study. Consent forms emphasised issues on voluntary participation in the study, ways that participants would be required to participate in the study, possible risk and benefits to participants, as well as ways of ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of participants and their responses.

## **Gaining Access to Zisan Secondary School**

Gaining access to conduct this research in Zisan Secondary School meant obtaining written permission at different levels. First, I began by submitting a formal application to the Kaduna State Ministry of Education, Kaduna seeking permission to conduct the study at one of the secondary schools under its jurisdiction. The application was approved with a letter. As instructed by the Ministry of Education, I submitted another application letter to the Sabo Zonal Education Office, the Zonal education office where Zisan Secondary School is located. After the application was approved at the zonal office, I was given an introduction letter to submit to the Principal stating that the Zonal office is aware of the application and had given approval. However, the principal was at liberty to reject or approve the request. Incidentally, the application was approved. Although permission was granted from the State Ministry of Education as well as the Zonal Office and the school Principal, it was necessary to obtain informed consent from parents, teachers and students that would be part of the study.

## **Getting Informed Consent/Assent**

As part of the ethical requirements of social research, informed consent/assent from potential participants is necessary before the commencement of any research activity. Obtaining informed consent means that potential participants in the study are furnished with a detailed explanation of the purpose and processes of the study. This includes the benefits and the possible risks that the participant could be exposed to by accepting to be part of the research process (Loue, 2002; Miller & Bell, 2005; Strydom, 2005b; Bryman, 2012). In gaining informed consent, the researcher needs to ensure that accurate and complete information regarding the research is provided to participants to fully comprehend (Isreal & Hey, 2006). This is to enable participants to make voluntary and informed decisions to participate in the study or not (Babbie, 2016).

In designing the informed consent/assent forms for this study, I provided detailed information on the purpose of the study and how the study will be conducted. I informed potential participants on how they will be involved in the study as well as the possible benefits and risks that they are likely to be exposed to during the research. I assured them that their identity, as well as the name of the school would be kept in confidence by using pseudonyms so that nobody could trace any information to individuals or the school. I also stated on the consent/assent forms that by signing them, potential participants are stating that they understand all the information provided and are willing to be part of the study. However, they are free to withdraw from the study at any time

without feeling compelled to continue. Withdrawal from the study does not attract any form of consequence.

In a study of this nature, there were concerns about the possible reaction of parents whose children attend Zisan Secondary School but were not part of the population of the study. The concern is for parents to find out about the presence of a researcher in the school who is not part of the employed staff. And the possibility of the researcher encountering their children within the school. To address these concerns, I was introduced to parents and teachers at a Parent Teachers Association (PTA) meeting. I gave a detailed description of my study and identified my study population (students in SS 1 and SS 2). There was no objection of any kind, hence, an indication of acceptance for the research to be conducted in the school. I further informed parents that consent letters would be sent to those of whose children were among the study population and under the age of eighteen years to indicate their consent in writing.

Strydom (2005b) argues that a potential participant can only give informed consent if confirmed to be legally and psychologically competent at the time. In Nigeria, children under eighteen years of age lack legal competence to be part of any contractual agreement, including signing a consent form. This made it necessary for me to obtain informed consent from their parents and guardians to enable them to participate in the research. Although parents had earlier been informed about the study, I designed a consent form and sent it to those whose children were in SS 1 and SS 2. The parents' consent forms had two parts. The first part contained the information regarding the study, and the ways their children will participate in the study. It also contained information around risk-benefit analysis, anonymity and confidentiality of responses and their children's identities. I included my contact details and those of my supervisors in case a parent would need further clarification on any aspect of the research.

In the second part of the parents' consent form (on a separate sheet), I requested the names and signatures of parents/guardians. By signing the consent form, parents/guardians indicated approval for their children to be part of the study. The first section of the consent form that contains the information for the study was to be kept by the parents, and the second section was to be completed by parents and returned to me through their children.

Potential participants who were eighteen years and above were given a consent form also containing information about the research and a second section where they are to sign and return

to me. Signing the second part of the consent form meant they have read and understood all the content about the research and are willing, without any form of compulsion, to be part of the study. I gave potential participants, who were under 18 years, assent forms instructing them to read the information in the first section and sign the second, indicating their willingness to participate in the study. Although their parents had consented to them participating in the study, I explained to them that they are at liberty to decide whether to participate in the study or not. All consent and assent forms from students and parents were returned and dropped in a box kept at the entrance of each class. I asked them to drop the forms in those boxes to ensure complete anonymity and to ensure that potential participants are not aware of the responses from others. Interestingly, only one of the consent forms that were given out to potential participants was not returned.

Although the signed consent forms were completed and returned by the parents and guardians of participants in the study, the selection of key informants who participated in the FGDs took a different turn. I was unable to get approval from the school principal to conduct the FGDs during school hours. This was because the FGD sessions were likely to conflict with teaching periods. This developed a form of ethical complexity since I had indicated in the consent and assent forms signed by participants, and their parents/guardians that all research activities will be conducted within school hours. In my research diary of 5/11/2019, I highlighted that:

While writing my proposal, I did not consider the possibility of certain research activities clashing with other schedules in the school. Understandably, I was not aware of the school's timetable regarding teaching and break periods. However, upon commencing my fieldwork and getting to know the timetable of the school, I should have noticed that the 30 minutes allotted as the only break period in the school would not give me enough time to conduct FGDs with students. This way, I would have added this information in the consent and assent forms, indicating that participants at some time may be required to be in a school outside school hours to ensure that the research exercise does not disrupt their learning process. I only realised this gap when I visited the principal's office today to inform her about the commencement of my FGDs with students, and each FGD would last for approximately one hour. Upon realising this, I requested for the principal's permission to conduct the FGDs in one of the classes during the weekend. I considered using Saturdays because little or no academic activities take place in the school on Saturdays. This way, I will have enough time to conduct my FGDs with the students. The principal gave permission after I assured her I will re-contact parents/guardians of potential key informants to inform them of the changes that emerged. I realised that this complication would have been avoided if I had thought and considered the possibility of time conflict in this regard.

Due to these changes, it became necessary to send another set of consent form to the parents/guardians of potential key informants. This time, seeking their approval to allow their children to come and participate in the FGD sessions, which were conducted within the school environment on Saturdays. This is within the hours of 10 am – 12 noon. About ninety-five percent

of the informed consent forms sent to parents in this regard were signed and returned. The five percent not returned were treated as cases of parents not consenting to their children being part of the FGD during the weekend.

Teachers who were selected as key informants to participate in the individual semi-structured interviews were also given consent forms. I gave them an interval of one day to read and understand the information as regards the study. I then requested they sign the second part of the forms and return the same in person before the commencement of the interview sessions. Although participants were well-informed on their rights to withdraw from the research exercise at any time, no participant withdrew from the study. Both teachers and students were excited about the nature of the study, which provided them with a free and non-judgmental space to express their views as regards their gender and sexuality.

### **Mitigating Potential Risks in the Research**

In the practice of social research, Strydom (2005b) emphasises the possibility of respondents being exposed to emotional or physical harm. It is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to ensure that participants are protected from any form of harm or discomfort they may experience during the research process. It is, however, difficult in some studies to know beforehand whether respondents will experience any form of harm, or what level of discomfort is considered as harmful. Therefore, it is important for researchers to make prior arrangements to mitigate such potential harm when it arises in the research process (Babbie, 2016). To mitigate possible harm or discomfort that may arise in the course of the research process, I made initial arrangements with the Guidance and Counselling Unit of the school to give immediate attention to any participant that may experience any form of discomfort in the research process. However, no participant showed any form of physical or emotional discomfort throughout the research process. Participants were always excited and eager to talk about their experiences with regards to the issues of gender and sexuality within the school.

### **Ensuring Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Babbie (2016); Bryman (2012); and Maxwell (1998) argue on the concepts of confidentiality and anonymity as being different in meaning yet related in practice. To them, anonymity means the inability of both the researcher and the readers of the research findings to trace any response given in the research process to any participant. Confidentiality is seen as an extension of anonymity. In

this case, however, although the researcher could identify certain participants' responses and information, the researcher cannot share such information with anyone else. However, Strydom (2005b) argues that confidentiality and anonymity could be used synonymously in social research as they both explain the researcher's responsibility towards protecting the identities of participants and information. In a study of this nature, I recognise anonymity and confidentiality, not as synonyms. Instead, I adopted the use of the concepts as different, yet related in practice.

To ensure anonymity in this study, I used pseudonyms to refer to both the individual participants and the school. Using 'Zisan Secondary School, Kaduna' to refer to the school without stating its location in Kaduna State makes it impossible for any reader to identify the source of the research. Zisan Secondary School is just one among over a thousand secondary schools in the State. Also, using pseudonyms to refer to participants makes it difficult for the researcher to identify responses from participants. I ensured that no participant referred to another participant using their real names in the course of the research. In cases where this happens, I ensured that in the process of writing field notes or transcribing interviews, such names were removed and replaced with pseudonyms.

In research such as this, where FGDs are conducted with a group of participants, ensuring confidentiality of responses and information becomes complicated. It is expected that during FGDs, participants could know the responses of other participants regarding the topic of discussion. This increases the chances of them discussing such responses with others outside the group, thereby limiting the levels of confidentiality and anonymity. During my first FGD with a group of SS I boys, participants expressed concerns over the confidentiality of their responses. They feared that the school would get to know the content of our discussion, and likely trace their responses to them. They insisted that I promise to treat their responses with utmost confidentiality and anonymity, otherwise they would not participate in the discussion. I assured them of the confidentiality of their responses, and emphasised the need, on their part, to keep all content of our discussions a secret from anybody that is not a member of the group. All participants promised to keep the content of our discussions confidential.

Although I had informed all participants about anonymity and confidentiality through the research process, as well as included same in the information section of the consent forms, during informal conversations in class and the playgrounds, no concern of such was raised by any participant. As such, I recognised that raising this concern during the FGD was motivated by the presence of other

participants who were members of the group and the fear that the school authorities might get to know the content of our discussion. This reflects the nature of teacher-student relations and the operation of power in the school. In Zisan Secondary School, young people found discussing issues around sex or engaged in sexual activities are subjected to different forms of punishment by teachers, such as flogging, kneeling for long hours, cutting of grass in the field and sometimes their parents were invited to the school and informed about their ward's involvement in 'immoral' behaviours in school. Participant's resolve on ensuring confidentiality of response also emphasised the importance of recognising young people in research not as objects that the researcher collects information from, but as those having agency and capable of generating substantial knowledge in the research process. In this case, young people in my research expressed agency by negotiating their interest in relation to the safety of information generated during the research activity.

### **Teachers' and Students' Construction of Me as an Adult doing Research with Young People.**

In this section, I draw on my research diary to discuss how teachers and students in Zisan Secondary School constructed me as an adult doing research with young people. In the extract below, I focused on how the Principal through Ms Kasang introduced me to the students upon the commencement of my fieldwork thus:

Today, under the instruction of the Principal, Ms Kasang took me round the classes and introduced me to students as a researcher that would be working with them throughout the first semester. In each of the classes, Ms Kasang would inform the students that someone is here to address them. I would then introduce myself by saying my name and informing them about the details of my research and in what ways I would engage with them. I told them that I was a student like them who was interested in relieving and experiencing school life. There were no questions after my introductions in the classes except for a student in SS 2 that requested to see my ID card to authenticate my position as a researcher. I showed him my University ID card. After introducing myself and my research in each class, Ms Kasang would always tell students to be respectful as I was not their mate.

The above is an excerpt from my research diary written on 23/09/2019. It reflects how my initial contact with students positioned me as an adult coming to research young people within a school setting. What is striking here is how Ms Kasang presented me as an adult in relation to students who she constructed as children. I understand her presentation of me in this way not just as someone to be respected by students owing to my advancement in age, but also as a way of conscientizing them to be wary of the type of things they say to me during our conversations. For example, when we left one of the classes going to the next class, Ms Kasang asked me how I

intended to get young people to open up and speak to me regarding their sexuality. She and other teachers like Ms Shinai (I have discussed my encounter with Ms Shinai in Chapter Five) at different times expressed such concerns each time I spoke with them about my study. For example, Mr Kaburuk was skeptical about the content of my research. His concern was about me opening discussions around sex and sexuality with young people which has not been done before. Also, a teacher during an informal conversation constructed non-normative sexualities as evil and pleaded with me to not talk about same sex sexualities with the students, as if I was coming to corrupt the “innocent” minds of young people.

The Teachers’ concern about me being “an adult”, doing sexuality research with young people stems from the cultural meanings attached to issues around sex and how these meanings influence the legitimacy of sexual discourses with young people. The moral ambivalence attached to sex in society informs the construction of sexuality research as “Dirty work” and this has been argued by scholars such as Dowsett (2014), Irvine (2015), and Msibi (2014). The construction of sexuality research as “dirty work” as argued by Irvine, is reflected in the ways that sexuality researchers are stigmatised and sometimes marginalised in institutional spaces, even in the academia for engaging in research that questions existing societal cultures regarding the practice of gender and sexuality. Within the Nigerian context, cultural meanings attached to sex and sexualities, especially among young people, promote the notion that discussions of young people’s sexualities are problematic; therefore, it is mostly dominated by the discourses of danger and disease within a public health perspective.

“Dirty work”, in the context of my study, is defined to include two elements. First, engaging in discourses of sex with young people who are culturally expected to abstain from sex until they are married. It is a cultural belief in Nigeria that exposing young people to discussions around sex would push them to premarital sex, which is culturally and religiously constructed as a “sin” and should be avoided. Secondly, the possibility of my study discussing non-heterosexual identities is worrisome given that the Nigerian government had proscribed any form of non-heterosexual relationships as illegal and subject to 10 to 14 years imprisonment if convicted (I discussed this in detail in Chapter Three). In dealing with these conceptions about my work, I rather avoided the mention of sex each time I was introducing my research to teachers. Instead, I used sexuality, which to them sounds less “mundane” than sex. Interestingly, young people in my study did not construct my study as “dirty work”. They were happy to talk about their sexual experiences. They

mentioned that no one had ever engaged them in such discussions. This made it easier for me to engage in discussions on sex with young people during my fieldwork without the fear of being stigmatised as a “dirty worker” by young people.

Through my stay in the school, I was constructed by teachers and students as an adult who is expected to identify more with teachers than with students. Teachers’ construction of me as an adult was exemplified when a headteacher offered me a table in one of the staffrooms to use whenever I was in the school. I politely rejected the offer and informed her of the student-centred approach of my study, which required me to be always with students in their classrooms and the playground. By interacting with students regularly, teachers also expected that I served as a check to students when they contravened school rules. For example, after I rejected the offer to stay in the staffroom, Ms Doney stated that “at least, your (referring to me) decision to stay in the classrooms will help to curb noise making and other forms of indiscipline”. Again, I told her not to expect that to happen, as my study expects me to interact freely with students and observe their interactions in their natural forms and social landscape.

My presence in the classrooms was noticed by students and teachers. I usually occupied an empty seat in the back row in each class. I made sure that I did not displace any student from his/her seat in the classroom. When a teacher enters the class, I stood up with other students to greet the teacher, “Good morning, Sir!” or “Good morning, Ma!” and remained standing until the teacher instructed students to sit down. Students were surprised to see me standing with them to greet the teacher and would ask why I was standing. Agog (an SS 1 student) curiously asked, “You are an adult like our teachers; why would you stand up and greet them like us?” I explained to them that I was just a student like them in the class, and I needed to stand to avoid being punished for disobedience or disrespect. However, teachers, on the other hand, often made my adult status more visible in the class when some of them would walk towards me and greet me before going back to continue with the business of the day. Teachers jokingly referred to me as a “Special Student” both within and outside the classrooms.

While in the classroom, teachers and students constructed me as a social control agent. They would expect students to be of good behaviour whenever I was in the class. For example, Ms Shinai, at the end of her lesson, addressed the class and asked that they should be of good behaviour and be respectful so as not to portray a bad image of themselves to outsiders. Similarly, after marking

student's register, Ms Amara ( an SS 1 form teacher) addressed her students: “Okay now, you know you have someone among you that is not from this school, if you like don’t behave yourselves, show him your negative side and give him a picture of how bad you are.” My understanding of the phrases “people coming from outside” by Ms Shinai and “someone among you that is not from this school” by Ms Amara was referring to me as an outsider. Being constructed as an outsider did not only mean that students needed to respect me, but also to show me that they were of good behaviour to create a good impression. Both teachers perceived my adult presence in the class as an avenue to regulate the excesses of students in social interactions.

Teachers presenting me as an adult figure to students also influenced student's construction of me. Although I made efforts to deconstruct this adult perception, student viewed me in the same way as their teachers. In the absence of a teacher in a class, students will always scold each other, reminding them of the presence of an adult and the need to respect my person. For example, when the teacher left an SS 2 class, students started making noise and Zikachat called out: “Class, keep quiet. Can’t you people respect the person in the class? Is he your mate?” Also, in an SS 1 class, the class captain called on students to behave themselves in a good manner and not give a negative impression about themselves “*Kai!* (hey) you people cannot keep quiet even with Uncle in the class, you people will be showing yourselves, you don't have respect *abi* (right)? By referring to me as "Uncle" in the same way they address their teachers, students accorded me the status of a teacher with authority and the need to respect me as their teachers. Students did not only see me as an adult who should be respected, but they also saw me as an outsider who should be given a positive impression about their personality. I distanced myself from the adult-teacher figure, both within and outside class, when they came to me to report/complain about their fellow students. I constantly reminded them of my position as a learner. Hence, I refused to judge or rebuke any of their behaviours as this is a practice associated with teachers in the school.

Teachers’ and students' construction of me as an adult was also manifested in their behaviours whenever I engaged with students on the playground. Deconstructing adult-youth relationships on the playground entail that I negotiate existing forms of power relations between teachers and students’ expectations of me and my resolve to participate and learn from students. I captured an incident in my research diary on 8/11/2019 that lends weight to this thus:

At break time today, I was with a group of students behind the SS 2 block of classrooms. Music was playing from a boom box owned by a student. We formed a circle, and taking turns, each member of

the group would move to the middle of the circle and dance for a minute while others watch and clap. After the exercise, Ms Vongs, a headteacher, who was watching from afar approached me and asked how I could bring myself low to engage with students in this form of play. She also was concerned if my engagement with students in this manner will not demean my status and make students disrespect me. I explained to her the need for my engagement with students in their activities as being part of developing a friendly relationship with students which is a requirement for the success of my fieldwork.

Teachers' construction of me as an adult doing what young people are known to do presents me as an adult with unusual behaviour. Ms Vongs felt my participation with young people in such activities is not only demeaning of my adult status but could also make young people disrespect me. This view resonates with Dixon (2011) who argues that the positioning of adults as powerful when interacting with young people is often taken for granted. This explains Ms Vongs' perception of me as an adult that should not be seen playing with young people on the same level. Instead, she believes that my interaction with young people should place me with more power expected to command respect.

In my struggle to deconstruct existing forms of adult-youth power in interaction with students, my adult-self felt compromised when teachers would not punish certain behaviours by students because I was there, even when the students were engaged in such behaviours. For example, when a boy and a girl were seen by a teacher hugging each other in class, the teacher decided to overlook them and passed. However, when I came out of the classroom, the teacher asked me why I did not stop or report the students. He stated that he ignored the scene because he saw me in the class and did not want the student to think that he was disrespecting me by rebuking them when I chose not to. I realised that overlooking such student's behaviours spurred the process of establishing friendly relationships with certain students who are regarded to be stubborn. Through my study, I understand the need to deconstruct existing adult-centric power relations as a prerequisite to engaging with young people and learning about their experiences from their point of view. Therefore, in the next section, I will explain how I engaged with students in a young person-centred study that ensured their active participation as co-producers of knowledge in the research process.

### **Learning from Young People: Doing a Young Person-Centred Research by an Adult**

My study is concerned with how young people in school understand their social identities by negotiating existing forms of interactions within the school environment. In conducting research of this nature, it is important to understand the deployment of power relations in the research

process. In this case, between me, an adult researcher, and young people in an adult-centric school setting. Dixon (2011) emphasised the need to deconstruct the position of power as an adult domain in the form of relationships that adults and students engage in. Mayeza (2017) argues that power is fluid and not solely preserved for adults. Through the research process, power changes hands between the adult researcher and young people who are active participants. In conducting my study, I realized the need to deconstruct the existing adult-centric power relations in the school by engaging in young person-centred research. Young person-centred research focuses on the perspective of children about their reality as opposed to the dominant adult perspectives of childhood (Bhana, 2016). It is concerned with forms of relationship where the adult researcher challenges the common-sense dominance of adult power in the research process by encouraging young people to freely express themselves to the researcher in the same way they would interact with their friends (Martins, 2011).

Influenced by the ideas of the New Sociology of Childhood (NSC), I engaged in a student-centred study, by interacting with students as active agents, thereby deconstructing the common-sense adult-youth power relations that may arise in the research process (Mayerza, 2015; Pattman, 2015). I positioned the students as experts, while I assumed the position of naivety by constantly making efforts to learn from their wealth of knowledge (Mayerza, 2018). In doing so, I recognise such interactions as social encounters that place the participants in positions of authority rather than seeing them as social objects and mere sources of data (Pattman, 2013, 2015). This lends weight to the idea shared by Thorne (1993:12), that any adult researcher working with young people must appreciate the youth-centred approach, which she refers to as the process of learning from children. Thorne also maintains that:

To learn from children, adults have to challenge the deep assumption that they already know what children are "like", both because, as former children, adults have been there, and because, as adults, they regard children as less complete versions of themselves. When adults seek to learn about and from children, the challenge is to take the closely familiar and to render it strange.

Thorne, (1993) uses the phrase 'learning from children' to refer to the child-centred research process that is critical of common-sense adult-child power relations and seeks to address young people's agency in the research that concerns them. A major challenge for adults that seek to learn from young people is the ability to democratise existing adult-centred power between the adult researcher and the young participants.

In the early phase of my fieldwork at Zisan Secondary School, I had to deal with the challenge of breaking into students' groups both within and outside of the classrooms. Students perceived me as an adult and accorded me the same level of respect as their teachers. For example, each time I walked into any of the classrooms, students would stand and greet me "Good morning, Sir!" and would remain standing, waiting for me to respond by asking them to sit. This I understood, was a common practice of greeting teachers and other adults that came into the classrooms. Also, when students saw me outside on the playground, they referred to me as "Sir". Breaking into student groups was at first difficult as students stopped talking or changed the topic of discussion whenever I joined the group. My conversations with groups of students in the school reflect their perception of me first as a stranger who should not be part of their discussion, as well as an adult who was more experienced and one that has nothing to learn from them. I was rather seen as one that has something to teach them. Although they constructed me as an adult with power in the conversation, sometimes they resisted when I said I wanted to learn from them. This affirms Foucault's argument that power is complex and is characterised by some form of resistance from subordinates in relationships (Foucault, 1990b).

Through my interactions with students, I realised the need to democratise my relationships with students. I decided to greet students first when we came in contact. I did this by using the informal forms of greetings I observed to be common among students such as "How far?", "How you dey?", "wetin dey?", "What's up?" among others. All these are forms of greetings by way of inquiring how one is fairing. Simply put, it means "How are you?" or "Hello". I observed that each time I engaged with students first by using these forms of greetings, students were surprised and would laugh about it. I also realised that using these forms of greeting, while shaking hands with students made students (especially boys) freer with me. I captured one of such incidences in my research diary on 02/10/2019 thus:

I realised that engaging with students using informal language within the school has assisted me in gaining acceptance from the students. Today I interacted with a group of SS 2 students who were surprised that I was speaking pidgin English with them (an informal language coined from English and a mix of local dialects usually spoken in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa). Pidgin English is prohibited within the school environment and students could be punished when caught speaking it. These set of students at the onset of the conversation refused to respond in the same language I used to speak with them, however, after confirming that I wasn't going to trick them into speaking the language and then report them to their teachers, they became free and interacted with me in the pidgin language.

My reflections in the excerpt above shows how young people exercise agency in the research process by not accepting everything that comes from the adult researcher, rather they sometimes challenge and resist adult domination of power relations during interaction (Walkerdine, 1990).

In adopting a learner's approach in my interactions with young people in the school, I continuously told students to call me by my first name "Hilary" rather than referring to me as "Sir" or "Uncle". During interactions, I constantly asked the students questions about their behaviours and the meanings of concepts they used in conversations. This resonates the ideas of conducting a young person-centred study where the main role of the researcher is seeking to learn from young people's point of view (Thorne, 1993; Pattman, 2013; Pattman & Bhana, 2017). My effort towards encouraging students to interact freely with me was made even more difficult when some students shared ideas with their fellow students that I was a spy sent by the Principal to observe their wrongdoings and report to her. For example, during break time, I approached a group of SS 1 students and one of them requested that I showed them my student I.D card before they could admit me into their group.

Again, this reflects the forms of resistance that young people expressed during my research process. Although I tried to convince the students about my position as an independent researcher, I later realised they still had doubts about my status. This doubt was finally cleared the next day when Ms Zanak came to class and requested to know who I was and what I was doing in her class. I explained that I was a researcher and showed her the permission letter I got from the principal to conduct my study. She read the permission letter to the hearing of the students. Then she apologised and told me she just resumed for the term after a period of illness. Ms Zanak did not attend the Staff Meeting at the beginning of the term where I was introduced to the teachers. This encounter played to my advantage when the same group of students I had a conversation with during break walked up to me and expressed their conviction about my researcher status which they said was informed by the content of the permission letter read by Ms Zanak in the class.

During my interactions with students in the school, I tried not to be judgmental in any way about student's behaviour, however, sometimes, when students had misunderstandings, they approached me to intervene in the situation. I referred them to their teachers, especially when such cases would require apportioning blame on one party. By referring students to their teachers, I distanced myself from taking a position of authority ascribed to teachers (Thorne, 1993; Mayeza, 2015). However,

there were situations when I had to intervene because the students could not take such a case to their teachers for fear of being punished. For example, there was a case of two girls who were friends, and had a quarrel over a boy they both liked. Each girl claimed to have met the boy first and would want the other to let go of the boy. After asking some questions, I advised them to wait and see whom the boy will approach first and the other should let go. Although this may not be the best solution to their quarrel, however, in my position at that moment, I felt it was the best thing to do by avoiding passing judgement on who met the boy first. This way, I ensured that both parties left without feeling defeated. Montgomery, (2019) argues that the popular understanding of young people as dependent on adults is often reified when young people approach adults for guidance, assistance, and support. Young people approaching me with issues they could not discuss with their teachers reflected the trust I had developed with them in my study. However, this also puts me in a position where I was expected to give advice to young people, a position associated with adult teachers in the school. Hence, the need to be critical on the ability of adult researchers to completely deconstruct adult-youth power relations in research of this nature.

On few occasions, students approached me and requested to read what I was writing, I freely shared my notes with them. I was careful to only share notes that did not contain any form of personal information about a student or teacher. To achieve this, I had a notebook where I wrote general observations while in the field, these observations were devoid of any names or personal characteristics of respondents; it is this book that I handed over to students who asked to read what I was writing. My continuous involvement with students helped me to develop relationships that were friendly, interactive, and informal in nature. Students would share their concerns regarding school, home, relationships, and intimacy with me. This enabled me to share in their experiences and understand how they negotiated through social interactions to construct their gender and sexual identities within the school. I will explain this further in the next section by reflecting on how the relationships I formed with students aided my data collection process.

### **Collecting Data in the Ethnographic Study**

The process of data collection for this study involved three major activities. Firstly, I engaged in direct observations with students within and outside their classrooms. Secondly, I conducted FGDs with student groups. And, lastly, I conducted interviews with selected teachers in the school. I approached my data collection process with an open but curious mind by assuming that young

people are active participants in their daily experiences. I therefore, assumed a least-adult role by developing less authoritative relations with students. I achieved this by being very friendly and playful with students (Mayeza, 2017) and by making them feel that they were experts at what they do from which I sought to learn. This is a practice that is not associated with those in authority (the teachers and the principal) in the school.

### **Collecting Data through Observations**

Collecting data through observations in the school meant that I immersed myself in the everyday activities of the students of Zisan Secondary School. I adopted the 'researcher-as-participant' strategy of Bryman (2012). I participated by carefully observing the various forms of interactions students engaged in, and how these activities were structured along gender lines. I also observed how issues of sexuality developed and how these issues are being understood and displayed. In conducting the observation, I engaged with and documented the various forms of interactions students at Zisan Secondary School participated in, both within and outside the classrooms. I attended classes with students, interacted with and observed them in their classrooms during the lesson periods.

During observations, I paid close attention to the forms of interaction that existed between boys and girls when the teacher is in class compared to when the teacher is not in class. I also interacted with students during break periods outside the classrooms by being part of some forms of play and games in which they were involved. I listened to their conversations and drew on such conversations arising along gender and sexuality lines. I raised questions to further explore such emerging themes from their conversations, thereby engaging students as active participants in the research process with whom we work together towards the production of knowledge on issues of gender and sexuality. By constantly encouraging discussions about gender and sexuality, themes emerged from the interactions. I assumed the role of a learner who was eager to learn from the expertise of children he was studying.

I visited Zisan Secondary School at least three days in a week; Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. I also visited the school on Tuesdays and Thursdays to attend to appointments with teachers or students as well as other research activities. For example, I visited the school on a Thursday every two weeks to attend clubs and societies which were bi-weekly. The school has two sections (the Junior and the Senior Sections). These sections operate in shifts of two weeks each. When the

senior section (with whom I worked) was on the morning shift, I visited the school by 7:10 am and 12:40 pm when in afternoon shift. During these periods, I observed students interacting and preparing their classes for the day's activities.

My first phase of observation took a period of 20 minutes before the bell rings and students moved to the Assembly Ground. The assembly took a period of 30 minutes after which students marched to their classes for lectures. During assembly, I listened attentively to the messages passed to students and observed the reaction of students to these messages passed by their teachers, especially with regards to gender and sexuality, which was a reoccurring theme. At 8: 00 am (morning shift) or 1: 30 pm (afternoon shift) students march to their classrooms for lectures which take a period of two hours (four lessons of 30 minutes each). During lessons in classes, I did more of the observations and took note of certain forms of student's behaviour. When the teacher was out of the class, I would then engage with the students by asking questions on certain observed behaviours that I needed to further understand. I did not engage in conversations with students when the teacher was in class to avoid distracting the students from the learning process. My informal conversations with students in class took place between five to ten minutes when a teacher left the class at the end of her/his lesson period, and before the next teacher came in.

The school had only one break period 10: 00 am -10: 30 am / 3: 30 pm – 4: 00 pm for morning and afternoon shifts respectively. At break time, I engaged in student activities and observed them for 30 minutes. I often approached students with an open mind and attempted to key into whatever form of conversation they engaged in. During these conversations, I documented the various forms of gender and sexuality discourses that were raised. I also observed the gender differentiation in the composition of the student's groups during the break. I was conscious to engage with groups of both gender and explored the dynamics of power relations that existed among mixed-gender groups.

After the break period, students went back to their classes for another two hours of lectures after which the school closes at 12: 30 pm and 6: 00 pm for morning and afternoon shifts, respectively. During my observations, I took brief notes in the research journal as activities unfolded. When the need arose for informal interviews that would extend beyond the normal conversation with participants, I sought verbal consent from the students to record their responses with a voice recorder. At the end of each day in the field, I wrote elaborate accounts of all that happened during

the day in the research diary. The research diary enabled me to keep track of all the events that had happened during my fieldwork.

### **Conducting Focus Group Discussions**

Following the observation, I conducted FGDs with groups of students who were purposefully selected based on their ability to provide the information needed for the study. It is these groups of students that I refer to in my study as key informants. Focus group discussions, as defined by Merriam & Tisdell (2016:114) are interviews on a topic with a group of people who have knowledge of the topic. FGDs involve the researcher engaging with a group of participants by asking questions systematically and simultaneously (Babbie, 2016). A major focus in conducting FGDs is to understand group interaction and how participants jointly construct meanings about the topic of discussion (Bryman, 2012). This implies that data gotten from FGDs is socially constructed; therefore, Merriam & Tisdell (2016) advocate for a constructivist approach in the process of collecting data in FGDs.

I conducted six FGDs with 6-9 members in each group. Each year group (SS 1 and SS 2) had a boys-only group, girls-only group and a mixed-gender group. Participation in each group was determined by the participants' consent to be part of the FGD. In conducting the FGDs I interacted with young people as authorities and experts about their experiences. I observed them closely and noted the issues they raised, then I encouraged them to elaborate more on these issues (Pattman, 2013). Participation in the FGDs was strictly based on the completion of consent/assent forms by selected key informants and their parents (in the case of minors). Before the commencement of each FGD, I ensured that I collected all the signed consent/assent forms from key informants. This was to ensure that all key informants had permission from their parents to participate as well as indicated their acceptance to be part of the FGD. After collecting the consent forms, I introduced the research topic to the participants and informed them about the rules guiding the discussion. I also informed them about the need to keep the content of our discussions confidential by not divulging any information to someone who was not part of the group.

In line with Bryman (2012), I took a least participatory role as a moderator during FGDs. I initiated conversations around what it means to be a boy/girl in school and allowed the conversation to flow continuously among the participants. I paid close attention to ensure that discussions did not digress far from the context of the study. Engaging with participants in this way enabled me to

understand group dynamics in the conversations, also the ways participants initiated, discussed, and constructed gender and sexual ideas when with their peers of the same gender as it varies from when they were together with peers of the opposite gender. All FGDs were conducted on Saturdays, in a classroom within the school. During the group discussions, I used an audio recorder to record the conversations. I also observed and documented other forms of physical gestures that the audio recorder could not capture.

My FGD sessions with both groups of boys and girls were interactive and interesting. At the end of each FGD, I asked participants if my gender had influence on the nature of their responses and if they would have responded differently if I was of a different gender. Both boys and girls indicated that my gender as an interviewer did not affect their responses in anyway. They also stated that through our informal conversations within and outside the classrooms, they had developed confidence that the school authorities would not know about their responses. They were excited to be part of the discussions. Notwithstanding, I noticed that both boys and girls spoke more openly about issues of sex and relationships in their single-gender groups than when in mixed groups of boys and girls. After a mixed group FGD with SS 2 students, I engaged the students in a conversation outside the classroom. During the conversation, boys and girls invoked gender identification in explaining concerns for discussing issues of gender and sexuality in mix-gendered groups.

Boys were concerned about girls divulging information from discussions to teachers and other outsiders. Girls on the other hand were concerned that the boys would make fun of them or construct them a “bad girls”. 'Bad girls' in this context is used to refer to girls that are more exposed to sexual experiences, I discussed this in detail in Chapter Six. Girls labelled as “bad girls” are perceived by others to be promiscuous. Within this context, boy’s concerns were informed by the fear that they could get punished if the school authorities found they were sexually active. Boys cared less if other students would laugh at them or even ridicule them for engaging in and discussing issues about sex. Rather, this was the concern of the girls. These concerns stem from popular and often taken for granted discourses which implicitly connects discussions of gender and sexuality with heteronormative values in a patriarchal society like Nigeria where boys are positioned as sexual subjects while girls as objects of desire (Pattman & Bhana, 2017) Giving these concerns, boys and girls would prefer to engage in discussions around topics of gender and

sexuality in same gender groups, with others they believed to share the same concern. In this way, young people believe their responses would remain confidential.

### **Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews with Teachers**

To understand how adults think, understand, and regulate young people's construction of gender and sexual identities, I conducted four one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the teachers who were in positions of authority to guide and regulate students interaction in the school. Greeff (2005:292) defines semi-structured interviews as "those organised around areas of particular interest, while still allowing considerable flexibility in scope and depth". This form of interview is particularly defined by its permissible flexibility in the sense that the researcher is open to exploring emerging themes that may arise in the interview process. In this case, the researcher approaches the interview with a set of questions, called the interview schedule, that will guide the interview process, but the responses of the participant largely direct the interview. It is from these responses that the interviewer can build on emerging themes to ask further questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview schedule should not dictate the interview process but rather serve as a guide (Greeff, 2005). In this form of interview, the participant is positioned as an expert on the subject of discussion and is therefore allowed enough time to give a comprehensive account of the subject of study. This presents the subjective nature of semi-structured interviews. By placing more emphasis on the responses of the participant, the interview data reflects the participant's subjective understanding of the subject of study.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with four teachers within the school environment at different dates and times as were convenient for the teachers. I gave the teachers the information and consent forms to read and complete indicating their willingness to participate in the study. Selected teachers had one day to study the information forms and decide on their participation. Interestingly, all the selected teachers agreed to be part of the study. They signed and returned the consent forms before the commencement of each interview. Interviews were conducted in the English language. I commenced each interview by briefly explaining the purpose of my study and the need for the interviews. I approached the semi-structured interviews with an open-ended question, asking teachers about their understanding of the concepts of gender and sexuality. It is from this initial question that I introduced other questions in the interview schedules as well as formulated subsequent questions that helped in probing issues raised by the teachers for further understanding.

Semi-structured interviews with teachers were guided by the interview schedule. Interview questions were framed to gain insight on the ways that adults understand and regulate young people's sexuality. During the interviews, I raised questions regarding the perceptions of teachers on the sexuality of young people. Drawing from Mayeza (2015), I tried to sustain conversations during the interviews with teachers by formulating probing questions from their responses and always asking teachers to give examples that could elaborate on the responses they gave on certain issues. I discussed in Chapter Five, Six and Seven, the findings that emerged from interviews with teachers in line with emerging themes from my observation and FGDs with young people. All the semi-structured interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder.

### **Ensuring Trustworthiness and Accuracy of Data in my Study**

Cypress (2017) argues for the importance of ensuring accuracy and trustworthiness of qualitative data by subjecting the data to some form of validity check. In my study, I used validity to mean “the degree to which inferences made in the study are accurate and well-informed” (Morse, 2015:1213). Validity measures the extent to which research findings reflects the actual phenomenon from the viewpoint of the study participants. To achieve this, I drew and analysed data from multiple sources such as observations, individual interviews and focus groups with students. I also interviewed teachers in the school. A combination of these sources of data gave me a more focused understanding of how young people operate within a heteronormative space to construct their social identities. As argued by Shenton (2004), a combination of different methods of data collection depicts the process of triangulation of sources. In the context of my study, triangulation served dual functions, it assisted by compensating for the limitation of individual sources of data and also helped to exploit their respective benefits. Shenton (2004) argues that generating themes from a combination of multiple data sources serves to check the accuracy and trustworthiness of data.

As part of ensuring the trustworthiness of data, Shenton, (2004) argues for the need to ensure that respondents are honest in their responses. As mentioned earlier, I adopted a youth-centered approach in my study. This approach encouraged participants to speak frankly about their ideas and experiences regarding gender and sexuality without any fear of losing credibility in the eyes of the researcher or the school authority. In continuation of this process, I engaged critically with data gotten from the field and made available my notes, recordings and transcripts to participants

who showed interest in reading/listening to their responses. Through this process, I was able to make clarifications about the meaning of concepts and ask respondents further questions that added to the data collected. This process also enhanced the understanding of young people's construction of social identities.

## **Analysing the Research Data**

As earlier stated, I collected data through observations, informal conversations, FGDs and semi-structured interviews. During these processes, conversations were recorded with the aid of a digital audio recorder while also taking notes. Greeff (2005) argues that recording conversations in the research process give a comprehensive record of the process than when only notes are taken. In analysing my research data, I followed the six phase-approach of Braun & Clarke (2006). This involved first getting familiar with the data through transcription by reading and re-reading of generated transcripts; systematically generating codes for the data; putting codes together to generate themes; reviewing generated themes; defining and generating names for themes, and finally producing reports.

I first transcribed the recorded conversations by taking note of what participants said, and how they responded to issues raised during such conversations. This process gave an understanding of data both in form and context. My transcription of data was guided by my understanding of young people as agential beings in the construction of their social reality. In this way, I was able to note all forms of non-verbal expressions during conversations such as laughter, expressions of sadness, disappointments, and sarcasm. I captured these expressions in brackets (where applicable) after providing the response from the participants, this assisted by providing more contextual meanings to responses and the use of concepts by participants. During transcription, I made effort to produce transcripts verbatim without distorting the original context of the conversation. However, when participants spoke in a language other than English, majorly the Hausa language or Pidgin English, I translated these into the English language and presented them in bracket for a better understanding of readers who do not understand either language.

Each day after returning from the field, I carefully studied my notes and transcripts by reading and re-reading them. Through this process, I highlighted sections of my notes and transcripts that are similar in meaning and assigned codes to them. I considered these codes as relevant in answering my research question on how young people understand and construct their social identities in

school. I coded my data in terms of how the school provide spaces for the construction of gender and sexual identities by young people. Also, in terms of young peoples' understanding of their social identities and the interplay of power in gendering identities, as well as how young people understand and construct gender transgression. I also coded in terms of the regulations that young people are subjected to in school regarding the expression of sexuality and how young people could navigate around these regulations to construct and experience their sexuality. I engaged in this process throughout the data collection phase of my study. Upon completion of my fieldwork, I continuously studied and reviewed generated codes to discover forms of similarities between the different codes. I then categorised related codes to create more focused themes that I present in my finding chapters.

I used thematic analysis to analyse the codes I generated from my multiple data sources. Braun & Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a study of data that enables a researcher to systematically identify themes about patterns of thoughts, behaviour or experience in relation to a given phenomenon, in this case, the construction of gender and sexual identities among young people. In agreement with Guest, Macqueen & Namey (2012:11), I consider thematic analysis as a sufficient tool for understanding "complexities of meaning within a textual data set". During my analysis of data, I inductively generated themes from the research data. Braun & Clarke, (2006) refer to this process as a bottom-up method of data analysis.

Emerging themes from the data were related to theoretical literatures and analysed in line with existing studies in the field of gender and sexuality studies among young people. For example, I draw on Connell's (1987) concepts of hegemonic masculinities and emphasised femininities to explain how boys and girls are expected to act along with heteronormative ideals within the school thereby qualifying them as "real boys" or "real girls" (I explain this concepts in detail in Chapter Six). In Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I integrate my findings with the analysis of themes that emerged from my data. Giving the nature of my study and the complexity of individual experiences regarding gender and sexuality, I recognise the possibility of having complex sentences and long verbatim conversations that could be complex in nature. This is to enable me effectively capture participants' experiences within the context it was observed.

## **Conclusion**

Through my ethnographic study, I engaged with young people in ways that deconstructed existing adult-youth power relations common with research of this nature. I approached young people as experts in their reality that I sought to learn from. Researching this way raise implications for the ways that social researchers engage with young people in the research process. My approach ensures that I engaged with young people, not as subjects from whom I sought to collect information, rather, as co-producers of knowledge who we collectively worked towards generating new knowledge. Researching this way provides the opportunity for self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher as well as the opportunity for self-expression on the part of young people.

This understanding guided the conduct of my research in terms of participant selection as well as my approaches to conversations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions with students. As discussed in this chapter, engaging in young person-centred research did not only provide me with information on how young people understand and construct their social identities, but it availed me the opportunity to observe and understand the ways that the school operates and the influences it had on the interaction of young people, and consequently their understanding of being boys and girls within the school. The next chapter, therefore, focusses on the dynamic environment of Zisan Secondary School, and the ways it supports the construction of young people's gender and sexualities.

## Chapter Five

### Zisan Secondary School: A Site for Construction of Gender and Sexual Identities

#### Introduction

This chapter explores how Zisan Secondary School contributes to the production of particular gender and sexual identities among students. Drawing from my field observations, interviews with teachers, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with students, I describe how the organisational structure of the school supports the performance of gender and sexual roles among students. The school is a site where a series of sexual discourses are articulated. I understand school practices as creating a context for the performance of gender and sexual identities. It is in line with this that Kehily (2005: 39) in her study with young people in secondary schools in the Midlands area of the United Kingdom argues that:

sexualities are produced within the school and inscribed in discursive practices that are normatively heterosexual. In this respect, the interest is in the processes which are constitutive of dominant practice, school routines and procedures situated within the curriculum and pedagogic practice that serve to shape and consolidate heterosexual relations.

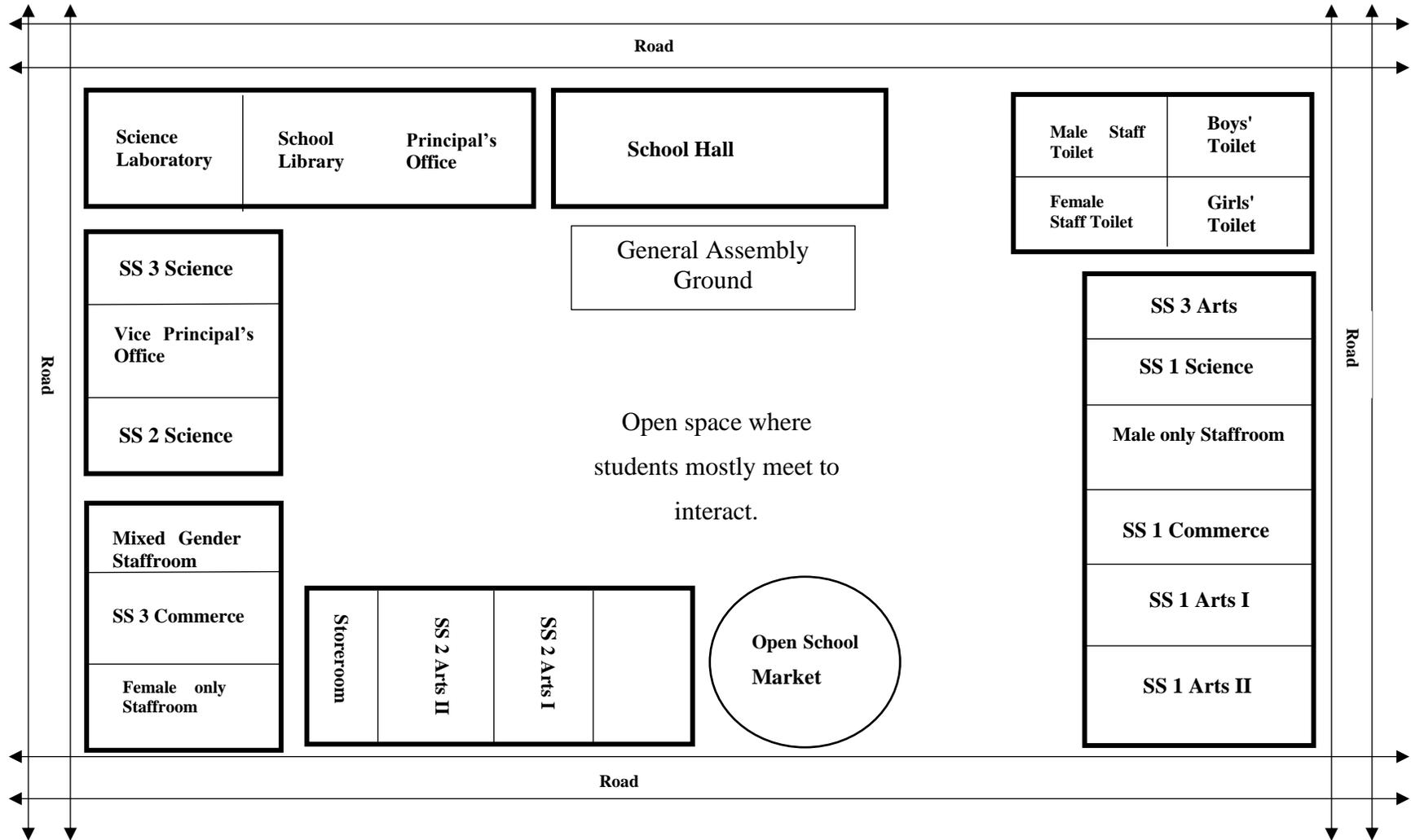
In my study, I understand gender as a social practice embedded in everyday interaction. Gender is something we do, and not something we have. In line with Kehily's study, I am interested in exploring how the school categorises young people's gender and sexualise them through particular institutional and discursive practices. In doing so, I discussed the physical, organisational structure and the processes of interactions that are obtained within these physical structures and their bearing on the construction of identities among students of Zisan secondary school. Therefore, this chapter addresses how physical structures and routines are arranged to support existing gender and sexual norms in the school; how responsibilities for both staff and students in Zisan Secondary School are allocated along gender lines; the relationship that exists between teachers and students within the school in line with students' construction of identity; and the teaching and learning of sexuality education in the school and its bearing on the lives of young people. As mentioned in Chapter Four, I present and discuss themes that emerged from my data in relation to existing theoretical and research literature in the field of gender and sexuality among young people in school. By doing so, I integrate my findings with the analysis of themes that emerged from my data.

## **Structural Organisation of Zisan Secondary School**

On the first day of my visit to Zisan secondary school to commence my fieldwork, I had to wait for the Principal to arrive so I could inform her of my presence. As I sat in the waiting room, teachers came in to sign the logbook, which was managed by the matron, who also serves as the receptionist to the Principal. I noticed the dominance of female teachers in the school. Most of the teachers will sign the logbook and engage in certain discussions. I listened with keen interest as two female teachers discussed students' engagement in sexual practices and the inability of available structures to deter such acts during school hours. The need for the school to develop more stringent measures in addressing the situation was also discussed.

The conversation between the two teachers indicated their concern about students' sexual activities within and around the school. Both teachers were more concerned about the girls as their conversation was centred on pregnancy, and how the school could be developed in terms of physical structures (a fence) to reduce these incidences. Getting pregnant was constructed by these teachers as a 'case of immorality'. Their trajectories implied that sex was an immoral act if students engaged in it, with pregnancy as its visible manifestation. Building on the elision of student sexuality with immorality, the teachers elaborated on the need to 'control' students from 'dodging classes' and, by implication, although this was not explicitly stated, 'controlling' their sexual desires and drives. Indeed, such concerns were reinforced when the conversation turned to the school's lack of a fence, and therefore porous borders as though the students were seeping through a site of moral control into a site of immorality, over which the students had little control. These assumptions about schooling and students, gender and sexuality, inform various institutional practices and gendered forms of sexuality education (formal and informal), which I address in this Chapter. Diagram A shows the structural arrangement of Zisan Secondary School.

**Diagram A: A Sketch Map of Zisan Secondary School**



The structural arrangement of Zisan Secondary School is a rectangular form. The school is located within a residential settlement and has no fence that separates it from other residential buildings in the neighbourhood. Behind the structures are roads that connect the school to the community. These roads make it easy for students to abscond from classes without the teachers noticing. The open nature of the school environment enhances the informal interaction between students and members of the community. For example, there were times I noticed community members walking through the school to their various destinations as though it was a mere pathway. Drawing from the conversation of Ms Kasham and Ms Zichat, this provides an avenue for students to interact with and establish relationships with people from the external community within school periods. Unlike Mayeza's 2015 study among young school goers in South Africa, where he found the playground to be highly gender spaces that support the domination of boys playing football; the school playground in Zisan Secondary School does not reflect such gendered arrangements. The absence of sporting facilities in the school makes the playground an open space where both boys and girls meet to interact in same, and mixed gendered group.

The staffrooms of Zisan Secondary School were organised along gender polarities. There are three staffrooms; one occupied by female teachers only, the other by male teachers. A third is occupied by both male and female teachers. However, in the mix-gender staffroom, there are few male teachers dominated by female teachers. This organisation of the staffroom is not official as indicated by Mr Kazah during an interaction. It is only a reflection of the preference to occupy the same office space among colleagues of the same gender with whom they felt comfortable. To this set up, Mr Kazah states:

Well, this is not an official arrangement. We are free to choose which office to stay. However, we will always select spaces where we feel comfortable with our friends. So, you see men coming together in one office and the women in another office. In fact, the men you see in that office [pointing at the mixed-gender office] are there because there is no space in our office [referring to the male-only staffroom]. As you can see our office is the smallest (Mr Kazah, Head Teacher).

### **School Routine: How Students' Interaction is Organised in the School**

Allen (2007); Heywood & Mac an Ghail (2003), Redman (2001); and Renold (2004) in their studies posit the importance of school routines in the production of gender and sexual identities among students. Through these routines, students can negotiate, adapt, and resist ideas as they make sense of their sexual selves. Through my conversations with students and teachers of Zisan Secondary School, I have come to understand that school routines provided two forms

of interaction. First, interaction that exists within the classrooms during teaching periods. This is mostly defined as a teacher-student form of interaction characterised by strict regulations by teachers. Secondly, the interaction that exists outside of the classroom before assembly, during the official break time or after closing times. Interaction outside the classroom is mostly between students and is constructed during their free time. The following table indicates the school routine of Zisan Secondary School, and how interactions are reflected.

**Table 1: Zisan Secondary School Timeline**

Morning Shift		Afternoon Shift	
7: 00 am	Classes are opened for cleaning	12: 30 pm – 1: 00 pm	Cleaning of classes
7: 30 am – 8: 00 am	Assembly	1: 00 pm – 1: 30 pm	Assembly
8: 00 am – 10: 00 am	Teaching time	1: 30 pm – 3: 30 pm	Teaching time
10: 00 am – 10: 30 am	Break	3: 30 pm – 4: 00 pm	Break
10: 30 am – 12: 30 pm	Teaching time	4: 00 pm – 6: 00 pm	Teaching time
12: 30 pm	School closes	6: 00 pm	School closes

### **Assembly Structure of Zisan Secondary School**

On the first day of my fieldwork, I visited the school early so I could begin the day's activities with them. Students were scattered around the school premises, some were sweeping and cleaning their classrooms in preparation for the day. In most of the classes, while girls were sweeping the floor, boys were helping to move the chairs to provide moving space. Students were allotted days to sweep and clean the classes and their environs, and this must be done before the time for assembly. Each day began with an assembly which often commenced with singing, worship songs, prayers which was followed by the Nigerian National Anthem and The Pledge. The Principal or any of the Head Teachers addressed the students on recent developments within the school and its environs. After that, students were inspected for proper dressing. Defaulters were punished by either flogging or cutting grass in the field or asked to wash the school toilets. Sometimes, (though rarely) defaulters were sent back home to dress

properly before returning to school. There were different types of assembly for each day, as reflected in the following table.

**Table 2: Types of Assembly in Zisan Secondary School**

<b>Day</b>	<b>Assembly Type</b>
Monday	General Assembly
Tuesday	Year Group Assembly
Wednesday	General Assembly
Thursday	House Assembly
Friday	Gender Assembly

The nature of assembly in Zisan Secondary School was one that reflects and contributes to forms of gender differentiation and polarisation between boys and girls. This gender distinction is observed in terms of the official grouping of students during the assembly, students' dressing patterns and the duties that prefects carry out during assembly periods. The following observation on 30/09/2019 illustrates the gendering of assembly practices and how these draw on and reinforce normative assumptions about gender.

It was 7: 30 am on a cold Monday morning. I stood by a window at SS 1 block of classes watching how students were cleaning and arranging their classrooms in preparation for the day. The school bell rang, and all the students had to leave what they were doing and ran to the assembly ground. It was a day for General Assembly. The students assembled in the open space in front of the school hall. Teachers were yet to come out from their morning briefing. Prefects ensured that students queued according to their classes in separate lines, one for boys and another for girls. Students were neatly dressed in white and brown colours. Girls were dressed in brown skirts against white neatly tucked-in long-sleeved shirts, with their hair all plaited in the same style. The boys were dressed in brown trousers and white long-sleeved shirts, bearing low haircuts. Both boys and girls wore white stockings with either brown or black sandals. Unlike the girls whose shirts had no buttons, the white shirts worn by boys had a line of buttons in front, down to the bottom. Interestingly, almost all girls were well-dressed from home with well tucked in shirts, while most boys were flying their shirts and only made efforts to tuck-in when they get to school or at the sight of a teacher. While the assembly was going on, students who came late were being apprehended and asked to kneel until the end of the assembly. I

observed that male prefects were often the ones stopping late comers, while female prefects were made to inspect and ensure that latecomers served the punishment. While this was going on, I went to stand by Gimbiya and Kuyet (two among the female prefects who were inspecting students on punishment). After a few seconds, Gimbiya turned to me and said, “Good morning, Sir”. I responded, “Good morning, you can call me Hilary”. And the following conversation ensued:

Hilary to Gimbiya: So why are you girls not around the corners of the classrooms to stop latecomers?

Kuyet: Because we are girls and the boys don’t respect us, even your junior, that is a boy will look down on you sometimes and may even push you. But they cannot do that with the boys.

Gimbiya: When the boys [male prefects] bring them here and make them to kneel, they cannot stand up or escape because they know that teachers are around, and we can easily report them.

The above observation reflects how the Assembly Ground serves as a space for reinforcing normative gender divisions. Boys dressed separately from girls and were made to stand on different lines during assembly. The differences in the mode of dressing was informed by normative assumptions about gender and sexuality that boys and girls should dress and behave differently. The form of interactions that takes place before, and during assembly further intensifies young peoples’ construction of themselves as opposites in the school. This is exemplified when students constructed the boys’ masculinities as commanding respect and obedience from other students, unlike Girls’ femininities that were associated with vulnerabilities that suggest the possibility of violence on girls by boys when no teacher or male prefect was watching.

The grouping of students along gender divisions was further shown in the school by the Gender Assembly that took place every Friday. Boys assembled in front of the School Hall, while girls assembled in front of the mixed-gender staffroom. During Gender Assembly, male teachers met with boys while female teachers met with girls. Mr. Kaburuk, in an interview, stated that gender assembly provided the platform for teachers to instruct students about the right behaviour both in and out of school thus:

... we normally have the gender assembly, where the male students are in one side and then females are in the other side. This provides the opportunity for male teachers to advise the male students based on how they can be responsible individuals regarding their education. Also, how they should be responsible in relationships with girls by treating them nicely while not engaging in any form of sexual relationship (Mr. Kaburuk, Head Teacher).

In another interview, Ms. Asmau further explained the conduct of Gender Assembly in the school saying:

On our own side, as women, we address the female students generally every Friday, cleanliness, you know, what you can observe in yourself, and how to behave. About two weeks ago we addressed them seriously ... we spoke with them on having to know who they are and then maintain their integrity, not to allow anybody to have access to them or their value but maintaining their track. When you derail out of the track, you can crash-land. When you let yourself so free and so lose to everyone then, the boys will use and dump you and you won't achieve your dream; so many things about your life will be truncated (Ms. Asmau, Head Teacher).

Boys and girls were taught to be “responsible” individuals, to focus on achieving educational excellence and the need to establish healthy relationships devoid of sex. Sex was constructed by teachers as being destructive and needs to be abstained from. Through the Gender Assembly, girls were constantly reminded of their identity as if being a girl is ideally grounded in nature. Teachers’ construction of boys as sexual predators, positions girls as particularly vulnerable to forms of ‘immorality’. Constructing girls in this way by teachers acts to infantilise these girls as lacking knowledge of their own identity. It further shows the heteronormative expectations on girls to conform to notions of respectability by resisting the advances of boys by practicing sexual restraint (Kruger, Shefer & Oakes, 2015).

Furthermore, there was a conscious effort at avoiding the discourse of sexuality. This is reflected in the use of euphemism by Ms Asmau while talking about student’s sexuality. Fine (1988) in her work on sexuality education in the United States, found the absence of a discourse of desire in sex education lessons and the how this absence impacted negatively, especially with regards to girls. In my study, teachers’ responses addressed a form of sexuality education that is devoid of desire. The lack of critical conversations with young people in this regard impacted differently on boys and girls, it disproportionately placed the burden on girls by appealing to their integrity in ways that made them think they would lose their morality if they had sex. In this way, the anti-sex rhetoric around school-based sex education does very little in promoting the healthy development of sexual subjectivities among young people in the school. It, however, embodies a potential for increasing the rates of victimisation, teenage pregnancy and consequently exacerbates the vulnerabilities of girls whom it seeks to protect.

### **‘Boys and Girls Could Sit Together but Not all of them’: Classroom Arrangement at School**

The sitting arrangement in classes resonates with the enforcement of gender polarity in the system. In the classrooms, a desk was occupied by a maximum of three students. Specific desk space was allocated to each student through the term. The process of allocating desk space was often determined by students with the supervision of the class teachers. Boys and girls were often paired with students of the same gender on each desk, while in some cases desks were

occupied by students of mixed gender. This sitting arrangement was mostly informed by girls' lack of trust on the boys. I learned during a conversation with a group of students in SS 2, where Swatchet explains: "We don't trust them [boys], if you sit with some of them, they will help you, but others will start touching you and saying they want to date or have sex with you". Similarly, teachers constructed some boys as possessing "reckless" sexuality and should not be allowed to sit on the same desk with girls. This is exemplified when Ms. Amara, who, after marking the register, decided to change the seats of some students in her class stating that "...it is dangerous to allow you (boys) sit with girls before I will begin to have cases of pregnancy and sexual harassment in my class"

I understand girls' construction of boys in this way to be partly influenced by the kind of information they get from their teachers as well as the forms of behaviours expressed by boys as exemplified by the response of Swatchet above. Constructing boys as sexual predators has two effects; firstly, it makes the selection of seats in the class a function of gender. Here, girls were given priority over boys because teachers felt the need to protect the girls from the excesses of the boys. Secondly, a girl would not want to share a seat with a boy because of the fear of being constructed by teachers in "negative" ways, owing to teachers' preference for sexually inactive students and their construction of sexually active students as bad and reckless. The construction of boys in this way becomes problematic in that it represses the sexuality of girls and denies them the agency they need to initiate or display affection for boys. The construction of young people in this way is informed by essentialist views of gender and sexuality upon which the teachers at the school draw. In contrast, my understanding of how young people's gender and sexuality should be constructed is influenced by the work of Allen (2008), Francis (2018), Fine (1988) and Bhana & Pattman (2010). These scholars in their works argue that the separation and polarisation of boys and girls in school is highly problematic. They are critical of heteronormative values that frame informal and formal sex educational practices in schools. They instead, attempt to develop forms of sexuality education that do not infantilise young people but engage with them as sexual beings. They also argue for opportunities for boys and girls to learn from each other in sexuality education and tried to promote friendships across lines of gender and sexuality in stark contrast to the kinds of messages being conveyed by teachers in my study who deemed such relationships as impossible.

### **‘This should be our Free Time’: Boys and Girls Interacting at Break Time**

From my observation, students' interaction during break time is one that creates and dissolves gender boundaries. Walking through the school during break, I observed the creation of gender boundaries by students. I came across groups of boys and girls sitting in different parts of the playground and classrooms. Boys were in different groups as girls with a few other groups consisting of both genders. In the classrooms, students in different groups were eating and talking with each other. On the playground, boys engaged in more physical forms of play like running and chasing each other and riding bicycles while girls were seated calmly in their groups of varying numbers chatting. The separation of boys and girls in groups sometimes created a boundary that makes it difficult for students who may want to join an activity dominated by the other gender to do so.

Behind SS 2 block, Yakunat, Bakam and Yamai were taking turns to ride a bicycle. Bavo approached them and called out; “Hey Yakunat; please let me ride the bicycle with you.” The boys laughed at her and Yakunat replied her, "Do you see a girl here? Please go back and play with your friends.” Bavo left the boys and walked towards me, her facial expressions and body language seemed to express disappointment that they did not allow her to participate in their play. While she was leaving, Bakam followed her and said, “Now you want to join us, when I came to “gist”<sup>13</sup> with you and your friends yesterday, you told me I should leave because I am a boy and you people are doing girls talk." Bavo gave him a scornful look and walked towards her female friends. The separation of students into gender groups further reinforces the relevance of gender identities in forming group interactions in the school – especially outside the classroom. Through this differentiation, students become more conscious of other social characteristics that distinguish them from the other gender and therefore, seek to act as opposites.

Although it was difficult for boys and girls to break into same-gender groupings in the playground, as exemplified above, boys and girls also come together in mixed gender groups to interact. Interactions in mixed gender groups take the form of students sitting and chatting within the school space. Interestingly, being part of a mixed gender group did not have any derogatory implications for boys or for girls. In a similar study by Mayeza (2015), in a primary school in Durban, South Africa, he found forms of gendered performances in the playground where boys who hung about with girls were often referred to in derogatory ways as gay.

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<sup>13</sup> Gist is a word used in the Nigerian context to refer to a chat or gossip between people. Present participle: gisting.

Although, these findings may suggest the use of gay as homophobic, Mayeza argues in this context that ‘gay’ was not invoked as a homophobic utterance, even though it was motivated by presumptions that boys who hung about with girls were not ‘proper’ boys, as relationally defined in terms of their presumed physical and emotional toughness. Similarly, Thorne, (1993) in her United States study found no pronounced gender divisions among young people in areas where teachers had more control over their activities such as classrooms, lunchrooms and hallways. However, students’ interactions become more gender divisive when they play on the playground where teachers have less control and students have relative freedom to choose their activities.

Although being in a mixed gender group during the break is seen as a normal occurrence, interactions between students in such groups could dissolve, and at other times reinforce gender divisions. For example, on the veranda of SS 2 block, a mixed group of students were eating biscuits and chatting about the teaching methods of Ms. Amara, [one of the Mathematics teachers in the school].

Didam: Oh my God! I enjoy Ms. Amara's class always

Other students in the group responded “*yes oh*” in affirmation to Didam’s observation.

Kunaba: She just makes Maths [mathematics] look simple. She is very intelligent.

Shisham: You see, women are better teachers than men.

Didam: [pushing Martha away] get out, we [men] are better. Mr. Bakut and the other male teachers are also good, but most of the women are wicked.

Shisham: It’s not true, women are gentle and kind, unlike men that are very harsh.

The foregoing conversation ignored any form of gender differentiation at its initial stage with a consensus by both gender on the teaching methods of Ms. Amara. However, Shisham’s first statement within the same ungendered conversation brought gender consciousness into the discussion. My findings corroborate the findings of Thorne (1993) in her ethnography of a primary school in the United States of America where she argues that, on the one hand, contact between boys and girls sometimes undermines gender differentiation, on the other, such contact could strengthen gender boundaries.

### **Allocation of Responsibility to Teachers and Students of Zisan Secondary School**

The allocation of responsibilities in Zisan Secondary School is highly gender sensitive and promotes the consciousness of students to its diversity along heteronormative lines. Teachers and students were given responsibilities according to what was considered in the school as

being gender appropriate. Connell's conception of gender regime explains the forms of relationships that exist within male and female in society to reinforce patriarchal patterns of power and authority (Connell, 1987). Gender regimes in Connell's context demonstrate the traditional forms of patriarchy that ensure the placement of male teachers in prestigious positions in schools as against their female counterparts. In Zisan Secondary School, gender regimes engage with institutional cultures and norms and locates gender power and dynamics as they operate in the school in relation to wider social norms and discursive practices which students and teachers imbue, articulate and engage with. In this regard, the existing form of gender regime ensures the domination of female teachers in management positions. The Principal, two Vice Principals and the four Heads of Department were females. One could easily assume this dominance of females to be a result of the higher number of female teachers in the school. However, this is not the case as allocating responsibilities to teachers was understood to be informed by competence. Competence, in this case, is defined as a function of gender. During a conversation with teachers in the school, Ms Zigwai affirmed the following position:

Even in cases where we have a male principal, his vice-principals are women. The truth is when a man is at the top, he will always want things to go well and most will not consider the feelings of people. But these children need to be loved and cared for, at the same time disciplined. A woman is capable of doing both and that is why this school is even better than other schools. The principal and most staff treat students with love as if they were their children. They also correct them when they are wrong, but men don't have that patience. That is why when you look at positions that are physical in nature, like games, labour and others, you will see that male teachers are occupying those offices because they can perform better there (Ms Zigwai, Subject teacher).

My conversations with the two teachers indicate the dominant value ascribed to gender in the school. These values associate physical strength, being unsympathetic, and toughness to the masculinities of men, while women are seen to be emotional, sympathetic, gentle, and caring. By constructing students as children that need to be loved and cared for, Ms. Zigwai attempts to justify the dominance of female teachers in management positions in the school, as if male teachers are naturally wired to care less or show less affection to children. Through this conversation, efficient and effective leadership in schools are constructed by Ms. Zigwai as characterised by discipline, sympathy, patience and caring. Also, by attributing these characteristics to women, she considers female teachers as better suited for leadership positions in the school.

The dominant values of gender that reify categorisation of students along divisive gender characteristics informed the selection of students into positions as prefects in Zisan Secondary School. This process ensures a balance in the normative gender categories of male and female

students at the school. For example, there are separate positions for the head prefects for boys and girls (Head Boy and Head Girl), with each having an assistant of the same gender category. Other positions were allocated to two students as well, one male and one female. Whoever heads the position is determined by the peculiar requirement of the position, while the other gender becomes the assistant. This process is justified by Mr. Bakut during an interview:

Yes, we ensure that we have both boys and girls in every “prefectship” position in the school. This is to help reach out to every student. There are specific offices [positions] like the Labour Prefect, the Games Prefect and others like the House Prefects that need boys to handle them. For example, during labour periods, the boys may not listen to a girl instructing them to do something. But if it is a boy like them, they will go ahead and obey. Then also when it comes to health issues, the girls will better hold this position, also like taking care of other student’s needs, girls are better in those aspects. As I said, we always put the opposite gender there so that there can be a balance and they will be able to work together (Mr Bakut, Head Teacher).

The perceived masculinity of boys that has to do with physical strength, toughness and being rough, made them more suitable for positions such as Labour Prefects, Games Prefect, and House Prefects; while the perceived gentle femininity of girls qualified them better for positions such as Health Prefect, Social Prefect, and Welfare Prefect. However, for each of the positions headed by a female student, there was always a male assistant and vice-versa.

The selection of class captains followed the same process as each class had a male/female class captain with the opposite gender as an assistant. Class captains were shouldered with the responsibility of representing the class at various levels. The selection of a class captain was often determined by the individual’s intellectual ability. The process was supervised by the class teacher. The selection process was either by nomination and voting by students or through appointment by the class teacher. Whoever was selected as class captain must be someone intelligent, obedient, and well-behaved. There was a preference for female class captains by teachers in the school. For example, this was emphasised by Ms Doney when she addressed her students “...we will select a class captain today, but you know we (referring to herself and other teachers) prefer a girl to head my class, so you can nominate three girls that are intelligent and obedient. I don’t want troublesome people like most of these boys”. Although the selection process was meant to be democratic, by allowing the students to choose whoever will represent them, Ms. Doney’s construction of boys as troublesome is reductive, as it ensured that a girl was selected as the class captain and a boy as her assistant. This was the case in most of the classes where teachers preferred girls to serve as class captains.

In terms of allocating general responsibilities such as daily routines in the school, gender differences became less explicit. Boys and girls were given the same responsibilities such as

sweeping of classrooms and the school environment, cutting of grasses during labour periods<sup>14</sup> and washing the school toilets - which was normally done as a form of punishment for both boys and girls. However, in certain situations, gender divisions became explicit when certain responsibilities were categorised by teachers as peculiar to boys and girls. Teachers' categorisation of students in this regard is informed by normative gender norms and expectations that construct boys as stronger than girls and should be given responsibilities that demand physical strength.

This position is in line with the findings of Mukoro (2017) on the conflict of sex education and cultural values in Nigeria. Mukoro reports the overarching effects of cultural norms in the definitions and understanding of gender and gender roles within schools in Nigeria. The positioning of boys as possessing strong, unserious and reckless masculinities against the weak, more focused and intelligent femininity of girls reinforces forms of gender power that ascribes control to male masculinities both within and outside the school. Normative gender categorisations as this does not only impact on young peoples' understanding of gender as natural but limits their agency to perform gender in non-essentialist ways.

### **Teachers' Interaction with Students in the School and How this impacts on Students and their Self-Identifications**

In the course of my observations, I realised the forms of interactions between teachers and students to be dominated by the categorisation of boys and girls as distinctive groups. Since gender is an unambiguous category of an individual's identity that easily differentiates groups of people, it serves as a convenient basis for comparison between boys and girls of Zisan Secondary School. This is both in terms of classroom competitions and the perceptions of teachers on the needs of students, which in turn determines the kind of relationships they establish with boys and girls.

### **Teachers Organising Classroom Competitions**

I observed boys and girls were divided into opposing groups in their classes to engage in certain class works. Ms. Amara, the Mathematics teacher, grouped her students in SS 2 into separate groups of boys and girls and instructed each group to select group representatives. She wrote an equation on the board and asked each group representative to solve the equation. The female

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<sup>14</sup> Labour in Nigerian schools is used to refer to the periods of cleaning the school. During such periods, students are divided into different groups and given the task of sweeping the classes and the school environment, picking papers and plastic bags and cutting grasses around the school environment. In Zisan school labour periods are once in a week, mostly on Fridays during the last thirty minutes before closing time.

group, after winning the contest were told to yell “shame on you” to the losing boys. The winning female groups exchanged pleasantries with one another and whispered to the boys sitting close to them how they were more intelligent. Class contests along gender lines continued when Mr. Abrak organised a debate between male and female students in SS 1 on the topic ‘Who is more intelligent, boys or girls?’ Although Mr. Abrak intended to observe how students articulate their points in supporting or opposing the motion, the exercise promoted forms of oppositional gender divide among boys and girls in the class.

By grouping boys and girls in the class contest that supports the placement of one group above the other, teachers create an environment that enables gender antagonism. Thorne (1993:67) argues that “When teachers organise gender-divided classroom contest, students pick up on and elaborate the oppositional and antagonistic meanings”. In this case, female students in Ms. Amara's class continued yelling “shame on you” on the boys even when the contest was over. Teacher’s categorisation of students by gender during class contests promotes gender contestation among boys and girls beyond the classroom. In this case, it influences girl’s self-identification as being more intelligent, obedient and loved than the boys.

### **“Girls should be Given Special Attention”: Teachers in Gender-Based Interaction with Students**

Findings from observations, interviews and FGDs reveal that interaction between teachers and students is determined by the perceptions of the former about the gender needs of the latter. Teachers of Zisan Secondary School related with students in ways that made gender boundaries explicit. These forms of relationship were expressed from the subtle, and polite conversations between teachers and girls to the more pronounced presentations through variations in the forms of punishment on students and the construction of girls as being more intelligent than boys. Mr Bakut, in an interview, emphasised the need for gender consideration in establishing relationships with students thus:

The girls are more at risk when it comes to social vices. So, I try to be more friendly with them because that way, they will feel free to talk to me about some of their problems. This way, they don't fall victim of such social vices. I address everybody based on what he or she needs. I am on both sides. When I see anything so demanding in the aspect of boys, I shift my attention to them. When it is the other way round, I go there also. Yes, but if I am to rate, I will say I am more friendly to the girls because they are more at risk. (Mr Bakut, Head Teacher)

The variation in the kind of relationship and interaction between teachers and students reflects the dominance of a gender order that constructs boys as independent and capable of taking care of themselves. It also reveals the positionality of girls as a vulnerable feminine category that needs to be given special attention. This therefore means more time and attention is given to

girls in the school as a way of protecting them from the “reckless” masculinities of boys. The construction of girls as a vulnerable category by teachers was also evident in the forms of punishments meted out to students. Mr. Banenat was presented with the names of noisemakers by an SS 2 Class Captain. He decided to punish the offenders before commencing his class for the day. He made the boys hold the class desks while he flogged them two strokes on their backs. When it was Baryat’s turn, the first girl among the offenders, she held the desk ready to be flogged, but Mr. Banenat smiled and said, "Give me your hand, I don’t flog girls on their backs or buttocks, I don’t want to injure you, you know you people are not as strong as the boys.” Mr. Banenat’s construction of girls as not being strong like boys is a common perception in the school that defines the forms of relationship between teachers and the girls as opposed to the boys.

Discussions in FGDs on the relationship between students and teachers were dominated by accounts of teachers being friendlier to the girls than the boys. Students believed that teachers were nice to the girls because they were more organised, intelligent and obedient than the boys. However, they also believed that some male teachers were friendly with the girls because they wanted to establish sexual relationships with the girls. Collaborating students’ assertion about male teachers establishing sexual relationships with girls in the school, Mr. Kaburuk, in an interview gave accounts of two teachers that had been involved in such relationships thus:

... A bad case, when for example, a *Corper* (Corp member)<sup>15</sup> recently had his student here whom he was very nice to. Eventually, he was caught having sex with the girl whose parents had gone to work. The girl claimed she loved him... It was really a bad case. I think there was also one case we had; the teacher was nice to the girls than the boys but actually he was trying to harass these girls. The girls collaborated with the boys and recorded their discussions and reported to the school.

The above account affirms the position held by students about some male teacher's interest in establishing sexual relationships with students as a basis for preferential treatment to girls over boys. While the first account indicates the girl's consent, the second account shows girls and boys exercising some form of agency by rejecting sexual advances from a male teacher who is assumed to be in the place of authority over them. Girls and boys coming together to record conversations, and report to the school illustrates how they could diffuse gender boundaries to achieve a common interest.

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<sup>15</sup> A Corp member is a male or female individual engaged in a compulsory one-year National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) upon completing a Degree in the University, Higher National Diploma (HND) in a Polytechnic or any related institution, or B.Ed from College of Education. Corp members are usually sent to work in corporate organisations, banks or teach in schools as their Place of Primary Assignment (PPA), and engage in other forms of community development services across Nigeria, after which they earn a certificate at the end of their service year.

The role of teachers is recognised, in various context, as influential in the process of categorising and reinforcing different forms of gender and sexuality among students in schools (Abbott, Ellis & Abbott, 2015; Francis, 2019; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). Forms of teacher-student interactions in school is instrumental in the shaping of students' understanding of gender and sexual identities. Adults' continuous use of gender labels such as boys and girls to interact with young people, makes being a boy or a girl central to self-identification as well as the ongoing life in school. Similarly, and in the case of Zisan Secondary School, divisions along gender binary are reinforced by the forms of relationships teachers develop with students in the course of interaction. These forms of relationship continue to dominate students' experiences in the school.

### **Teaching and Learning Sexuality in the Absence of a Curriculum in Zisan Secondary School**

On the second day of my visit to the school, Ms. Shinai expressed concern about my study. In the course of our discussion, she explained how students are not engaged formally in classroom discussions on gender and sexualities. Ms. Shinai mentioned that students are only advised by teachers to refrain from sexual activity and how to take care of their bodies. She was particularly concerned about the possibility of getting students to open-up and speak about their sexual experiences to me. She believed that this would be easier for me if the students were initially exposed to formal forms of sexuality education. Ms. Shinai's concern arose from the non-existence of a formal curriculum in the school. She expected that a formal curriculum would have exposed the students to issues around sexual desires and experiences. For Ms. Shinai, the teaching of sexuality education in the school could bridge the gap in social relationships between the young and adults in the area of gender and sexuality, both within and outside the school.

Studies on sexuality education in Nigeria reveal the non-inclusion of sexuality education in the school curriculum (Iwu, Onoja, Ijioma, Ngumah & Egeruoh, 2011; Adetunji, 2013; Eko, Osuchukwu, Osonwa & Offiong, 2013). However, certain aspects of sexuality education are reportedly taught in other subjects (Iwu *et al.*, 2011). Findings from my interviews and observations reveal the non-existence of a formal sexuality education curriculum in Zisan Secondary School. However, through the teaching of subjects such as Biology, Civil Education and Hausa Language, students were exposed to physiological differences between boys and girls as well as the reproduction system of humans and the different forms of dressing and interactions peculiar to boys and girls. Through observations and interviews with teachers, I

noticed the invisible presence of sexuality education as a preventive practice in the school. Though not taught as a subject in the school, the discussion aimed at restricting students' sexuality abounds in the school space. The presence of restrictive sexuality discourse in the school provides more awareness of sexual issues and so creates a space for conversations about gender and sexuality. I observed and also as reported during my interviews with teachers, restrictive discussions mostly take place during gender assembly and during counselling sessions with teachers. On this note, Ms. Zanak asserts that:

During gender assembly on Fridays, we normally advise them on personal hygiene. We tell them anytime they meet with the opposite sex, they could get pregnant or contract STDs. So, we normally teach them to stay away from all these things, and then to avoid any relationship, any contact with the opposite sex. When we observe abnormalities like boys and girls doing bad things, we call them to order. They should be conscious of that because we have stories that even in the class, they normally play and be touching themselves in the class, so we caution them on that (Ms. Zanak, Head Teacher).

Response from the teachers indicate the construction of young people in sexual relationships as problematic. It demonstrates adults conception of children as a vulnerable category that requires guidance by adults. Interestingly, teachers recognise boys and girls in the school as capable of expressing sexual desires, yet existing discussions of sexuality is dominated by the construction of sexual practices as risky and dangerous, thereby creating a contradictory and inconsistent use of language that describes young people both as innocent (and should not be exposed to issues of sexuality) and hypersexual (therefore need to be checked by adult teachers). This reflects the adoption of a public health approach in discussing gender and sexuality by conceiving young people's sexuality as a social problem that requires moral guidance, vigilance and medical intervention. Foucault (1978) firmly criticises the construction of young people's sexuality in this way.

Ameh (2015) in a survey on students' perception on the teaching of sex education in a local government in Kogi State Nigeria, maintains that for any form of sexuality education to be adequate, it must address major themes such as sexual pleasure, sexual orientation, contraception, decision making, communication and STIs. Unfortunately, discussions of sexuality in the school are devoid of issues around sexual feelings, sexual rights and sexual desires, contraception and sexual diversity. They are rather dominated by discourses of abstinence, diseases, mortality and preparing young students for "responsible" adulthood (Igbokwe, Ogbonna, Ezegbe, Nnadi & Eseadi, 2019). Information being passed to students could be problematic. Telling a young person that any contact with the opposite sex could result to pregnancy is counter-productive. This is so because, firstly, most young people are unable

to get adequate and efficient information about their bodies, desires and feelings. Secondly, teachers' use of euphemism when talking about sex does not aid understanding on the part of students. Rather, it could lead to confusion among certain students who are unable to figure out the true meaning of the information being passed.

Responses from interviews with teachers also indicated certain forms of collaboration between the school and some external organisations. NGOs such as Action Health Incorporated (AHI) under the project 'Educating Nigerian Girls in New Enterprises' pay periodic visits to the school to educate, especially the female students about their sexual health. Such visits were usually done once a year, and lasts for a day. During the visit, girls were taught how to take care of their bodies and how to protect their self-worth by making healthy decisions about their sexual health. Sanitary pads were often distributed to girls. Although the form of education provided by AHI to girls is also preventive in nature, it varies from that which is obtainable within the school in the sense that, it is geared towards enlightening girls about their rights as girls to exercise agency in decision making whether to engage in sexual intercourse. There were no reports about teaching the boys in this regard, although there is a need to include boys in such programmes. The emphasis by AHI on educating the girls only on issues of sexuality is reportedly informed by the perception that girls are more vulnerable, and have not been given adequate attention in aspects of education, health and other human endeavours. Therefore, there has been a massive campaign in Nigeria (like in other parts of the world) that seek to challenge the dominance of patriarchy so as to improve the wellbeing of women in all aspects.

Forms of gender and sexuality discussions by teachers in the school further seek to reinforce gender polarity and present heterosexuality as the only recognised form of relationship in the school. Conversations around sex, both among teachers and students, are constructed along with heterosexual relations. In line with the findings of DePalma & Francis (2014) in their study on the meanings sexuality educators attach to culture in South Africa, my study found that the pervasiveness of heterosexual relations and the invincibility of its structures promotes its normative dominance during interactions within the school. Explaining the dominance of heterosexuality in social relations Dyer (1993) argues that:

Heterosexuality as a social reality seems to be invisible to those that benefit from it. In part, this is because of the remorseless construction of heterosexuality as natural. If things are natural they cannot really be questioned or scrutinised and so they fade from view. Such naturalisation often characterises how we see and don't see, the powerful, how they see and don't see themselves (1993:133).

In Zisan Secondary School, existing forms of sexuality discourses were organised around the notion that heterosexuality is a natural order and should not be distorted. The dominance of heterosexual values was expressed in conversations with teachers who referred to non-normative sexualities as evil and non-conforming to moral values, and advocated for the exclusion of non-heterosexual relations. These form of sexuality education organised around moral, cultural and religious discourses provides a predominant framework that determines the particular ways sex should be taught and spoken about in the school. This framework legitimises and confines sexuality only to heterosexual relationships (Kehily, 2002). Although there is a need to introduce sexuality education that is encompassing in ths school, legal and cultural provisions in Nigeria could serve as a barrier. As I discussed in Chapter Three, formal discussions on non-heterosexual identities is prohibited and punishable under the Nigerian legal system. Hence, the avoidance of discussions regarding non-heterosexuality by teachers and students in the school.

### **Teacher's Support for the Introduction of Sexuality Education Curriculum in the School**

I think it's a government policy. The government is not ready to face the truth. When you start talking of sex in school, the government officials and religious bodies will start kicking against it. I don't think it's helping us in anyway, we need to teach these students about sexuality. They need to know so that they can make right decisions about their sexual health (Mr Kaburuk, Head Teacher).

The above excerpt is from an interview with a teacher in Zisan Secondary School. His response explains why the sexuality education curriculum is not available in the school. In Nigeria, the development and approval of a curriculum is the responsibility of the Federal Ministry of Education in collaboration with other relevant agencies. Nigerian studies such as Obiekea, Ovri & Chukwuma (2013); Osuide (1988); Tolman & Costa (2010); Udegbe, Fayehun, Isiugo-Abanihe, Nwagwu, Isiugo-Abanihe & Nwokocha (2015) and Okoroma (2006) reveal the development and attempts at implementing sexuality education curriculum across Nigeria. However, there have been controversies emerging at every stage of implementation (Esohe & PeterInyang, 2015). These controversies arise as a result of agitations by different groups who feel that the content of sexuality education curriculum is conflicting with religious (Kolawole, 2010; Shiffman, Kunnuji, Shawar & Robinson, 2018; Uchechukwu, 2011) and cultural values (Mukoro, 2017; Nakpodia, 2012). Lack of government commitment has also been identified by Action Health Incorporated (2009); Esiet (2012); Kolawole (2010); and Udegbe *et al.* (2015) as a major factor that has led to the non-implementation of sexuality education curriculum in schools across Nigeria.

Despite these challenges, teachers of Zisan Secondary School argue in support of the introduction of comprehensive sexuality education as a subject in the school. Teachers expressed concern over the rising cases of sexual activities among students and the need to educate them through formal teaching and learning about their sexuality. This will help young people to make informed choices about their sexual life. Here, I argue that the introduction of a comprehensive curriculum will help to address the concerns of young people in the school and ensure that they exercise agency in taking decisions regarding their sexuality, as well as improve their general well-being. Given the importance of a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum in the school, I advocate for an age-specific sexuality education curriculum that would expose young people to more complex issues of sexuality as they advance in age and study levels. This will partly help in addressing the cultural and religious concerns that see sexuality education as capable of exposing young people to early sexual initiation and consequently promiscuity (Kolawole, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter looks at how Zisan Secondary School is organised, and how existing structures support young people's construction of social identities. In this way, the school space is conceived as having a variety of existing discourses regarding young people's gender and sexuality. However, these discourses are foregrounded in normative cultural forms of gender and sexualities that young people are expected to adhere to. The school environment provided little or no spaces for the free expressions of alternative forms of gender identities. Rather, it supports forms of heteronormative identity construction that is inclined with hegemonic forms of masculinities and emphasised femininities. These inclinations are found to have a strong bearing on the ways young people understand themselves in school. In this regard, the next chapter examines how young people understand and construct their gender and sexual identities within this heteronormative school space.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Young People's Understanding of Gender and Sexuality through Interaction in School**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter explores how young people construct, understand, and perform their gender and sexual identities during social interactions in school. In Chapter Five, I presented how Zisan Secondary School supports the construction and understanding of young people's social identities in heteronormative ways. I discussed how existing discourses regarding gender and sexuality are normatively influenced and how young people are expected to act according to such heteronormative conceptions. Furtherance to this discussion, this chapter draws from the arguments of the social constructionist to discuss how young people in Zisan Secondary School understand and construct gender identities through everyday social interaction within a heteronormative space. In this regard, I used data generated from my ethnographic observations, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and excerpts from my Research Diary to discuss young people's understanding and experiences of dominant gender categories in the school; the ways that popular gender identities are constructed through activities such as sports; and the intersection of gender with risky sexualities as understood and experienced by young people in the school. The chapter also explores gender power relations in the school and what young people construct as gender transgressive/inappropriate behaviours. The chapter aims at understanding the meanings, and significance young people attach to gender in their interaction with others within a heteronormative school space. Like in Chapter Five, I integrate my findings with the analysis of themes that emerged from my data.

#### **Young People's Construction and Understanding of Gender Identities through Social Interactions**

In line with Burman (2008) and Corsaro (1997), I recognise that despite having agency, children's construction of social life, and the identifications they make in relation to gender and sexuality, is influenced and circumscribed by social values and expectations enshrined in popular discourses in the societies they inhabit. How young people in my study constructed their social identities was a key question which framed my research and which I explored, posing more specific questions about how they perceive, and what it meant to be boys and girls.

My ethnography revealed cultural heteronormative constructions of gender and its bearing on the understanding of gendered identities among young people in Zisan Secondary School. Gender roles were understood by students in divisive ways such that activities associated with housekeeping were considered feminine, while being masculine was associated with outdoor activities that signify or are identified with power, dominance and respect. In this regard, the relational construction of gender by my participants presents the dominance of masculinities of boys and the plea for respect from the girls' subservient femininities. I see participants' construction of femininity as synonymous with social practices and motivations associated with housework as problematic. In this context, housework and the home are constructed or invoked as signifiers of femininity in opposition to which masculinity is associated with working outside the home, being independent and absolved from caring responsibilities. Such cultural meanings accorded to gender identities provide only narrow forms of identities that encourage the dominant constructions of gender. This defines the attributes of being a boy as oppositional to being a girl (Butler, 1999). Morojele (2011), in his study with young people in school in Lesotho, reveals the influence of cultural gender expectations on young people's construction of gender identities. In my research, young people in Zisan Secondary School understand and construct their gender identities within culturally defined spaces that present a clear distinction of gender identities along with roles and responsibilities that each gender is expected to perform.

Boys in my study understood being a boy as not an end in itself. Rather, it is a process of becoming an adult who should be responsible for leadership positions by defending and providing for the basic needs of other family members. Such conceptions of gender identities are replete in the FGDs I conducted with groups of boys in the school as recorded during conversations about what it means to be a boy:

- Yashim: To be a boy means to be able to replace my father in case he is not alive, providing for the family in time of need.
- Yakunat: As a "real man" you have to like stand for them [family], help them and go out to look for a job so that you can support them.
- Hilary: Are girls not supporting the family?
- Yashim: Boys are leaders to people
- Didam: Sir because girls are the weaker vessel. Because they don't have the strength and the zeal of a boy because a boy can defend himself, anywhere he goes, but a girl cannot because she is not as strong as a boy so the boy will need to be protecting her.

The conception of girls being "weaker vessels" by boys reiterates boys' dominant positioning, and the need for boys to protect girls against societal aggression. Morojele (2011), in his study,

argues that the dominant construction of boys as stronger compared to girls usually informs the idea that girls should be subjected to strict surveillance and control by adults. Through the discourse of responsabilisation, girls in my study were constructed by society as being responsible for curtailing the excesses of boys' masculinities. Therefore, society places girls under close supervision and ensures that they act in certain "acceptable" ways in terms of their dressing, walking, talking and other forms of behaviour that have been culturally associated with femininities (Ngabaza *et al.*, 2016). Within this context, the restriction of girls' behaviour serves to obstruct their ability to negotiate and select their preferred way of action in defining their identities within the heteronormative school space.

Izugbara (2005) and Mukoro (2017) in their studies in Nigeria, argue about the centrality of cultural influences in the socialisation process of young people. Culturally, young people are taught to adopt "appropriate" gender roles that seek to promote the domination of boys over girls, and are expected to adhere to these values in performing gender. Cultural influences on socialisation promotes the understanding of gender identities as homogenous, natural and fixed. This contradicts the ideas of the post-structural feminist that understand gender beyond binary or natural differences. The enduring understanding of gender in this way seeks to relegate girls in interactions within the school to more passive roles. This is exemplified in the understanding of "being girls" must conform in line with growing up, establishing heterosexual relationships, and bearing children. Thereby depicting established cultural acceptance of the expression of desire in heterosexual relations as the only acceptable form of relationship. Perception as this is influenced by the knowledge passed to young people in Nigeria about traditional conceptions of sexual expressions as primarily geared towards procreation in marriage between heterosexual partners. Gender constructions as these reinforce forms of gendering that provide the basis for inequality between boys and girls in the school.

Societal expectations of gender identities could be overwhelming for young people. They see this as limiting their agency to act in ways they desire (Okanlawon, 2020a). Such constructions of strict gender boundaries resonate with continuous adherence to institutional norms that produce gender divisions and inequality, thereby restricting young people in school to only a few ranges of behaviour along with normative heterosexuality. In my study, some teachers and young people viewed and considered deviations from these normative gender expectations as possessing weak masculinities and aggressive femininities. Therefore, young people would rather adhere to culturally defined gender expectations at the detriment of their desire to engage in other forms of behaviour that have been culturally defined as transgressive. Interestingly,

despite wide conceptualisations of culturally defined forms of gender identities in Zisan Secondary School, young people indicated some form of resistance to existing social expectations. They indicated their desire to act along fluid gender boundaries. I elaborate on this in a later section of this chapter on “transgressive” gender behaviours among young people.

### **“Real Boys Don’t cry”, “Real Girls Are Sexy and Attractive”: Young People’s Construction and Experience of Dominant Gender Categories in Zisan Secondary School**

Existing constructions of the social identities of young people in society has been closely associated with cultural expectations of what boys and girls are expected to do (Morrell, 1998). I argue that young people are born into gender bodies, not into accomplished culturally appropriated forms of femininity and masculinities. They become men or women in a complex process of learning that operates within a set of social constraints (Holland, Ramazanoglu & Sharpe, 1993). Society demands that to be a “real boy” or a “real girl”, one must conform to cultural expectations of masculinities and femininities. Cultural values associated with gender create a divide between boys and girls and expect them to act along these divisions. Failure to subscribe and live by these expectations is often visited with different forms of sanctions across societies. Kent (2004) in a study among students in a high school in Durban, South Africa, reveals the formal structures of schools as playing a central role in maintaining gender divisions. However, I understand that these forms of gender divisions do not end as oppositional; it transcends to the construction of some students as more masculine or feminine within an opposite category. Addressing the ascendancy of different forms of masculinities, Connell (1989: 295) argues that:

The differentiation of masculinities, ...is not simply a question of individual differences emerging or individuals' paths being chosen. It is a collective process, something that happens at the level of the institution and in the organisation of peer-group relationships. Indeed, the relationship of anyone boy to the differentiation of masculinities may change over time.

Connell argues on the construction of multiple forms of gender identities during social interactions. These forms are not biologically determined but are defined and enacted by young people in their everyday interactions. During my observation and interaction with the students of Zisan Secondary School, I noticed the display of different forms of masculinities and femininities among young people in the school. However, the dominant forms are what Connell (1987) referred to as “hegemonic masculinities” and “emphasised femininities”. These forms of gender categories serve as the standard for defining being a “real boy” or a “real girl” in the school. Boys who performed hegemonic forms of masculinities were those who engaged in

culturally defined activities that express physical strength, enduring pain, being rough and dominating. Due to the social value attached to hegemonic masculinities by boys and girls, most boys would strive to display such characteristics even at their own detriment. I captured such an incident in my research diary on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2019 thus:

During Ms Zigwai's class today, while she was writing notes on the board for students to copy into their notebooks, some students were making noise despite Ms Zigwai's warning of punishing anyone who indulges in the act. Karam, who was sitting on the same desk with me, left his seat to another boy's seat. Unfortunately for him, Ms Zigwai turned to face the students at the same time he was playfully hitting the other student on the head with a notebook. Ms Zigwai punished him by making him kneel in front of the students until the end of her class. After rounding off her class, she flogged Karam ten strokes of the cane and said it was to serve as an example for others who may want to disrupt her class. When she was done flogging him, Karam's eyes turned red and full of tears, but he refused to let them out. However, he waited for the teacher to leave the class, he then asked for permission from the class captain to use the toilet.

I decided to follow him without his knowledge. I later found him alone behind the school toilet, crying. I moved back and waited for him to be done crying. Eventually, when he was to return to the class, he saw me and became embarrassed. I told him it was okay to cry and that he should not feel embarrassed about it. But he replied that "Real boys don't cry". He further explained, after I asked him why real boys don't cry, that "as a boy, you have to be tough and endure pain; otherwise, other boys will laugh at you and call you a woman. Also, girls will not admire you because they only like to date strong men." He then asked me to promise him not to disclose to anyone that he was seen crying. I assured him of my silence about the issue. Interestingly, when we walked back into the class, two boys and a girl, who are Karam's friends, applauded him for being a "man" by not crying. The girl, Kyangchat, said, "*You be correct man. If dem beat me like dis ehn I for dey hospital by now*" (You are a real man, if I was beaten like that, I would have been in the hospital by now). Although I recognise that the punishment Karam received was not severe enough to warrant being taken to the hospital, Kyangchat's hyperbolic applause for Karam as a real man shows the value students attach to strong masculine boys, hence the struggle by most boys to possess such kind of masculinity.

The above excerpt from my diary exemplifies the struggle of boys in Zisan Secondary School to perform hegemonic forms of masculinity. Failure to act in this regard by performing alternative forms of masculinity often resulted in physical and emotional humiliation and derogatory name-calling such as "Charlie-Charlie", "boy-girl" or being called a "girl". Experience as this presents the kind of pressure boys are exposed to during social interactions in a patriarchal, heteronormative space. Boys are pressured to perform hegemonic forms of masculinity even when they could not endure the physical and emotional pains that come with it. This is due to fear of the stigma that comes with quitting. The struggle to perform or engage forms of hegemonic masculinity creates an illogical dimension in the dynamics of masculinities. On the one hand, it serves as a source of power to boys who are successful in the act. On the other, it serves as a source of embarrassment and agony for others who are unable to uphold such characteristics. For example, when students collectively laughed at a boy who continued to fight with a girl despite being beaten by her. This was substantiated by Morojele

(2011a) in his study with young Lesotho boys, and how they tried to identify themselves in relation to hegemonic versions of masculinity by distancing themselves from girls in general on to whom they projected presumptions of weakness, and from particular boys whom they constructed as girl-like and weak by ridiculing them.

Connell (1987:183) argues that “Hegemonic masculinities are always constructed in relation to various subordinate masculinities as well as in relation to women”. It is an oppositional feature of femininity. The interplay of masculinity and femininity provides a structural gender order that promotes the domination of men over women, the dominant construction of femininity as subordinate to masculinity. The subordinate femininity of girls in the school is performed in the form of what Connell (1987) calls “emphasised femininities”. Girls who possess the characteristics of emphasised femininities are those who adhere to the dominant assumptions about the subordination of girls and act in ways that accommodate the interest and desires of boys within the school. Girls who performed emphasised femininities are considered “real girls” within the context of Zisan Secondary School. Drawing from my observation of young people’s interaction in the school, real girls displayed forms of feminine identities focused on attracting boys with hegemonic masculinities.

During my observation, I noticed that girls who displayed forms of emphasised femininities were often gentle, calm, tidy, polite, and not engaging in any form of rough play. To be a “real girl” in Zisan Secondary School was to avoid any form of physical activity associated with boys. This was captured in an informal conversation with students at break time when one girl, Doshiya, was seen running after a boy in the school playground. Although other girls in the group rebuked Doshiya for “not behaving like a real girl”. Two girls, Bavo and Kushenyan, expressed their admiration for Doshiya because they felt boys would not disrespect her due to the fear that she could beat them. Findings from my ethnography on the ways young people challenge non-normative gender categories exemplify the domination of cultural assumptions of gender norms and the divisiveness that exist between genders. Findings by Mac an Ghail (1994) in his study with young school children in the United Kingdom provide evidence for the subordination of women as a product of culturally instituted modes of gender identities that are being constructed in everyday social practices.

### **“Baff-up Guys” and “Slay Queens”: The Construction of Popular Gender Identities in Zisan Secondary School**

During my interaction with young people in the school, I observed with keen interest the display of different forms of masculinities and femininities by young people during social

interaction. Among other forms of gender identities expressed by young people in the school, the baff-up guys and the slay queens<sup>16</sup> were prominent. The characteristics of the baff-up guys were in so many ways similar with identified dominant characteristics of hegemonic masculinities. However, in addition to being strong and tough, baff-up guys are expected to dress neat, wear expensive clothes, perfume and sometimes jewellery (though not allowed in school except for wristwatches), be eloquent in speech and behave in ways that attracted the attention of girls. During an informal conversation with a group of baff-up guys, Danbovo describes them in this way:

We are just a group of boys that know the right way to behave and attract girls to us. Girls love us because we are neat, we use good perfumes and smell nice, we don't engage in rough play, but you dare not look for our trouble. As baff-up guys, girls, especially the slay queens, always want to be with us and we can have as many as we want. Other boys want to be like us because we enjoy attention from the girls. But they must step up and be like us and be smart with the ladies.

As argued by Connell (1995) on the cost boys incur by aspiring to being hegemonic boys, membership of the baff-up group comes at a cost as it is determined by material possessions. It also gives boys popularity in school and makes them a delight to girls. I see the idea behind the construction of baff-up boys as a response to the awareness among boys that every relationship should be developed along heterosexual lines, thereby creating a form of competition among boys who are intending to develop such relationships with girls. Within this context, being a baff-up guy automatically gives a boy an edge over other boys. The baff-up guys' conceptualisation also creates the awareness that boys' understanding, and expression of gender and sexuality cannot be understood separately but in relation to the opposite gender category, in this case, girls' femininity. Among this group of boys, convincing a girl into a relationship is considered a conquest, and respect is accorded/earned with a higher number of "conquered terrains" (girls). Interestingly, this group of boys perceived genuine display of affection for girls as a sign of weakness. This is captured in my conversation with Zibushiya, a baff-up guy when I asked him how many girls he was dating now:

Sir, I am dating three girls; two are in this school and one is in our area. ...you see it is not about love, it is about conquering. We don't really love-up, although you can have one that you love among them. But even that one, when you begin to show her love, she will take you for granted. Like me, I make her see that there are a lot of other girls and so she can get jealous, and she loves me even more. Girls will not respect you that much if you show them that you truly love them.

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<sup>16</sup> Societal construction of a slay queen refers to a beautiful and highly fashionable girl that seek to acquire wealth (mostly from men) without necessarily engaging in a form of paid employment or self-empowerment. A slay queen could be equated to girls who in Western societies are referred to as "gold diggers", However, young people in my study used the term "slay queen" in a different way other than its original societal meaning. I discuss young people's conception of a slay queen in this section.

Dominance among buff-up guys depends on one's ability to manoeuvre his way by engaging in multiple relationships with girls. A common idea among these groups of boys is the objectification of girls as possessions that can be conquered and owned. In line with the argument of Szymanski, Moffitt & Carr (2011) on the objectification of women in society, I see a common perception by buff-up guys in Zisan Secondary School about girls as objects whose possession serve to uplift boys' social status in the school without concern for the expression of desire and affection among the girls. This further debunks adults' cultural perception of young people as being asexual and ignorant about issues relating to sex and sexuality.

Through my interaction with students, I understand the construction of slay queens as informed by girls behaving in ways that are mostly inclined towards developing relationships with boys. However, while being a buff-up guy had little to do with the body structure of boys, slay queens were often defined by their body structure which is well-developed bodies, bigger breast or/and hips and should always be well dressed in line with trending fashion styles of the period and neat. Yachat, a slay queen in SS 2, explained when I asked her why she was being addressed as a slay queen thus:

A slay queen should be neat and have a figure-eight body shape. This is what men want. A slay queen should be able to attract men to herself. If you are a dirty girl, or you don't have figure eight with big breasts and ass, you cannot be a slay queen because men will not be attracted to you. You also have to behave in a mature way.

Slay queens walked together in a close group of girls that share similar bodily characteristics. They normally would interact only with themselves and allow little or no provision for admitting non-members to the group. They tend to relate and form relationships more with buff-up boys than with other boys in the school. It is important to note that slay queens do not have to engage in relationships with the boys as is the case of the buff-up boys; rather by merely having a good number of boys showing interest on a girl, she attains a higher position on the social ladder as defined by this group of girls. The construction of the identity of slay queens and buff-up guys resonates with the dominant constructions of subservient femininities in relation to the dominant masculinities of boys. Within this context, girls dress and behave in ways they believe is appealing to boys, thereby serving to attract and satisfy the desires of boys. The dominance of gender opposition in this context seeks to equip young people with complementary roles that help to reinforce each other. Forms of gender roles displayed by young people in Zisan Secondary School seek to promote heteronormative ideals through the idea that they can only partner with the opposite gender in sexual relationships.

## Construction of “Bad-boys and Bad-girls” Identities: Intersection of Gender and “Risky” Sexualities

Today being Monday, I attended the general assembly with students. During the assembly, I stood behind the students with Mr. Abrak, a subject teacher. A Head Teacher was addressing the students where he advised them on the need to be exemplary students by being respectful and obedient to their teachers as well as being serious with their academics. The Head Teacher mentioned that students should be careful not to associate with the "bad boys" and "bad girls" who could influence their behaviour. At first, I casually took the meaning of bad boys and girls to mean those students that contravene school rules and regulations. However, I became curious when Mr. Abrak remarked that, "If they don't listen, they will end up being fathers and mothers or even get [contract] HIV". Although not sure who exactly Mr. Abrak was referring to, I decided to initiate a conversation with him in this regard. During our conversation, Mr. Abrak mentioned he was referring to the “bad boys” and “bad girls”. Apparently, bad boys and bad girls are those students who smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol and engage in “irrepressible” sexual relationships with others of the opposite sex. He defined them as students that “have gone bad and can hardly change from their bad ways”.

The above is an excerpt from my Research Diary recorded on 2/12/2019. Drawing from my conversation with Mr. Abrak and my observations and interaction with both young people and teachers, I realised being a “bad” boy or “bad” girl in Zisan Secondary School is associated with flouting existing school rules and regulations. They were constructed as possessing unsalvageable identity, which is defined by their constant engagement in sexual activities which I refer to as "risky" sexualities. This view creates a dichotomy in the ways young people and adults understand young people's sexualities in society. Here, young people see their engagement in sexual activity as a way of socialising and gaining respect from their peers, on the other hand, adults perceive young people's engagement in sexual activity as a social problem that needs to be resolved by adults.

These different conceptualisations of being bad in school inform the experiences of young people in the school. Teachers’ construction of young people in this way entails that such students are often subjected to high levels of surveillance and when “caught” defaulting, in this regard, are made to suffer serious punishment. However, teachers’ restrictions did not deter young people from expressing such characteristics associated with being “bad”. Young people in my study rather associated their behaviours with maturity. They felt engaging in sex and other behaviours such as smoking and drinking alcohol defined them as ‘adults’ who should be “allowed to enjoy life and all the good things that come with it”. To understand the construction and experiences of “bad” boys and girls, I reflect further on my interaction with young people in Zisan Secondary School.

As I watched students move around the open space within the school during break time, I noticed a group of students, four boys and a girl, walking out of the school premises. Karam, a

boy who was standing with me, pointed to them and said “Sir, those are the bad-boys gang, I am sure they are going to SS 4<sup>17</sup> to smoke and maybe fuck themselves.” I came to realise that SS4 is a term used by students to refer to the bush that Mr. Abrak was referring to in our earlier conversation, where bad boys and girls go to when they abscond from classes. I decided to walk to SS4 to have an experience of what was going on. As Karam and I walked down the road, I noticed different groups of students seated along the road, some chatting while eating snacks. At the end of the street, which is about a quarter of a kilometre from the school, a narrow road leads into a bushy area. However, I was warned by Karam not to go in there except I was with someone that belongs to the group of "bad boys" or with a teacher. He explained that I could be beaten and/or robbed. He explained that those hiding in the bushes could be aggressive to an intruder unless they know and are used to the person. However, they will always run and hide inside the grasses at the sight of a teacher.

I heeded Karam's advice and went back to school. After two days of asking around, Agwam, one of the boys with whom I had been friends, accepted my request of accompanying me to SS4 as he was familiar with the ways one could gain access to the place. SS4 is a swamp overgrown with tall grass and sparse trees distributed around. There are very narrow routes passing through the grass that lead to an open space under a cluster of trees. These routes are almost invisible from outside. As we walked through the narrow path, I could perceive the smell of cigarettes and could hear voices. However, when we got to the open space, there was no one. All the voices were gone. Agwam whistled and some students (mostly boys) came out of the bushes, most were holding lit cigarettes and small bottles of dry gin. Agwam told them I was his friend he brought to see the place. He assured them of my trust and promised there was nothing to worry with regards to my presence.

There were about nine people there from which six were students of Zisan Secondary School, still dressed in their uniforms. Standing by one of the mango trees were two students, a boy and a girl, smooching and kissing each other. On the other side, there was a male student who was sitting on a log of wood and carrying a girl on his lap (I am not sure if she was a student as she was not on school uniform). He was fondling her breast with his right hand while holding

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<sup>17</sup> SS 4 is used by students to refer to a bush outside the school where bad boys and bad girls use as hideouts during class. The senior section of secondary schools in Nigeria is structured into three year-groups, SS 1, SS 2 and SS 3. SS 3 is the final class before the students graduate and register for the entrance examination into the University. The construction of the term SS 4 is influenced by students' construction of bad boys and bad girls as being “fearless” and so belonging to a higher class that is not obtainable in the official school structuring.

a lit cigarette with his left. From where I was standing (not far away from them), I could hear the girl asking him to press her breast harder, while she moved his hand from her left breast to the right breast. Others sat in different positions smoking and drinking different brands of gin. I noticed two students, a boy and a girl, who were neither smoking nor drinking. They sat under one of the trees, chatting. I realised the place served as a haven for “bad boys” and “bad girls” to interact and engage in smoking, drinking and other forms of sexual intimacies. These “vices” are neither allowed in school premises nor at home. I also realised that my presence as an adult did not deter them from doing what they wanted, or what they were already doing.

Littered on the ground were empty packs of cigarettes, empty bottles of alcohol, used condoms, pieces of broken bottles, biscuit wraps, and so on. Through my discussion with Agwam, I learned that despite students’ engagement in some forms of intimacy, they rarely have sex when other students were there. They would rather wait until the numbers have reduced. In Agwam’s words:

Those that want to have sex cannot do so now. They will wait when others have left, either after school or during classes. But sometimes when they cannot control the urge, they go inside the grass and do their thing [have sex]. Like me, I do other things, but I have never had sex here. I cannot be doing my thing while other people are here.... Some people will even come to you and ask if they can also do small and if the girl agrees, why not, you will allow him to have sex with the girl just once, but as for me, I cannot do that. ...because some of them when they are drunk especially the girl, whether you use a condom or not, she cannot resist.

Agwam’s comments reflect the display of “risky” sexualities by “bad” boys and “bad” girls who engage in such sexual activities that expose them to the risk associated with unprotected sex. Such a risk could be an unwanted pregnancy or the contraction of STIs. Bad boys and bad girls also perform other forms of “risky” sexualities such as engaging in consensual sexual intercourse with multiple partners both in SS4 and other places. This mostly takes the form of one girl having intercourse with multiple boys. On our way back to the school, Agwam shared one of such instances saying:

There was a day that one SS 1 girl was caught having sex in this bush [referring to SS 4] with four SS 2 boys. The boys took turns to fuck her, at first the school thought the boys were raping her, but she confessed, and the boys also confirmed that she was the one that begged them to fuck her. She saw it in a movie, and she wanted to try and know how it feels. That girl is a very “bad” girl.

Unfortunately, I was unable to meet and interact with this girl because she eventually got pregnant (not from this case) and had to stop attending school. However, I met one of the boys involved who confirmed the story to be true. This scenario reflects the influences of popular culture and media activities on forms of heterosexual femininities that girls learn and perform. Thorne (1993) argues that popular culture such as music, teen magazines, and movies, as well

as interactions with peers, expose girls to a life of fantasy about intimacy, love and relationships based on mutual understanding. However, the heterosexual marketplace in Zisan Secondary School often involves forms of heteronormative exploitation of girls who suffer the most consequence of risky sexual practices. In this case, “bad” girls are more likely to suffer the consequences of unprotected sexual intercourse through unwanted pregnancies and STIs.

There is the need to recognise young people not just as capable of being sexually active but also as capable of engaging in “risky” sexual practices that could expose them to adverse health conditions. James & Prout (1997) argue about the need to recognise the agency of young people in their expressions of sexuality, thereby understanding their narratives about their behaviours. This could go beyond the cultural values passed to them during the socialisation process. By so doing, adults can understand the social world of young people better. In this way, adults can also assist young people to imagine and achieve different futures and craft new life stories.

### **Construction of Gender Identities through Football in Zisan Secondary School**

During my ethnographic study in Zisan Secondary School, opportunities for students to participate in sporting activities were rarely available. Due to many students and limited classrooms, the school operates two shifts (I discussed this in Chapter One). This implies that a normal school day begins at 7: 30 am and ends at 6: 00 pm. This leaves very little or no space for sporting activities during school hours. However, the school has a male football team that represents them at inter-school football competitions with other schools within the community. Boys who play in the football team train either on Saturdays and Sundays or in the evenings during weekdays. Training in the evening during weekdays implies that they train in a field outside the school, and some members of the team would have to choose between going to play football and staying in school to attend classes.

### **“We Play Better when Girls are Watching”: Boys Talking About the Influence of Girls on their Football Performance**

The focus here is on the cultural significance of football to the boys in my study in relation to constructing masculinities and femininities, with boys positioned as potential players and girls as supporters that exert influence on the boy-players’ performance of on the pitch. This was vividly illustrated in the inter-house football competition held in the school. During the first phase of the football competition where the preliminary matches were played, the field was populated by only boys who either came to play or to support their respective teams. Girls were asked to stay in school and practice for the track events. Both male and female teachers were present on the field to support the houses to which they belonged. After the first phase of the

games, boys complained about not having girls on the field to cheer them up. They argued that the girls' presence in the field would motivate them to victory.

Drawing from my conversation with these boys, girls could exert influence on the performance of boys during a game of football. This influence was noticeable during the second phase of the games where the girls were present in the field of play. The games were more interesting and entertaining than the preliminary games. Before the games commenced, Agwam, an SS2 student, told me to watch him during the game with the promise to put up a wonderful performance, perhaps to impress his girlfriend who was watching at the sideline. The games went on with cheers from girls prompting the boys to perform better. A girl standing not far away from me called out to Yakusak, a boy from Green House who came to pick the ball for a throw-in "Yaks [short form of Yakusak] if you score, I will let you kiss me!". Yakusak punched the air with his fist, and comically pushed his lips as if expecting to be kissed, before promising to score more than a goal.

These forms of interaction typify the sexualisation of the game of football by boys and girls in Zisan Secondary School. Boys sexualise their performances during football to appeal to girls, and girls cheer and evaluate the performances of boys as well. Wider societal perceptions in Nigeria suggest the inclination of girls to like or fall in love with male professional athletes. This is mostly ascribed to their well-built physique, the need to associate with fame, and the financial benefits that accrues from sports, especially football in Nigeria and around the globe. Although boys in Zisan Secondary School were not yet professionals, they enjoyed some privileges in school in the form of monetary rewards for representing the school in competitions. They were also respected by teachers, students and enjoy popularity within the school and their local communities. Most of them belonged to the buff-up guys group who were a delight to the girls in school. This finding corroborates the findings of Mayeza (2015) in his study with young children in a South African school where young boys strive to perform well in the game of football so as to attract girls, as if their ability as football players was a measure of their own attractiveness as boys in a heteronormative context. I will further discuss how girls construct boys that played football in the next section.

### **"Like Celebrities, Some girls like them and Others Don't": Girls Talking about Boys who Play Football.**

Watching boys play football and girls cheer them up by the sidelines, I could hear the latter group cheering and talking to themselves about the performance of the former group on the field. I picked particular interest in a group of girls standing close to me. It is from this group

that a girl promised to kiss Yakusak if he scored a goal during the match (as presented in the previous section). I moved closer to them. During the half-time, when the players were resting, I engaged in a conversation with the girls to understand how they constructed the boys that play football. Most girls indicated that they felt attracted to boys that played football. However, others like Zikachat has a different opinion about them. “They are like celebrities,” said Zikachat. “Some girls like them and others don’t like them. Some of them can be too proud to a fault. They think every girl likes them, so they become players [womanisers] and will want to date every girl. I really don’t like them”.

My conversation with these girls typifies how girls think of and accorded higher social status to boys that played football compared to other boys who don’t play football. It goes further to illustrate the strong impact that girls could have on boys during a boys-dominated event. Although in the school, the game of football has been constructed as a heterosexual game for boys, girls also have a place in this heterosexual game as spectators. The forms of heterosexual interaction that occur in the football field are a two-way interaction. Girls on the one hand, believed that by cheering boys who played football they make them perform better, on the other hand, boys believed that excellent performance in the game would attract girls to them. Therefore, the game of football was used by some students to initiate and sustain heterosexual relationships.

### **Gender Power Relations among Young People in Zisan School**

To further comprehend young people’s understanding of gender identities in school, I discussed the dynamics of power in doing gender among young people in Zisan Secondary School. Thorne (1993) argues that to understand, and to make meaning of the social relationships that boys and girls engaged in school, it is important to appreciate the centrality of power in this process. I draw on my findings from the field and discuss how young people understand and experience the domination of hegemonic masculinities in the school, as well as how girls and other non-hegemonic masculine boys navigate within the school space by resisting such masculine domination.

The forms of gender relations displayed among boys and girls in Zisan Secondary School significantly positioned power with boys. The display of dominant masculinities by boys served as a way of commanding respect from girls as well as dominating the physical spaces in school. The expression of masculine power dominance is exemplified in the responses of students during my FGDs where girls spoke about boys as bullies and perpetrators of violence

over girls. Kuyet, a girl in SS 2 mentioned that the boys “always bully us to do what they want”. Responses from girls in the FGDs suggest that hegemonic masculine boys do not only bully girls in the school, but also bully non-hegemonic boys. In line with Meyer (2009), I understand the expressions of violence by boys as a means of proving their masculinities and regulating the behaviour of girls and other boys who perform alternative forms of masculinities. I also engaged in a discussion with a group of boys to understand their perceptions of the forms of gender power relations that existed in the school. I started the conversation by asking them to explain their relationship with other students in the school. Almost immediately, the issue of bullying came up in their responses:

Binyan: We relate well, but the girls are stubborn, so we deal with them sometimes. [Other boys laughed out loud] yes, even other boys that behave like women, we also deal with them.

Yashim: Yes, you see the girls don't have respect, so we shout at them, push them around and some boys sometimes beat them. But this is only for those that do not respect us.

This reflects the dominance of patriarchal values that seek to regulate girls' activities by ascribing girls and boys whom they construct as effeminate with subservient roles. This exposes girls, as well as boys who are seen as ‘behaving like women’, to forms of gender violence that reflects existing normative inequalities in social status by making them susceptible to victimisation by hegemonic boys. The social construction of boys' superiority over girls in this context provides the basis for adverse experiences among girls, and other non-hegemonic boys during social interaction. This gives ascendancy to gender categorisation in ways that promote inequitable gender relations. Due to this perceived masculine superiority, boys would assume they could exploit girls by exercising violence over them as a way of exerting power and control. Experiences as these raise concerns over the predisposition of girls to gender violence owing to their socially constructed minority status within the school and community at large. I see boys' domination in this regard as a product of adherence to dominant normative gender values ascribed to masculinities that include policing and punishing “transgressive” gender behaviours both within, and outside the school.

Forms of gender identification among students were influenced by heteronormative constructions of gender as opposites. Boys and girls made meaning of their gender in relation to the opposite gender. Through this process, the cultural construction of masculinities as dominant comes to play. Social interactions among young people in Zisan Secondary School were organised around forms of gendering that support gender inequality. Mac an Ghaill (1994) in his UK study, argue that forms of gender inequality in power relations are understood in terms of the ways dominant groups oppress subordinate groups. I find power relations among

students in the school to reflect uncontested assumptions of heterosexuality as the acceptable norm. Forms of relationships that students go into safeguards the masculine dominance of boys over the femininities of girls. Influenced by the ideas of the post-structural feminists, I understand that the place of power does not only indicate how boys dominate girls in interaction, but it is also a reflection of how cultural dominance of patriarchy is reproduced and challenged by young people in interaction.

### **Boys and Girls Talking On Resistance of Gender Domination in School**

Guided by the post-structuralist argument on the fluidity of gender, I observed and discussed with students about the ways dominant gender identities are being challenged. During social interaction, girls sometimes resist the domination of masculine boys using aggression and sometimes physical violence. This is reflected in response to my FGD with a mixed group of students. During my FGDs, girls and some boys expressed their displeasure towards the dominance of boys and applauded the bravery of girls who could challenge this hegemony. Kazanka expresses this view when she asserts:

Sir, sometimes you must face them [boys] and fight so that they will not try it again. Girls fight boys who try to bully them. But we do this outside the school. When you fight a boy in school the teachers will be looking at you like a stubborn girl. They [teachers] always say we should report to them when a boy beat us. Like when we were going home last week Friday, my friend beat up one SS 2 boy that was stalking her. Now he has left her alone (Kazanka, SS 2 female student).

Discussions with students reflect how the school environment is structured to provide the space for gender inequality among students. The authority ascribed to teachers and school practices reifies the unequal power relations between boys and girls. It reinforces the widely held stereotypical assumptions that girls are soft and gentle as opposed to being rough, thereby providing an inequitable effect on girls. Morojele (2011) argues that widely held stereotypical perceptions of gender values that attribute basic and subservient qualities to girls as opposed to boys make boys to have an inequitable advantage over girls.

As exemplified in the excerpt above, girls act contrary to dominant feminine values by not always yielding to boys' attempts to intimidate them. Girls can develop a means to protect themselves against the domination of boys thereby challenging the stereotypical construction of girls as weak, gentle, and submissive. In this way, girls are proud of fighting back and winning the fights against boys. Although socialised along with dominant gender values, girls also learn from their lived experiences in school and their local communities, to challenge the essentialist ideas of femininities. This illustrates that the core values of femininities, being gentle, weak, soft, and submissive are not foregrounded in the potentialities of girls. This is

exemplified in my study where girls' aggressive behaviours towards boys challenge/contests the dominant values of gender, thereby inciting forms of gender-motivated fights among young people in the school that reify the fluidity and plurality of gender identities.

### **“Transgressing” Gender Boundaries: Understanding Young People’s “Transgressive” Behaviours in Zisan Secondary School**

Studying the spectrum of gender among young people, Thorne (1993) suggests the recognition of existing dualisms and forms of deviance from the dominant forms of gender categorisation and the labels attached to such individuals. Thorne discovers the use of “sissy” as a word of contempt used to describe boys who often display what are constructed as feminine characteristics. Also, girls who display “masculine” forms of behaviour may be referred to as ‘tomboys’. The use of the term “tomboy” in her study often implies something positive. In my study at Zisan Secondary School, forms of gender “transgressions” among boys and girls were reported and observed. Just as in Thorne’s study, young people in Zisan Secondary School show more acceptance for girls that express masculine tendencies, (referred to as “Tomboy/Agbero”) than for boys that exhibit feminine characteristics (referred to as “Boy-girl/Chalie-Charlie”) who are mostly being ridiculed and embarrassed. I recorded this in my research diary on 21/10/2019 thus:

Today I interacted with two groups of students in SS1 and SS2 on gender “transgressions” among students. Although these discussions were not planned, they occurred on the same day with different sets of students in different year groups. These discussions were informed by some events that took place in the two classes. In the morning before assembly, I was standing by the window of an SS1 classroom watching students sweeping the premises in preparation for the day. The girls were sweeping while two boys were helping to move the desks to allow more space to sweep. After moving some desks, one of the boys said he was tired and needed to rest, but the other rebuked him and asked if he has become like Zicham who behaves like a girl. I listened closely picking up on the conversation that ensued. Apparently, Zicham is a boy in SS1 who exhibits some characteristics of non-hegemonic masculinity [I discussed Biirat's school experience in a later section]. After the boys had finished moving the desks, I asked them to join me outside. I started a conversation about Zicham trying to understand the construction of his identity and what they think about it. By this time, another boy and a girl joined us. From our conversation, these students expressed disdain for boys that behave in "girlish" ways. When I asked about their attitude towards gender “transgressive” identities, Didam stated: "God forbid a "boy-girl" cannot be my friend. They behave girlishly, they are weak and gullible, and I don't want such people as friends. I better be friends with an agbero girl sef, that one I know she is tough and will not embarrass you[me] in public". Interestingly, other students in the group made comments that support Didam’s idea of “transgressive” gendered identities as unacceptable in the school space.

Later in the day, during the break, I went to interact with SS 2 students who were sitting in front of the SS2 science classroom. It was a mixed-gender group who were eating biscuits they bought from a shop behind their classroom. A girl, Zinai, walked past us, she was on a low haircut and had a boy-like physique. Yanang, one of the girls I was sitting with, expressed her likeness for Zinai, "I like how she walks, she just live her life without worry." The other students in the group seemed to

have the same likeness for Zinai as they both made comments that agreed with Yanang's. I became curious and decided to push the conversation further. During our discussions, their admiration for Zinai was informed by the perceived level of freedom Zinai enjoys in terms of wearing any type of cloths she wanted, playing freely with boys and her ability to challenge boys' masculine domination. They used the word "tomboy" and "Agbero" to refer to Zinai. However, this admiration was not there when we spoke about Zicham. Zicham is a boy in the school whom everyone referred to as a "boy-girl" or "Charlie-Charlie" because he behaves in a non-hegemonic masculine way. These students felt that "men are supposed to be strong and able to defend themselves and their women" [girlfriends]; a characteristic Zicham did not possess. Zicham would cry easily when he is sad or when he is being punished by teachers or senior prefects.

During my observations and FGDs, the terms "boy-girl" and "Charlie-Charlie" were used by students interchangeably to police "transgressive" masculinities. While the terms "tom-boy" and "agbero" were also used to refer to girls that "transgress" the feminine gender boundaries. The excerpt above presents how young people police "transgressive" forms of gender identities among their peers. In agreement with Thorne (1993) I argue that these attitudes are heavily influenced by cultural values about gender that glorifies masculinities over femininities. The ascendancy of masculinities over femininities is reflected in young peoples' acceptability of girls that express masculine behaviour. These girls are constructed in ways that portray a positive image of the individual actor. They are seen to express forms of behaviour that are ordinarily "above" the expected feminine behaviour they should possess.

This is further exemplified when a student is able to identify herself during a discussion as a tomboy without any expectation of disdain from the other participants. This further reflects the assumption that girls who "transgress" gender boundaries are indicating that they could enjoy the power and freedom which are associated with masculinities in patriarchal societies. On the other hand, boys who exhibit supposedly feminine characteristics are conceived as being retrogressive in that, they express feminine characteristics that have been constructed by patriarchal cultural norms as being inferior to the masculinities of men. They are therefore, ridiculed for their failure to be "proper" boys. Such ridicule is promoted by the tenuous relationship boys develop in a patriarchal context in which boys assert themselves as "proper" boys by distancing themselves from and ridiculing other boys who are seen as transgressing normative understandings of boyhood.

Although dominant gender norms require that girls should be gentle, calm as well as express inclination to masculine boys, students in my study showed their support for Zinai's "transgressive" behaviour which serve to challenge inclinations to strict gender boundaries by challenging the domination of boy's masculinities. In line with the arguments of the post-structural feminist, the "transgressive" forms of gender performances indicate the agency that

young people exercise in negotiating the forms of gender values they are exposed to in the socialisation process. They do not only assimilate existing gender norms, but they also negotiate and act in ways that fit their realities (MacNaughton, 2000). This process is further illustrated in my FGDs with students where they described what qualifies one as a "boy-girl" or "tomboy". The following sections, therefore, present discussions on the understanding and construction of “transgressive” gender identities like the "boy-girl" and "Tomboy". I also discussed the experiences of two students (one boy and one girl) who have been constructed by other students as possessing “transgressive” forms of gender identities.

### **Young People’s Understanding and Construction of the “Boy-Girl/Charlie-charlie” Identity in the School**

The boy-girl/Charlie-Charlie identity in my study is synonymous with the category of boys Thorne (1993) in her United States study referred to as “sissy”. The boy-girl identity is often attributed to boys whose character and behaviour have been culturally associated with girls, such characters and behaviours depict weakness, timidity, calmness, and dependence. The term boy-girl is used to ridicule boys who are effeminate in speech and behaviours. It is used as a derogatory term as young people indicate their dissension for boys whom they construct as boy-girl. Contrary to studies by Thorne (1993) and Mayeza (2015) where they found non-participation in "masculine" sports by boys as a determinant of effeminate identities, my study reveals that boy’s non-participation in sports constructed as masculine or participating in female constructed games does not define one as a boy-girl. Rather, participation in games constructed as feminine, such as skipping and *suwe*<sup>18</sup> is a pleasurable exercise for boys and any boy could participate in such games. Zacham explains this claim during a conversation in the playground:

We can play any kind of game in this school. It doesn’t matter if you are a boy or a girl, if you enjoy playing the game you go ahead. We even like playing with the girls when they play their *suwe*, or skipping, we like to hang around them. It is also very nice when we play football and the girls come to join us, they also enjoy playing with us. But when we are playing a match then girls are not allowed to join, only boys play.

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<sup>18</sup> *Suwe* is a predominantly female game among Nigerian children, especially in rural communities. The game is played by at least two players. The pitch is drawn on the floor in rectangular boxes. Each player has a pebble she throws in the first box and jumps over the box when it is her turn, then goes round the other boxes jumping on one leg, the same is done with the other boxes. If the player successfully goes around after throwing the pebble in all the boxes, the player turns his/her back and throws the pebble to a random box, whichever box the pebble falls is now owned by the player and other players are not allowed to step on that box. When all the boxes are acquired by the players, the player with the highest number of boxes becomes the winner. Although the game is predominantly played for girls, and boys sometimes join in to play.

The expressions of contempt towards boys constructed as boy-girl/charlie-charlie could be attributed to the cultural and lawful disapproval of non-normative sexualities in Nigeria as I discussed earlier in Chapter Three. The use of these terms is tied to definitions of the transgression of gender roles and has little or nothing to do with transgressions of normative sexual expectations. The expressions of negative reactions to the boy-girl identity indicate the lack of tolerance to non-normative gender identities among young people in the school. If not controlled, this could result in homophobic bullying against students with such identities as the boy-girl. In Zisan Secondary School, boys who have been defined as boy-girl become vulnerable to bullying and are also being ridiculed by their peers. I, therefore, recognise the importance of understanding the experiences of boys constructed by others as boy-girl within the school. I identified two boys who admitted to being called boy-girl by other students; however, only one consented to share his experiences with me. I interacted with Zicham to understand his experiences of being called a boy-girl by other students, and how he deals with their construction of him in this way.

During our conversation, Zicham admitted being called derogatory names by other students in school because of the way he behaves, which he understands is natural and unchangeable. He further indicated a few times where he experiences some form of bullying by students who would tease him and laugh at him whenever he became angry and started to cry. Zicham constructed his identity as no lesser than other boys, even though he was not as strong as they were and did not engage in physical forms of activities that required strength. He also has an inclination for girls with whom he establishes romantic relationships. Zicham is constructed in this way because he does not express the characteristics of hegemonic masculinities by being physically strong, and rough. The support he gets from teachers and other students, especially girls, has made him accept his identity as being normal and not allow it to be a source of frustration when other boys called him derogatory names as boy-girl. Zicham stated that:

When they called me such names, I reported them to our teachers and the teachers would punish them. A few times, some girls also ridiculed me, but I have more female friends compared to males. The girls will tell me they like how I am calm and not rough like the other boys... Before now, I would be worried and not concentrate in class, but some teachers advised me to ignore those ridiculing me. My friends, both boys and girls, do fight for me sometimes and encourage me not to cry.

This reflects the relatively friendly attitude expressed by teachers and other students towards non-hegemonic masculinities, an attitude that could be propagated further and encouraged to ensure the wellbeing of other forms of non-normative gender categories in the school.

## Young People's Understanding and Construction of the "Tomboy/Agbero" Identity in the School

My interaction with young people in Zisan Secondary School reveals the construction of certain girls as "tomboys" or "Abgeros". As earlier stated, these terms are associated with girls that express forms of gender identities that have been culturally identified as masculine. Thorne (1993) in her American study, found that the term tomboy is used to refer to girls who are spirited and adventurous in their character. She further reveals that tomboys dislike feminine dresses and are drawn to activities that have been associated with boys. In my study, I found similar constructions of tomboys as those explained by Thorne. However, while most students in Thorne's study did not use the term tomboy to refer to this category of girls, majority of young people in my study frequently uses the term tomboy and/or agbero to describe this set of girls.

The student's construction of tomboy identity in my study is ascribed to girls who are adventurous, active, and independent. Such girls reportedly engage in activities that involve physical strength. They are rough, and dress in ways that boys are culturally known to dress. Conversations with students about tomboys are filled with positive meanings of the concept, unlike the boy-girl identity (that I discussed earlier). In my study, "tomboys" also serve as mediators for boys that want to establish relationships with girls in school. Based on students' understanding of the tomboy identity, it does not only accord girls the freedom to act in ways they deem fit irrespective of gender restrictive norms, but it also serves as a way of challenging the domination of boys by acting like boys and resisting forms of masculine bullying in school. Although a few other girls self-identified as tomboys, I paid more attention to Zinai whom I believe her popularity within the school would provide me with a better understanding of being a tomboy in a heteronormative school space.

During my conversations with Zinai, she self-identified as a tomboy, an identity she was proud to possess. Although she had experienced some form of disapproval regarding her behaviour from her parents at home and some teachers in school as well as other individuals outside school, she rarely experienced any form of disapproval or discrimination among students in the school owing to her tomboy identity. I had the following conversation with Zinai:

Hilary: Do you think they call you tomboy because you like to play football with boys?

Zinai: Not at all, it is because of the way I do my things, dress, walk and all. Other girls also like to play football with boys. We all have fun playing with them (boys).

Hilary: How do you feel when people call you a tomboy?

Zinai: Although they call me tomboy, it doesn't affect my relationship with other students. Some even call me agbero but the students like me a lot, both boys and girls. It's just that sometimes, like at home, my parents will be saying I should behave like the girl that I am and stop behaving like a boy. Even in school, some teachers will be advising me to behave like other girls, but I will tell them this is who I am. In school, my friends will say they wish they have my kind of freedom and I tell them they can be like me. Even my boyfriend said he likes me like this, so I don't care... The other day, I was coming to school and one man stopped me and was asking me why I walk like a boy, I just *fashi* (shunned) him, because I don't know what to tell him and he said I should better change.

Hilary: Have you been punished in school or at home for behaving in this way?

Zinai: No! Never! They only use to advise me. Like my brother he even said he likes the way I behave, nobody will bully me or even push me around.

This depicts the non-supportive cultural environment that gender “transgressive” individuals must navigate to exist. In this case, restrictive cultural gender values are being propagated by adults in society. However, young people can resist this restriction and still act in ways they deem appropriate during interactions with their peers. The supportive attitude of young people in school towards Zinai's behaviour is further informed by the assumption that girls who transgress gender boundaries enjoy some power and freedom associated with masculinities in patriarchal societies.

Contrary to societal cultural expectations, the construction of Zinai's tomboy identity by her, and other students in the school denotes a positive meaning which is reflected in the acceptance of her identity despite its contradictions with dominant normative gender roles. The tomboy identity serves to challenge the ascendancy of masculine boys. Contrary to other studies on gender and schooling such as Thorne (1993) and Mayeza (2015), engaging in masculine sports serve as a significant determinant in the construction of “transgressive” gender identities as the tomboy. In my study, students who engage in masculine form of sports like football had little or no significance on the construction of girls as tomboys. Rather much emphasis was placed on their ways of dressing and behaviours such as how they walk, how they talk, their physique, and their engagement in forms of play that requires physical strength, not necessarily sports. Again, this draws attention to the importance of understanding young people's agency in their construction of social identities which does not necessarily conform to societal perceptions which is tied to adult constructions of what young people's identities should be.

## Conclusion

The chapter is concerned with the ways young people in Zisan Secondary School understand and construct their social identities through interaction in the school. It provides insights into the socio-cultural context of Zisan Secondary School through its focus on gender, cultural heteronormativity, and schooling. The significance of gender and sexuality as understood by young people is determined by the types of social interaction they engage in with other students, teachers, and the school environment. Social interaction in Zisan Secondary School is structured along with heteronormative values that promote consciousness regarding gender boundaries, and therefore raises implications for the gender identifications in line with masculinities and femininities.

While acting within heteronormative conceptions of masculinities and femininities, young people are influenced by the overarching awareness of gender categorisations in constructing forms of identities such as dominant masculinities and subservient femininities, popular gender identities as the buff-up guys and slay queens, and other forms of identities constructed by students in this way. Findings further reflect how the game of football is being sexualised by young people in school. In this way, girls become more sexually attracted to boys that are good at football, on the other hand, boys are propelled to perform better to be able to attract girls to them. Through these findings, I understand the positionality of power as central to understanding identity construction through social interaction among students in Zisan Secondary School. In line with this, the chapter further discusses the positionality of gender power in interactions among boys and girls and the ascendancy of normative gender categories in doing gender in Zisan Secondary School. Findings reveal how young people, through social interactions in school, devise various ways of self-identification in response to their interactions with the opposite gender. It provides evidence on the most persistent form of distributing power to support inequalities between boys and girls, consequently reinforcing the domination of boys within the school space.

The heteronormative discourse of gender and schooling is often guided by the idea of oppositional but complementary sex roles. These sex roles define the behaviours and attitudes of young people in line with societal conceptions of what is appropriate behaviour for boys and girls. These appropriate ways of behaviour are constructed along with strict gender boundaries that young people are expected to conform to. In line with this, young people found “transgressing” such strict boundaries could cause resentment from their fellow students and teachers. This further reinforces cultural normative ways of behaviours that young people in

school are expected to conform to. Such normative behaviours transcend towards the assumption that young people should not be sexually active, and therefore rouses the need to regulate their sexualities within culturally acceptable limits – the plea for sexual innocence. Thus, the next chapter presents evidence on the ways that young people experience their sexualities, and the forms of regulation they encounter within the school space.

## Chapter Seven

### Expression and Regulation of Young People's Sexualities in School

#### Introduction

Global studies on gender and sexuality among young people in schools have viewed schools as complex spaces that make possible the learning, expression and policing of young people's sexualities. Expression of sexualities among young people is often guided by social processes that encourage compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 1999). This chapter engages discourses on how young people's sexuality is produced and regulated within the school. Allen (2007) views schools as settings where activities are organised with an inclination towards cultural norms that understand and construct young people as non-sexual beings. Consequently, engaging in contradictory discourses simultaneously recognises young people's sexuality, and constructs them as innocent and asexual. Through these contradictory practices, school cultures tend to undermine young people's sexual agency to seek their sexual well-being (Francis, 2019b).

Drawing from data generated during my field observation, informal conversations, and FGDs with students and interviews with teachers, the chapter discusses how young people interact and develop heterosexual relationships in the school. It provides evidence that debunks the adult construction of young people as asexual. Rather, emphasising the need to view young people as sexual beings capable of being sexually active. The chapter further discusses how young people's sexualities are being regulated in the school, and how young people navigate existing regulations to produce and experience their sexualities. Like in Chapters Five and Six, I integrate my findings with the analysis of themes that emerged from my data.

#### Boys and Girls in Sexual Relationships in School

In my study, I understand sexuality as a social construct and a central aspect of human existence. It includes sexual feelings, thoughts, attraction, attitudes, and behaviours expressed through thoughts, desires, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, values and relationships (WHO, 2016). In my study, I engaged with young people as sexual beings, and recognised young people's ability to exercise agency by engaging in sexual relationships within the school space. I am guided by the idea that young people at puberty experience secondary sexual growth, hormonal changes and secretions, psychological and emotional developments. These biological and psychological changes often result in sexual curiosity and experimentation, thereby making young people aware of their sexuality (Okpani & Okpani, 2000; Zaggi, 2014). It is in line with

this that this section presents young people's sexual experiences in the school by discussing how boys and girls initiate sexual relationships in school and their sexual practices, including engaging in relationships with multiple partners at a time. These forms of relationships are understood, constructed and experienced within a strictly heteronormative space that only permits heterosexual relationships.

### **Boys and Girls Initiating Romantic Relationships in School.**

On a Monday afternoon during break time, I stood by the school's open market with a group of SS 2 girls. An SS 2 boy came to us and asked to speak with Kushenyan (one of the girls I was standing with). She excused herself from the group and went to talk to him. After a few minutes, she returned to the group wearing a gloomy face on. I queried to find out what the problem was, and she told us that the boy, who is her friend, came to say he was disappointed in her after learning she had asked his friend out on a date. He went further to tell her how cheap she was and how girls should not be found asking boys out on a date. However, her friends debunked his idea of her being cheap and insisted that she did nothing wrong. Shiayet commented that "It is only right for a girl to go for what or who she wants, "How come a guy is not cheap when he is asking a girl out, but if it is a girl, she is considered to be cheap? This is not fair!".

My experience with this group of students exemplifies the ascendancy given to boys' masculinities, even with regards to the initiation of romantic relationships. Contrary to adult perceptions of young people as asexual beings, in my study, young people provided evidence of expressing sexual behaviours. This is despite existing within an adult regulated space where young people are expected to not engage in any form of sexual relationship. During my data analysis, I found interesting the discourse on young people's initiation of romantic relationships as understood, and constructed along with gender differences. Societal normative construction of femininities in subservient ways supposes girls to be submissive in ways that empower boys' masculinities. Kushenyan's expression of interest in a boy was conceived as a transgressive behaviour that should not be associated with the femininities of girls. However, girls' feminine construction of such behaviour, as expressed by Shiayet seeks to oppose such normative cultural ideas that only boys should initiate relationships.

The association of masculinities with romantic relationships initiation was further reported in my FGD with a mixed group of SS 1 students when I queried about who should initiate such relationships between boys and girls. There was a general response, "*boys!*" from the

participants. The students feel that a girl will be disrespected and taken for granted if she initiates such relationships. To them, initiating romantic relationships is a prerogative for boys.

The association of masculinities with romantic relationships initiation was further reported in my FGD with a mixed group of SS 1 students when I queried about who should initiate such relationships between boys and girls. There was a general response, “*boys*” from the participants, also giving the following reasons:

Binyan: For me, if a girl should ask me out *gaskiya* (truthfully), I will hate her. I will rather just go to her and tell her that I like her myself.

Hilary: Why would you hate her?

Binyan: Sir, you see ehh, girls should not be doing this [asking boys out] if a girl asks me out, I will not respect her, I see her as trash and I will think that is how she will be asking other guys out, so no for me. She should wait for me to come and ask her out.

Abakasa: It is a normal thing for a guy to toast a girl. It is you [referring to the boys] that will go and look for a wife.

Dorcas: The guy will feel like the girl is cheap, even if he marries the girl, if something occurs between them, he’ll use it against her like you were the one that even approached me...I don’t even know what I saw in you

This perception depicts how cultural ascendancy to masculinities continues to support the domination of boys over girls. Although girls also experience forms of desire that attracts them to boys, the expression of such desires is expected to be restrained and subjected to the boy who is indicating interest in the girl. This suggests the continuous influence of cultural norms and values that promote patriarchy in the society. Consequently, feminine sexualities are geared towards satisfying the desires of men and relegating the satisfaction of feminine desires to the background. Nigerian studies by Ikpe (2004) and Mukoro (2017) support my findings as they present discourses on how the Nigerian cultural environment is inclined to support patriarchal values that seek to prioritise the desires of masculinities over femininities. Here, I argue that patriarchal cultural values, which support the domination of masculinities over femininities, empower young boys in schools to exercise domination to the point of victimising girls and, at worst perpetuating forms of sexual violence against girls.

Through my conversation with students, responses indicate the prevalence of heterosexual relationships in the school as being covert. Teachers and school cultures' continuous attempt to maintain the perception that young people are asexual makes it impossible for young people to openly engage in romantic relationships within the school space. Interestingly, despite wide acceptance of romantic relationships' initiation as a function of masculine boys, girls in my

study reported devising certain means of making boys develop an interest in them and consequently approaching the girls for a relationship. This is captured in my FGDs with female students. During a FGD with a group of SS 2 girls, I asked them if they would be able to approach a boy and ask for a relationship. Participants collectively shouted “No!”. However, they mentioned that once they saw a boy they liked in school, they will always behave in ways that will attract the boy’s attention. For example, some girls will always adopt certain “sexy” postures when such a boy approaches. Some will constantly keep eye contact with the boy. In some cases, girls will go out of their way to find out what interests the boy, and try to behave in such ways towards him. Girls in my study reported the efficacy of these gestures as they have effectively used to get the “boys of their dreams”.

Even with normative gender restrictions on the initiation of romantic relationships in school, which gives boys dominance, girls can use some form of agency by developing alternative ways of initiating the conversation with boys and still sustaining the status quo. In this way, girls can initiate the process of developing romantic heterosexual relationships without demeaning the masculinities of boys. This, in clear terms, suggests the subjugation of girls’ femininities to adhere to and serve the purpose of the masculinities of boys. In this case, the fact that girls could only engage in romantic relationships with boys who ask them out and not just any boy they like. Interestingly, it appears that girls sometimes need to be pressurised into accepting the proposal of boys that want to date them, indicating that not all relationship proposals get positive responses from the girls. However, as indicated by some students, continuous persistence by the boys is seen as a sign of seriousness and could yield positive results in terms of girls accepting boys’ proposals to start an intimate relationship.

This conversation strongly debunks the idea of “sexual innocence” among girls as projected by some adult teachers when discussing young people’s sexualities in the school. These teachers invoke the use of sexual innocence relationally to mean a form of childlike naivety that portrays the lack of sexual knowledge and experience among young girls. On the other hand, they assume that if girls are not well “protected” from boys, the girls’ “innocence” would be taken away by boys teachers constructed as possessing aggressive sexualities. The way adult teachers engaged with the supposedly sexual innocence of young people in conversations suggests that young people who had some levels of sexual experience are guilty of some trespasses, as if having sex is a crime. In line with this, I discussed my conversations with young people in the next section regarding their sexual experiences.

## **‘The thing is Natural, You Have to Obey’: Young People Talking about Their Sexual Experiences**

Upon the commencement of my fieldwork, I had a conversation with Ms Shinai (which I narrated in Chapter Five) on the possibility of getting students to talk to me about their sexual experiences. This possibility is debated as a result of my perceived adult status, as well as the restrictive environment that deny students the expressions of sexual desires. Although I considered this to be a possible problem, it turned out to be the opposite. As I also discussed in Chapter Four, I was able to achieve this by consciously engaging in forms of young person-centred research that helps to deconstruct existing adult-centric power relations. In this way, young people in the school acknowledged me as an adult who is interested in learning about their social lives without being judgmental like their adult teachers. During my conversation with young people, they were excited to talk about their sexual experiences, stating their excitement, Kuyet commented; “Sir, we are happy to talk about this with you, nobody has ever spoken about it with us both here in school and at home. We are very happy Sir”. Due to the desire of young people to talk about how sex features in their social world and the opportunity I brought by deconstructing existing adult-centric power relations (I discussed this in detail in Chapter Four), young people would easily begin discussing their sexual experiences even when we were talking about unrelated issues. One of such incidents was when I was with a group of “slay-queens” discussing the nature of classroom arrangement and the following ensued:

- Yachat: Well, even my boyfriend doesn’t want me to sit with another boy in class.
- Baryat: Hahaha! He doesn’t want another boy to touch you?
- Yachat: Ehen now, you know this feeling is natural when a boy starts touching you, especially when you like him, you begin to feel your body doing somehow. And because the thing is natural you must obey sometimes.
- Hilary: Okay, could you describe the feeling.
- Yachat: Sir, don’t say I am a bad girl.
- Hilary: No, not at all. Trust me, I wouldn’t think of you in that way.
- Yachat: Sir you know when he [my boyfriend] touches my breast, I used to feel my joints getting weak, and I love the feeling. And since I love him, the sex is very sweet.

Current trends in research on young people’s sexualities have been focused on correcting the societal, cultural notion that constructs young people’s sexuality as a social problem. Cultural notion as this continue to restrict the discourse of sexuality to adulthood. However, as Pattman (2005) argues, sexuality should be seen as a progressive phenomenon that begins from childhood to adulthood. In this way, the sexual agency of young people will be recognised and encouraged for their well-being. In line with this idea, young people in the above conversation

spoke about their sexual experiences freely, but also passionately. Drawing from the above discussion and my interactions with students in the school, young people understand their sexualities as not only experienced in adulthood. They express their sexual desires in heteronormative ways by only discussing such experiences between heterosexual partners. However, the restrictive school environment they exist and operate within, makes it impossible to freely express sexual desires, thereby suggesting that young people who engage in sex are “bad” and “guilty” of the sin of immorality. This is exemplified in Yachat’s initial reluctance to explain how she feels when a boy touches her breast. She is concerned that I, like other adult teachers, will construct her as being immoral. Interestingly, Yachat referred to her gender when she spoke of her concern about me constructing her as a “bad girl”. This could imply that speaking reflectively about sexual desire in the company of adults carries more risk for girls than for boys in the school. Therefore, the continuous claim of innocence by young people, especially girls, in sexual relationships in the school when discussing with adults.

In line with the social constructivist paradigm, I see the sexual behaviours of young people in my study as shaped by the meaning they attach to it. In this case, I find interesting the meanings young people attach to sex as polarised by gendered identities. Girls spoke about sexuality with emotions, a way of expressing love for one’s partner. On the contrary, boys talked about sexuality in ways which were devoid of feelings or emotions. For these boys, sex is a means of expressing their masculinities by accruing more respect for boys who could engage in sex with a greater number of girls. In this case, boys always seek to have sex with girls because it assures them of their “smartness” by convincing girls in this regard. Karam substantiated this claim when talking about his sexual conquest saying: "You see girls always bring feelings, emotions and all that, but for me, as a boy it’s just sex. I fuck you and move to the next girl, and my guys will hail me. We [boys] don’t do the love thing, we just conquer”. Giving these varied gendered understanding of sex among boys and girls, boys spoke about how easy it was for them to move on to new relationships with other girls after breaking up. On the other hand, girls mentioned that they become heartbroken during break-ups in relationships and would require some time to "heal" before engaging in another relationship. In a related study among primary school learners in London, Renold (2006) explored how young people express their sexualities in everyday interaction. The study presents the complexity of young people’s construction and performance of sexualities by engaging in emotionally charged relationships with the opposite gender. These relationships were deeply embedded in dominant hetero-romantic cultures that attached emotions to the feminine partners.

## **“It’s like Having two Sim Cards...”: How Young People Construct Having Multiple Romantic Relationships in School.**

Findings from my fieldwork in Zisan Secondary School reveal that young people established and engaged in romantic relationships with the opposite gender and sometimes engage in such relationships with multiple partners. I draw on my conversation with a gender mixed group of SS 2 students during my FGD, where we discussed their sexual experiences in this regard thus:

- Hilary: Do your friends have more than one partner?
- Baryat: Yes, a lot. As usual, the boys normally have more than one girlfriend.
- Myrya: Sir even me, I have more than one boyfriend. If he fucks up, you have another one. I normally say it is like having two sim cards... when the network is poor in one, you put the second one. That’s all. ...But I only sleep [have sex] with the one that gives me more attention and provides for me at that time.
- Didam: Sir, having a lot of girlfriends is a thing of pride. If one refuses to see you, especially when you have *konji* (urge for sex) you can easily call the next one. This way, even your friends will respect you for that. They will treat you like a king, yes, a king of girls. Boys will laugh at you if you have one girlfriend. It means you are not man enough.

Engaging with the above conversations, I reflect on the pervasiveness of gender polarities among young people in school. Although I asked a general and ungendered question at the beginning of the conversation, Baryat responded by making a comparison between boys and girls with regards to engaging in multiple romantic relationships. This reflects the meanings that young people attach to sexualities to be influenced by heteronormative values. Connell (1987) argues that the meanings we attach to social reality influences the social practices we engage in. It is these social practices that form and sustain relationships. In this case, boys and girls understand the practice of multiple romantic relationships in different ways. Boys’ positionality in this is devoid of emotions or feelings. Rather, it is a way of affirming and elevating their position on the social ladder among their peers and therefore seen as an adventure, as indicated by Karam’s response during a FGD which I discussed earlier in this section. Girls on the other hand, understand this practice as a way of ensuring they get constant care and attention from boys, thereby affirming the positioning of emotionality with the femininities of girls.

Nigerian studies by Izugbara & Modo (2007); Zaggi (2014) affirms the understanding of young people in school with regards to engaging with multiple partners. These studies conducted in the southern and northern part of Nigeria respectively reveal that young people (especially boys) engage in romantic relationships with multiple partners to gain respect for themselves and social acceptance and also to boost their social ranking among their peers. Although

existing cultural norms have constructed this practice as promiscuous and immoral, thereby frowning at it, young people in my study rather understand it as a means to gain social respect, economic gains, have fun and cushion the effect of a heartbreak – in case it occurs. My conversations with women, men and students also affirm the use of agency by young people in understanding and constructing forms of sexualities that contravene existing societal, cultural values, in this case, the claim about promiscuity and immorality.

Contrary to cultural values that applaud fidelity in relationships, young people in my study (as expressed by Didam in the excerpt above) understand fidelity as a thing of ridicule among their peers. Here I find it interesting how young people could adhere to cultural norms that define romantic relationships and heterosexuality, however, denying the cultural values attached to fidelity. This resonates with MacNaughton's conceptualisation of the market place of ideas, where young people are exposed to different ideas and could select, interpret, live and adopt ideas that suit their reality and make them part of their everyday social practices (MacNaughton, 2000). In the case of my study, it reinforces the acceptance of dominant heterosexual values and the rejection of fidelity as a virtue in romantic relationships. The expressions of varying forms of sexualities among young people in Zisan Secondary School provide insight to how young people navigate and construct their identities around school cultures organised along heteronormative, adult-centric values. Exploring this interaction further, the following section presents how teachers within a restricted school space police young people's sexuality.

### **Regulations on Young People's Expression of Gender and Sexuality in School: A Conflict of Values**

Ngabaza & Shefer (2019) in their study in South African schools, reveal how the discourse of young people's sexuality in education is dominated by forms of regulation and discipline. This is often expressed in ways that seek to reinforce gender binaries and heteronormativity among young people interacting within the school environment. In Chapter Five, I discussed how Zisan Secondary School serves as a site for the construction of gender and sexual identities among young people. I presented evidence on how teachers construct young people's engagement in sexual activity as an immoral act. Thus, emphasising the need to exercise control over them to curtail this "sexual immorality" that has pregnancy as its "consequence" as in the case of female students. In furtherance to this discussion, the next section presents how teachers perceive young people's sexualities in school. Understanding teachers'

perceptions will provide insight into the forms of regulations young people experience in the school.

### **Teachers Perception of Young People's Sexuality in school**

Studies on young people's sexualities in schools have been directed towards changing dominant societal perceptions that young people can make "mistakes" if exposed to discourses of sexuality. Traditional school cultures construct young people as "innocent" and incapable of expressing sexual desires, thereby making the discourse of sexuality among young people in schools to be within the ambit of morality (Pattman & Chege, 2003; Allen, 2007; Francis, 2018). In line with these dominant assumptions about young people, I engaged in in-depth interviews with teachers at Zisan Secondary School to find out how they understand young people with regards to their sexual identities. Teachers' conceptualisation of young people's sexualities in Zisan Secondary School suggests their preference for young people who do not engage in sex. Teachers during my interviews and informal conversation reported that young people at the school are sexually active; however, teachers understand the expression of sexual desires as a matter of adulthood. Thereby, constructing young people's sexual behaviours as abnormal, evil, immoral, or even a sin that needs redemption.

The teachers' account of the sexuality of young people at Zisan Secondary School suggests widespread sexual activities among the students. For example, Mr Bakut reported how young people make drawings on pieces of paper during classes expressing love for the opposite gender, as well as recounting events where young people have been seen having sex in, and around the school environment. Also, Ms Zanak reported events where students will leave their houses with the claim of coming to school, but will end up in the bushes called SS 4 (I discussed SS 4 in Chapter Six as a place associated with the display of "risky" sexualities by young people constructed as "bad boys and girls") where they engage in "immoral" activities. Mr Kaburuk gave instances that further suggest the sexual interests of students in the school thus:

There is a hotel that the students use to sneak to... they will come to school and they will disappear one by one and go to that place to have their sex picnics there. There is also Dala farm around here that the man [the owner of Dala farm] once caught our students, a girl and about five boys having sex. So, they all do it and they are very active. But I fear if they are not stopped then we will be looking at a damaged future. Some of them have really mastered these evil acts. (Mr Kaburuk, Head Teacher).

School cultures continue to ensure the domination of adult-centric ideas in discussing young people's sexualities. Here adult ideas of young people's sexualities suggest the need to protect young people from the "harm" associated with their expression of sexual desires. As expressed by Mr Kaburuk, adult ideas suggest the understanding and construction of young people's

sexualities as dangerous and evil. In a way, though not explicitly mentioned, young people in this case, are viewed as inexperienced and their engagement in sexual activity as an immoral act that should be checked. In this case, Mr Kaburuk refers to young people's expression of sexualities as evil. Allen (2008) argues that viewing young people as inexperienced and incapable of knowing their sexual needs is wrong as it seeks to give legitimacy to adult-centred sexuality discourses.

Accounts of adults' construction of young sexualities in negative ways abound in my study. Although there is wide acceptance of young people being sexually active, teachers' responses tend to address young people's sexualities within the purview of public health. This presents young people's sexual behaviours as social problems that need to be attended to through moral guidance, restrictions and even spiritual intervention. In this way, teachers construct even subtle ways of showing affection by young people, such as embracing each other, as abnormal and a way of misbehaving. For example, Mr Kaburuk commented that in the case of "a boy and a girl misbehaving, the girl will not feel abnormal when being embraced by a boy in public". This was also the case when Ms Asmau constructed a girl that was found having sex with another boy in the school as "far gone" and needs some form of redemption "When you look at the girl, she is far gone; I spoke with her just to minister Christ to her. This way she can stop these evil things". The construction of young people's sexualities in this way is problematic, especially because young people exist and interact in an adult controlled school space. Adults who control this space perceive young people's sexualities as problematic and need to be controlled. Consequently, young people become constrained within an adult-centric heteronormative space, thereby denying them the enabling environment to employ agency in constructing and experiencing their gender and sexualities while in school.

The continuous dominance of adult ideas on the discourse of young people's sexualities ensures that young people are only permitted to engage in discussions around abstinence, diseases, and mortality geared towards preparing them for "responsible" adulthood (Francis, 2018; Igbokwe, Ogbonna, Ezegbe, Nnadi & Eseadi, 2019). To achieve this, young people in school are often subjected to forms of regulations by adult teachers and the school authority. Such regulations seek to restrain young people from engaging in discussions around sexual pleasure, contraception, sexual orientation, and other discourses linked to adulthood. In line with this, the next section discusses how adults in Zisan Secondary School police young people's sexualities.

## **“They are Spoiled Kids, they Need Iron Hands to Stop them”: Existing Forms of Regulation on Young People’s Experience of Gender and Sexuality in School**

Well, the students you see in the school come from different environments, they meet in the school and meet at home also... They are even more controlled in the school more than at home; even if they have the intentions, they think twice in the school because of how strict the school is. They are spoiled kids; they need iron hands to stop them from doing all this rubbish. Whatever they have in mind, they reserve it until they go back home (Mr Bakut, Head Teacher).

The above is an excerpt from an interview with one of the teachers on the ways young peoples’ sexualities are policed in Zisan Secondary School. The teacher’s response emphasised the preference of teachers and the school towards students who do not engage in sex. The constant denial of young people’s sexuality becomes more problematic when adults continue to compel young people to act in ways that contradict young people’s beliefs, desires, and values. In this case, young people in Zisan Secondary School are faced with contradictions that operate not only to subjugate them to adult cultural norms, but also to force them to act in ways they do not desire.

Young people in Zisan Secondary School are exposed to different forms of regulations in the school. First, regulation through school cultures as exemplified by Mr Bakut's statement above. Secondly, teachers and senior prefects' regulations (I discussed the selection of school prefects in Chapter Five). Interestingly, although young, this set of prefects unite with teachers to police the sexualities of other students. However, these prefects use the opportunity to express their sexualities, knowing that no junior student could dare report them to the teachers for fear of being punished afterwards. I captured this during an informal conversation with a group of students while discussing how heterosexual relationships among young people were regulated by teachers:

Yakunat: We the prefects used to assist the teachers to make sure that students do not have boyfriends and girlfriends in the school. We report them to teachers when we find out.

Hilary to Yakunat: Does it mean you do not have a relationship in school?

Yakunat: We have oh, but the teachers will not know and other students that know can not report us. If they do, we will find a reason to always punish them and we will even deny it before the teachers. They (teachers) will believe us because we do report other students to them and we will tell them (teachers) they (students) are trying to set us up.

Agog: Yes, these prefects they always get away with it. Even the prefects in SS 3 do it more. One day a teacher will catch them.

This reaffirms the positioning of power in gender and sexuality in school as guiding contestation between teachers and students, and students of varying ages and classes. Thirdly, young people in Zisan Secondary School also face regulations from community members residing around the school. Reports from young people abound with accounts of how

community members have "caught" and reported to the school authority, several students who were found behaving in ways that contradict the constructed innocence associated with young people regarding their gender and sexuality.

Through my interaction with young people and teachers in the school, the discourse of sexuality and gender appears to simultaneously recognise young people's sexualities and position them as children whose sexualities should be suppressed and only expressed in adulthood. The construction of young sexualities in Zisan Secondary School as a social problem makes it imperative for the school to become restrictive in controlling these "risk-laden" sexualities. Teachers' concerns about the "dangers" attached to young sexualities, makes the school authorities to continue to improvise ways of controlling young people and ensuring that they act in ways that suit their perceived innocence, thereby averting this looming "threat". I categorize forms of regulations in Zisan Secondary School into four categories: Cultural silence, which I discussed extensively in Chapter Five regarding the absence of sexuality education curriculum in the school; restrictive discourse; shaming and corporal punishment. I discussed the three categories in the subsequent sections.

### **Policing Young People's Sexualities through Restrictive Discourses in School**

During my early days in the school, I observed that each time I approached a group of students, they always stopped mid-way into any discussion they were having. Whenever I asked what they were discussing, they brought up a new topic and would always insist it was what they were talking about. Through these experiences, I understood the fear among young people of teachers and other adults, finding out that they were in discussions about sex and sexuality. This was the case when I gained acceptance from the students, and we got to talk about sex freely; students always panicked and stopped talking at the sight of a teacher approaching. The restrictive environment in Zisan Secondary School allows only for discussions of sexuality that have to do with abstinence; this is considered to fall within the domain of morality. I discussed in Chapter Five how some NGOs came to the school to talk to girls about their sexuality. Such discussions were dominated by personal hygiene, and the construction of sexual desires among young people as immoral and a social vice capable of destroying their future. This suggests schools as institutions that privilege "rationality" over bodily desires (Paechter, 2004).

In this way, constructing young people's sexuality allows for only a few ranges of behaviours that young people are compelled to conform to. These restrictions are extended to the playground as observed by Ms Zanak when she mentioned that:

There are some of them [students], when you see the way they play, a female student with the male student, at times you begin to ask whether this student is aware that he is not supposed to play like that with the opposite sex. You see them holding each other, jumping on each other's body and all that. But through the school, they are being told that you as a female student there are some things that you are not supposed to, most especially you should not be amid the male students alone and then playing like touching each other. So, the school frowns at it. If you allow them now before you know it, they are pregnant (Ms Zanak, Head Teacher).

I understand these forms of restriction as informed by adults' assumption of young people as inexperienced and risk-laden regarding their sexuality. Interestingly, forms of restrictions go beyond heteronormative norms to the extent of even frowning at heterosexual relationships among boys and girls. Boys and girls are taught to be different and avoid each other even within a mixed-gender school space. In furtherance to implementing these restrictions in the school, the school authority provided a box where students are requested to write and submit an anonymous note reporting students engaged in romantic relationships. The anonymous note should contain the name(s) of the "defaulting" students, and their classes so that the school could follow up on such cases. Although the school authority understood this process as a means of advancing its control over young people who have been constructed as vulnerable in the school, it sparked a lot of debates among students who opposed this policy. Students and some teachers were concerned about the possibility of some students capitalising on this means to wrongly implicate other students with whom they have problems. Eventually, reports from students revealed how some students were punished unjustly due to the notes that were dropped in the box. Due to agitations by students and some teachers, this policy was later rescinded by the school authorities.

Further restrictions on students' sexualities imply that when caught in a romantic relationship or having sex, students are often being counselled by the guidance and counselling unit on the need to abstain from relationships and sex, sometimes their parents are invited to the school to be informed about it. Other times, such students are made to serve some form of punishment. There are instances where such cases are treated as diseases that need to be prevented from spreading, therefore expelling such students from the school is assumed to be a form of "damage control" to protect other students. Ms Zanak commented that, "...they are being expelled from school so that they will not infect the other ones". Expulsion of students is common with cases of pregnancy. Girls that get pregnant while in school are often expelled from the school. This is problematic because it deprives young people of agency in their construction of identities, and distorts their learning process. Allen (2007) argues that young people's ability to exercise power through deploying agency in constructing their realities

enables them to make the right choices, and gives them greater control over the practice of safer sexual behaviours and attaining healthier livelihoods.

### **Regulating Young Sexualities through the Act of Shaming in School**

One Friday morning, while attending Ms Doney's class, the Principal came in with two students, a boy and a girl. The students had the hems of their shirts tied together. After the students' usual greeting to the Principal, she apologised to Ms Doney for disrupting her class and asked the students to listen to what the two students had to say. The girl went on to say, "Good morning class, we were caught in the bush doing what young people should not do [referring to having sex], so we advise you that when you come to school, stay in your class and study don't go around doing what is not good". The principal addressed the class and told them how she was ready to embarrass anyone who would not abstain from immoral acts in the school. I later learned that the Principal took the students to all the classes in the school in the same manner, after which she made them kneel in the middle of the school until closing hours. The act of shaming as used by the principal, was to serve as deterrence to other students who may want to engage in such "immoral" acts. It was, however, criticised by some teachers who felt the principal's action was out of line, as there was no proper investigation before she went ahead to shame them. Teachers understood this act as capable of upsetting the affected students' learning process, who will feel ashamed of themselves. To students who are psychologically weak, this could negatively affect their attendance in school, and if not properly handled, results to their dropping out of school.

Interestingly, the act of shaming, as reported above, created different forms of reaction among students. These reactions were divided along with gender differentiation. Young people's reaction to the incident was inclined towards applauding the boy for being a conqueror and constructing the girl as immoral and cheap. Although both were allegedly caught in the act, the boy gained more respect among his friends, who cheered him for daring to have sex with a girl during school hours. On the other hand, the girl experienced scornful attitudes from the same boys who thought she was "cheap" and girls who referred to her as a "disgrace to womanhood" for allowing a boy to have sex with her in the bush. The act of shaming was supposed to have the same effect on both genders. Unfortunately, the girl suffered more from it and as I later heard, she stopped attending school for some time. This indicates the inclination of cultural norms and values towards favouring masculinities over femininities, especially in a patriarchal society. Such practices celebrate boys for a particular act, and frown at girls who are engaged in the same acts for which the boy is complimented. This emphasises the divisions of gender

boundaries, and exposing girls to various forms of victimisation. For example, a girl that is pregnant while in school will be expelled, but her male partner in the same school will be allowed to continue with his studies. Sometimes, the boy – whether a student or not, will not even be known, let alone punished.

### **Regulating Young Sexualities through Corporal Punishment in the School**

During my stay in Zisan Secondary School, corporal punishment has been used to control the sexualities of young people who have been culturally defined as non-conforming to the assumed innocence of young people. Young people caught in romantic relationships, or reported making such attempts were subjected to corporal punishments such as flogging, kneeling under the sun for long hours, and/or cutting grass in the field. I recorded an experience of such in my research diary on 25<sup>th</sup>/11/2019 thus:

Upon arriving at the school today, I saw Didam kneeling in front of the staff room; Didam is one of the buff-up boys I befriended in my fieldwork's early stages. Beside Didam, was a teacher standing with a cane and a female student. Although I was curious about what was happening, I decided to go into an SS 2 class closer to the scene to observe what was happening through the window. I was unable to hear what the conversation was about. However, Didam eventually was flogged five lashes of the cane and was told to get a bucket and wash the staff toilet. I later decided to follow him to the toilet to inquire about what happened. Didam informed me that the girl reported him to the teacher for telling her that he loved her and wanted her to be his girlfriend. He further explained to me how genuine his affection towards the girl was. Although being a buff-up guy, who constructs relationships devoid of feelings and affection, Didam, in this case indicated being genuine and described his intention towards her as pure. Despite being punished by the teacher and warned to abstain from making advances at the girl, Didam insisted that he will continue to express his feelings towards her hoping that she will understand and accept him against all odds, but this time he will rather wait until after school hours.

Here, reflecting on my experience as a young person in school (I discussed this in Chapter One as part of the motivation for my study) where I was punished for singing a song defined by my teacher as immoral. I see the enduring influence of culture and traditions that continue to suppress the freedom that young people have towards expressing their sexual desires. Cultural conceptions of sexuality continue to deny young people's place as sexual beings and being forced to behave in ways that present them as asexual. Through my experience at Zisan Secondary School, I see these restrictions manifesting in the forms of gender relations and dynamics that exist in the school. I discussed earlier in Chapter Five how teachers construct girls as vulnerable and so the need to protect them from "predatory" masculinities. Teachers constructing femininities in this way makes it possible for the girl to report Didam to the teacher whom she believed could help protect her from Didam's perceived destructive masculinity. From the experience above, I understand the use of corporal punishment in the school to achieve two purposes; first, it seeks to punish an offence in the short-term and set an example

for other students who intend to act in the same manner. In the long-term, it is aimed at changing the behaviours of young people into being consistent with the ethical expectations of adult teachers and the school authority.

However, I see this practice as being counter-productive. In a way, young people are sexual beings who naturally experience forms of biological stimulations that could lead them to explorative behaviours regarding the understanding and constructing of their sexual identities. In line with this, the use of corporal punishment may be counter-productive and may not achieve its desired goal. For example, despite being punished, Didam insisted he will continue to make advances at the girl until she accepts him. At this point, he does not care much about the possible punishment he could face if he continues in this regard. Therefore, even when corporal punishment becomes effective, it only creates fear in young people and may only deter them from acting in such ways only in the presence of the adult that could punish them. It could further result in gender-based violence where boys who have been punished in the school may wish to exert revenge on the girls that reported them. Didam's resolve to continue making advances at the girl raises concern on the need to protect girls against forms of harassment. Although the school could be critiqued for constructing young people's sexualities as problematic and subjecting "defaulters" to corporal punishment, it is important that the school provide a safety net for girls by encouraging girls to report cases of sexual harassment by boys, and other adult teachers in the school.

Due to the fear and pain young people experience during corporal punishment, there is also a possibility of admitting to behaviours they were never part of. During my FGD with SS 2 girls, Yachat reported one of such incidents saying:

Sir, I once had a friend in this school who was accused of having a boyfriend. She told me she never had, and then she was taken to the Principal's office and the Principal asked her if she had a boyfriend. She told the Principal she doesn't have a boyfriend. The principal called the security man and asked him to flog her; after flogging, she felt the pain and now said yes, she has a boyfriend. The Principal asked if they have ever kissed, she said no. They flogged the girl again, and she had to say yes. Then she [Principal] asked her if he had ever slept with her. she said never, nothing like that has ever happened. The Principal insisted but the girl told her that even if they beat her till death, she will not accept what she has never done again. She has consented to what she doesn't know because she thought they would stop beating her.

This again exemplifies the kind of meanings that adults attach to the sexualities of young people. The unfavourable school environment does not only force young people to act in adult determined ways, but also inflicts pains on young people who act in ways that contravene adult's expectations of them. This prevents young people from being expressive regarding their sexualities and so would lack the appropriate recognition and guidance from adults who are

expected to have more experience. Consequently, it denies young people the needed agency to experience healthy sexual lives.

### **How Young People in Zisan Secondary School Navigate Existing Forms of Regulations in doing Sexuality within the School**

Through my discussions above, it is clear that the rationale behind regulating young sexualities in the school is to prevent young people from engaging in sex at early stages of their development and to protect them from the “adverse” consequences of sex. Monk (2001), in his study on the developments of sex education in England, argues that sex education information in schools is often legitimised through the discourse of welfare, protection and 'child saving' geared towards emphasising the view of young people as dependent and innocent as opposed to sexually active beings. Through policing young people’s behaviours, the school invests significantly in producing asexual identities. However, young people in school also invest heavily in constructing identities along with sexualities. In this way, young people can navigate around existing regulations by developing alternative means of expressing their sexualities. During my FGDs with a mixed group of SS 1 students, the following conversation ensued when discussing ways teachers regulate student's behaviours:

- Chechet: Sir [referring to me], our teachers are very strict.
- Zacham: That’s true; if they catch you with a girl, you are in trouble.
- Kuyet: They can be very wicked. We cannot even have male friends they [teachers] will conclude that we are dating, and they will so punish you and even call your parents. If you are not lucky, they will even expel you.
- Katung: Yes, we are also smart. Mostly we pretend in school like nothing is happening. But some students do sneak to SS 4 down there [pointing the direction of the bush down the school]. Those that don’t go there, we go to other places a bit far from the school like “Dixon Hotel and Resort”<sup>19</sup> there we interact freely, we play games like snooker [pool], table tennis, we drink our alcohol, you can even kiss your girl freely outside without any fear. If you have the sexual urge at night, you can have sex in a corner.

Although my question to the students was about the general restrictions they experienced in school, they were able to swiftly move the discussions to talk about restrictions regarding their sexualities. They spoke with so much passion about their sexual experiences. This, in a way illustrates the value that young people attach to their sexualities as forming an integral part of their everyday reality. Denying this fact could make young people act in ways that could be detrimental to their sexual well-being. They are likely to engage in such sexual practices as engaging in clandestine sexual relationships due to the fear of being punished. As sexual

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<sup>19</sup>Dixon is a pseudonym I use to refer to a resort located about two kilometres from the school.

beings, they are likely to engage in unprotected sex because they fear that they will be scolded or even reported to their parents when they go to buy condoms (Zaggi, 2014). Another strategy young people in the school used to navigate around regulations was to avoid each other when in school. A boy and a girl in a relationship will walk past each other in school without any form of greeting, but would meet after school as sexual partners. This practice as indicated by students, helps to avoid the prying eyes of teachers seeking culprits in this regard.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter presents evidence of young people's sexualities. It shows how boys and girls in Zisan Secondary School interact and form relationships in ways that reflect their sexual values, which are constructed along with gender identities. In line with Allen (2007), findings from my study present schools as settings where activities are organised with an inclination towards cultural norms that understand and construct young people, and especially young women, as non-sexual beings. Consequently, engaging in contradictory discourses that simultaneously recognise the existence of young people's sexuality and constructing them as innocent and asexual (Francis, 2018a). Through these contradictory practices, school cultures tend to undermine young people's sexual agency as they seek their sexual wellbeing. Here, I emphasise the need to see young people as sexual beings that could express sexual desires in relationships with others.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Summary of Research Findings, Recommendation, and Implication for Practice**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents an overview of the key research findings that emerged from my data analysis. The research focuses on how young people understand and construct their gender and sexual identities in social interaction within a regulated school space. It provides insight into how gender is polarised in relation to sexuality, with boys positioned as instigators of sexuality and girls as objects of men's gaze within a heteronormative school space. In line with this, the findings raise implications for ways that schools could support values that recognise young people's agency in their construction of social identities. The popular conception of young people presents them as adults in the making. Thereby constructing young people as subordinates and passive actors in the socialisation process. Young people should not be seen in this way, rather, as agential beings whose identities are embedded in their everyday interaction within and outside school and should be considered worthy of study in their own right. Thus, I present an overview of the findings by highlighting the major themes that emerged from my data analysis. I further make recommendations that could help create a favourable condition for young people to develop gender and sexual identities in ways that will ensure their overall wellbeing.

#### **Summary of Key Findings**

In this section, I discussed my research findings on the meanings young people attach to their gender and sexuality in a regulated school space. First, I discussed how the school space produces gendered identities among young school goers, I further looked at how young people invoke the use of gender categories in their understanding of femininities and masculinities as being influenced by heteronormative discourses within the school. The section further discusses the positionality of power in doing gender and how young people's sexualities are policed and its bearing on the construction of social identities both by them and others in society.

## **How Zisan Secondary School Supports Young People's Performance of Gender and Sexuality**

Contextualising schools as complex spaces where gender and sexualities are performed entails understanding the interplay of gender and sexuality in school. This means recognising the influences of material and non-material practices and their bearing on young people's understanding and construction of social identities. Studies by Bhana & Pattman (2010); Fields & Payne (2016); Mayeza (2015); Ullah & Skelton (2016); Francis, Brown, Mcallister, Mosime, Thani, Reygan, Dlamini, Nogela & Muller (2019) have found schools to provide spaces for young people to perform gender through their everyday interaction. Through the organisation of school routines, young people's behaviours in school are influenced by heteronormative constructions of gendered identities within the school space. Moreover, in my study, I find these spaces in Zisan Secondary School heavily regulated by existing cultural norms that position the gender and sexual expressions of young people as problematic.

Consequently, young people in school lack the freedom to express agency in constructing their social identities. Instead, they are regularly subjected to the control of adult teachers and expected to act in ways that reflect cultural heteronormative values as is obtainable in the society where the school is located. Despite these regulations, young people sometimes resist by navigating existing regulations and behaving in ways that suit their interpretations of social reality, thereby contravening adult expectations of them, such as constructing the "bad boys and bad girls" identity, which I discussed in Chapter Six.

Heteronormative values are reflected in the ways school routines are organised to reflect gender differentiation among both staff and students. The unofficial arrangement of staffrooms, the nature of assembling students, as well as the nature of classroom sitting arrangement and classroom competitions were organised in the school to reflect gender differentiation both among students and teachers. Although a mixed-gender school, boys and girls are trained to be conscious of their gender differences. Boys and girls are encouraged to adopt and express characters that are in tune with Connell's concepts of "hegemonic masculinities" and "emphasised femininities," respectively (Connell, 1987). Teachers in the school showed more concern towards protecting girls, whom they construct as a vulnerable gender category, from the perceived "natural" aggression of boys' masculinities. In this way, girls are burdened with the responsibility of controlling both their sexualities and those of the boys. This is reflected in my study, where female teachers during Gender Assembly (and NGOs that visit the school) only attend to girls by distributing sanitary pads to them and teaching them to abstain from

having relationships with boys. The information given to girls often constructs relationships between boys and girls as a social problem that needs to be controlled and avoided.

Further findings on the ways the school environment influences young people's understanding of gender and sexuality is reflected in the absence of a sexuality education curriculum in the school. As was stated by Ms Cynthia saying, "We only advised them to refrain from sexual activity and how to take care of their bodies." This indicates the silences around the discourse of sexuality in the school. Silence in this regard is influenced by the popular cultural perception, as was also found by other Nigerian studies, that exposing young people to issues of gender and sexuality will expose them to early sexual initiation, unwanted pregnancy, and the contraction of STIs, including HIV/AIDs (Adepoju, 2005; Adetunji, 2013; Nakpodia, 2012). Although some teachers reported educating young people in the school on issues relating to their sexualities, a further look at the kind of information they passed to students reveals domination of a taxonomy of dos and don'ts, centred on the discourse of abstinence and the cultural value attached to being a virgin before marriage. Thereby informing young people that their sexualities are problematic, hence the need for adult control.

Here, I argue that such a restrictive discourse could be counter-productive in terms of the aims of those teachers who invoke this as it may encourage school students to become more aware of their own sexual desires and identifications. Consequently, such punitive discourses in relation to sexuality may ironically, create spaces for conversations and expressions of gender and sexualities in ways that do not conform to the nature of information passed to students by teachers in school. This claim is evident in my study when teachers complained of the rising cases of sexual activities among students (as if sex is a disease) despite the restrictive discourses they are exposed to. In line with this concern, teachers in my interviews expressed their support for the introduction of comprehensive sexuality education in the school. However, some other teachers still fear that introducing a comprehensive sexuality curriculum could lead to an increase in 'sexual promiscuity among young people in the school. Therefore, they supported an age-specific sexuality education curriculum that will give young people the information that suits their ages, as argued by Kolawole, (2010).

### **Young People Doing Gender and Sexuality in School**

By observing and interacting with young people in school, I draw on the significance they attach to their gender identity. Young people's identity construction is often influenced by the societal and cultural understanding of gender in binary terms. This cultural understanding classifies gender into two distinct oppositional forms of masculinities and femininities. It

assumes that the gender and sexualities of young people are naturally aligned with the individual's sex assigned at birth as being a boy or a girl. The social environment in which the school is located is dominated by such essentialist cultural conceptions of gender, and tends to reinforce this conception of gender as a guiding principle for young people's behaviour while in school. Teachers taught boys to behave differently from girls and vice versa. In Zisan Secondary School, young people's gender is given an essentialist meaning in that, boys and girls were seen to have naturally distinctive forms of behaviour from one another. Thereby restricting them to limited forms of behaviour that have been culturally defined as masculine and feminine. Young people found or "caught" acting in ways that contradict culturally defined gender roles and values were made to face some form of resentment or punishment from teachers and students alike.

Given these restrictions, young people sometimes conform to the dominant discourse of gender polarity by constructing forms of identities in heteronormative ways, as exemplified in the construction of the "real boys" and "real girls" as well as the "baff-up guys and slay queens" identities which I discussed in Chapter Six. In other instances, they can resist and navigate around these restrictions to construct other forms of identities that contradict normative gender identifications, which present gender identities as fixed and natural. Rather, promoting fluid gender boundaries in identity constructions, in this case, the formation of the tomboy and boy-girl identities as well as the "bad-boys" and "bad-girls" identities.

These findings from my research resonate with the argument of James & Prout (1997) by critiquing the top-down adult-centric conceptualisation of socialisation which present adult behaviours as a measuring standard for the behaviours of young people. Rather, it opens spaces for thinking about alternative understandings of socialisation which engage with young people as active agents in social interactions having expert knowledge about their reality and from whom adults could learn. This understanding entails reciprocity between young people and adults by learning about young people's narratives regarding their social world and how it influences and affects them (Pattman, 2015).

Sporting activities organised in the school along with gender categorisation are being sexualised by young people and serve as a basis for selecting partners and establishing forms of heterosexual relationships. The game of football is the most popular sporting event in the school and is generally organised for boys only. Although football is constructed in this way by the school, young people can negotiate and ensure that the femininities of girls also play an important role in a supposedly masculine sport. Good performance from boys playing football

serves to promote their status and make them likeable to girls. Girls in my study refer to this set of boys as celebrities. On the other hand, the girls standing as spectators around the field of play motivates the boys to play better, some players admitted to playing out their best in order to impress the girls.

Although forms of gender regimes exist among young people in Zisan Secondary School that seek to promote the domination of boys over girls, girls sometimes resist this domination by engaging in activities that are highly gendered and, in this case, constructed as boys' activities. In this way, they challenge the normative categorisation of gender roles even within a heteronormative school system. Drawing from the experiences of students in my study, the school system in Nigeria must be reorganised to ensure that young people are allowed to operate as agential beings in school, thereby exploring learning options, and constructing such identities that efficiently define their social reality. In this way, adults will also learn from young people about the best way to contribute to the overall development of young people.

### **The Positionality of Power in Doing Gender and its Bearing on Gender “Transgression”**

Gender regimes in the school reflect cultural perceptions of gender power that seek to promote the domination of masculinities over femininities. The school's cultural conception of femininities as a vulnerable gender category provides the basis for boys' construction of their hegemonic masculine identities as superior over girls' femininities and other boys' alternative masculinities. The expressions of hegemonic masculinities and emphasised femininities create a form of gender regime that constructs some boys and girls as “transgressive” when viewed within the context of the essentialist ideas of gender. In the school, forms of gender “transgressive” behaviours among boys and girls took two different dimensions; while boys whose characters depict weakness, calmness, and dependence are frowned upon and ridiculed by their peers, “transgressive” behaviours by girls such as being adventurous in character, high spirited, and independent and drawn to the activities that have been culturally associated with boys are admired by their peers in school. The ascendancy accorded masculinities makes it possible for “transgressive” girls to be viewed in this way. On the other hand, “transgressive” boys are begrudged because they are seen to express forms of identities that demean their supposed masculine status, which has been associated with power and authority. For example, In Chapter Six, I discussed how Zicham was being ridiculed in school for being “weak” or when he became frustrated and cried. Young people associated such behaviours with girls, whom they construct as having weak and dependent identities. In line with Connell (1995),

hegemonic masculinities are caricatures of masculinities to which boys aspire but do not achieve. In my study, the failure of some boys to attain hegemonic masculinities generates pains and problems for them as they assert themselves in opposition to girls, and also to other boys who are perceived to be possessing hegemonic ideals.

Interestingly, in the social construction of sports by young people in the school, gender did not feature as a significant source of identification. Sports were not defined by young people along gender polarised lines except during competitive football games like inter-house sports. Although sporting activities were categorised by the school authorities along gender lines, participation in any of the sports meant for the opposite gender, did not in any way demean one's gender identity as being masculine or feminine. Sporting events were viewed by young people in the school as a pleasurable event that any gender could participate in, as long as one enjoyed the process. In this way, girls could join boys to play uncompetitive football games and boys could join girls in *suwe* and skipping without any fear of resentment from other students or teachers. However, when such games become formalised and competitive, it becomes a strict gender categorised event.

While the terms boy-girl and tomboy could easily be associated with “transgressive” sexualities in the adult world, in my study, young people used these terms differently. For young people in my study, boy-girl and tomboy do not reflect one’s sexual identity; rather, the terms are used (especially the boy-girl) to police gender “transgressive” behaviours among non-hegemonic gender categories. However, this does not mean the absence of sexuality discourses among young people. I understand this construction to be informed by the unfriendly legal provisions that proscribe non-heterosexuality within and outside the school environment. In this regard, those constructed as tomboys and boy-girl also engaged in heterosexual relationships within the school.

### **How Young People’s Sexualities are Policed in the School**

Contrary to adult assumptions that young people should be sexually inactive until they become adults, many of the young people in my study could speak about their sexual experiences in ways that reflect their concerns. Gender plays a vital role in the forms of relationships young people are involved in, and the meanings they attached to such relationships through social interaction. These interactions can only be understood within heteronormative discourses that present the initiation of romantic relationships as the prerogative of masculine boys. Consequently, social relationships are better understood by recognising heterosexuality as the foundation for social interaction within the school space.

Adult perceptions of young people in the school suggest a contradiction of values. Teachers in my study reported young people to be sexually active, yet they also hold on to the idea that young people are “innocent” and inexperienced about their sexualities. This perception provides the basis for the implementation of various forms of regulations in the school as a means of policing the sexualities of young people. In this regard, the discourse of young people's sexualities is often silenced. The few times it is spoken about, discussions are restricted to the subjects of abstinence and disease and in discursive associations made between schoolgirls and pregnancy, which calls attention to the morality of such girls. Those found to act in ways that contradict adult expectations about the sexual innocence of young people are being punished either through shaming or corporal punishment. Or in extreme cases, expulsion from the school. Here I understand the denial of young people's sexual desires and the continuous positioning of it within the purview of morality as capable of retarding the advancement of sexual subjectivities among young people.

Drawing from findings in my study, young peoples' expressions of sexual desires are inevitable. If the desired goal of having a healthy and “saved” adult in the future is to be achieved, then the needs and interests of young people should be considered both within and outside the school environment. In this way, young people could exercise agency in understanding and constructing their identities and at the same time act within socially acceptable norms that take cognisance of them as sexual beings. I understand that young people who have a positive understanding of themselves as legitimate sexual beings will be better positioned to select ways of action that support their sexual wellbeing.

## **Recommendations**

Drawing from my study, the following are the key problems I uncovered regarding young people's gender and sexuality in the school: (1) The school is organised in heteronormative ways that do not support the fluidity of gender boundaries. This limits young people's understanding and performance of gender and sexualities in school to only a few culturally defined options to reflect dominant forms of femininities and masculinities. (2) So much value and power in doing gender are positioned with dominant gender identities, thereby defining alternative gender identities as transgressive. Consequently, subservient and culturally defined transgressive gender identities are exposed to forms of gender bullying and, in some cases, violence. (3) There is the continuous construction of young people's sexualities as a social problem; therefore, the dominant assumption that young people should be asexual. Maintaining this assumption translates to young people being subjected to forms of strict regulations that

deny them the needed agency to understand and perform gender in ways that reflect their reality. (4) The inability of teachers to understand young people as active agents constructing social identities, thereby approaching the process of learning and social interaction within the school from an adult-centric viewpoint which constructs young people as ignorant about issues that concern them. This view takes for granted the assumption that adults behaviours are considered in society as measuring tools for the behaviours of young people. I consider this problematic in understanding and promoting young people's wellbeing and my study carries implication for ways of engaging with young people as knowledgeable regarding issues that concern them. In the light of these problems, I make the following recommendations that will help advance the livelihood of young people in school.

### **Creating a Supportive Environment in Schools for Young People Performing Gender and Sexuality**

Given the interconnectedness of the school and the society, there is continuous domination of heteronormative values in the way Zisan Secondary School is organised. Gender polarity becomes emphasised in school routines among both teachers and students. This creates an unfavourable environment for young people who may want to act in ways that contradict the cultural heteronormative definitions of gender. The school must be re-organised to propagate gender-neutral values such as downplaying the emphasis made on gender differentiation in organising school routines.

The arrangement of students in the assembly ground, sitting arrangement in classrooms, students' activities during break time, and the allocation of responsibilities to students heavily invest in gender polarity and differentiation. To address this, I suggest that students could be made to stand in lines according to their year of study rather than based on their gender during assembly. There should be fewer restrictions to young people selecting a seat in the classrooms. The school will need to normalise the spaces within the school as gender-neutral spaces that both boys and girls could collectively use for social interactions during break time. Also, the allocation of responsibilities should be done in ways that encourage both boys and girls to take on responsibilities irrespective of their gender or based on merit (capability). Re-Organising school routines in this way will assist in creating less consciousness in young people about their gender difference and will help them to understand and act in ways that resonate with gender neutrality, thereby dismantling existing gender boundaries in the school.

The absence of a comprehensive sexuality education program in Zisan Secondary School needs to be addressed. In this study, I understand the teaching and learning of gender and sexuality

to be a key element in achieving a sustainable school environment. Although the school curricula are organised and implemented by the State Ministry of Education, schools acting under the Ministry also have some leverage to influence the activities of the Ministry. I suggest that principals of schools should engage with the State Ministry of Education and request for the revision and implementation of existing, but not in-use, sexuality curriculum in schools across the state, because of its importance. This is achievable because, during my interviews, teachers indicated great support for the introduction of a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum in Zisan Secondary School that will help to educate young people about their sexuality. Teachers were of the opinion that the teaching of sexuality education in the school would help to reduce the negative effects of unprotected sex such as pregnancy, contraction of STIs and unsafe abortions. In the meantime, I suggest that Zisan Secondary School could intensify its effort by creating opportunities and inviting resource persons to address the students (both male and female) on issues concerning their gender and sexuality.

A major limiting factor to the implementation of a sexuality education curriculum in the school was the influence of cultural beliefs and taboos associated with young people's sexualities and the legal implication of same-sex sexualities in Nigeria. Cultural beliefs are premised on the assumption that young people should not be exposed to issues of sexualities. On the other hand, legal injunctions have sanctioned issues of non-heterosexuality in Nigeria. Given this, some teachers may be reluctant to discuss the sexualities of young people, especially gender variant and non-heterosexual identities. While the school can do little or nothing regarding the legal sanction, I suggest that cultural values as these should not be ignored when developing a sexuality curriculum for schools. Rather, there should be a multi-stakeholders' approach to developing sexuality education content.

This process should harness opinions from different stakeholders, including government policymakers, NGOs, traditional leaders, parents, teachers, religious leaders, and students. This collaboration should effectively recognise and integrate the diverse contrasting cultural values and interests towards achieving a unified goal - ensuring the sexual wellbeing of young people. It is also pertinent that the school introduces sexuality education programmes to have a more intentional focus on gender and sexuality with its allotted lesson period. Consequently, there should be the employment of qualified sexuality education teachers to help teach the curriculum in the school by providing a conducive atmosphere for young people to engage in discussions regarding their sexual life. There should be continuous training of sexuality education teachers regarding the content and methods of teaching of sexuality education. To

achieve this, it is important that sexuality educators be exposed to teaching methods that engage with young people as legitimate sexual subjects that have knowledge about their sexuality and could contribute to the pedagogic process along with a wide range of sexuality discourses, from disease to desire (Francis, 2010c). In my study, my involvement with young people in non-judgmental ways during conversations made it possible for students to speak more openly about their sexual practices than they would or could with their teachers. This raises implication for ways that sexuality educators could engage with young people without constructing young people that have engaged in sex as deviating from existing norms. In this way, life orientation teachers could educate young people about safety practices regarding sexuality, such as the practice of safe sex.

The interconnectivity of the school and the wider society is inevitable. As I found in my study, teachers and young people's understanding and construction of gender and sexual identities is influenced by the school and the external environment where the school is located. My study provides evidence that supports the claim that the school is a micro unit of the society. This suggests that there are interchanges of values, norms and cultures between the school and society, providing a basis to argue that the society influences and is influenced by the school. In this light, I argue that introducing a comprehensive student-centred sexuality curriculum in the school will help change existing gender stereotypical knowledge held by both teachers and students in the school and by extension the society at large. As Francis (2018) puts it, an effective sexuality education curriculum should address young people as legitimate sexual beings. It should have less emphasis on the themes of danger, diseases, and prevention regarding young people's sexualities. Rather, such curriculum should encourage discussions on themes of relationships, pleasure and agency among young people. Furthermore, this new curriculum must take cognisance of the diverse social characteristics of young people in school, and how these characteristics influence young people's understanding and experience of their sexualities (Francis & Kuhl, 2020; Francis, 2022).

Young people in my study view teachers as role models from whom they seek to learn and copy ways of livelihoods. This implies that a change in the attitude of teachers regarding how they conceive and perform gender in the school is expected to have a large impact on young people's views and understanding of their social identities. Given this, I suggest that teachers should be trained to adopt new ways of thinking about gender and sexuality by repudiating the widely held ideas of "oversocialised" (Wrong, 1961) understanding of children as presented by the sex-role socialisation theory. The sex-role socialisation theory constructs young people

as passive beings who only adopt and reproduce static and natural sets of identities passed to them by adults. Rather, my study suggests that teachers in the school should see gender and sexuality as social constructs which are produced in everyday interactions. In this way, teachers will recognise young people's agency, and view young people as active agents in their construction of social identities. There should also be a change in the unconscious distributions of staffroom spaces to reflect less gender polarity. Male and female teachers should consciously move into staffrooms and co-exist with one another. By teachers behaving in non-stereotypical gender ways, young people are encouraged to invest less in positioning themselves as opposites of each other. Thereby, creating an enabling environment for boys and girls to engage in activities normally constructed for the opposite gender.

### **Addressing Gender Bullying Among Young People in Zisan Secondary School**

In his study at a UK school, Mac an Ghaill (1994) suggests that gender power relations are understood in terms of the ways dominant groups oppress subordinate groups during social interaction. In my study, I found social interaction to be organised around forms of gendering that support gender inequalities among groups of young people in the school. Gender bullying in my study took two forms. Firstly, the forms of bullying perpetrated by boys over girls. For example, in my interviews, boys spoke to me about how they would shout at, or even express forms of physical violence towards girls for not respecting them. Disrespecting boys, in this case, is defined by boys as when girls refuse to be submissive to the decisions of boys regarding the use of spaces in classrooms, at the playground or when girls refuse to perform certain tasks assigned to them by the boys in their class. Teachers construct girls in Zisan Secondary School in ways that emphasise their vulnerabilities. Thereby, exposing girls to forms of gender violence by making them susceptible to the victimisation of boys. By promoting heteronormative discourses in Zisan Secondary School, boys in the school believe they are strong, rough, and natural leaders. In this way, boys invest a lot in expressing their domination over girls in school as a way of commanding respect from girls.

Secondly, forms of bullying perpetrated towards boys that perform alternative forms of masculinity, like when they are being called derogatory names like the charlie-charlie/boy-girl or being laughed at and ridiculed by other boys and sometimes exposed to physical violence. I see the ascendancy accorded to hegemonic gender categories as promoting existing forms of gender bullying among young people in the school. In my study, I engaged with gender as a social construct against the essentialist constructions of gender as natural sets of stereotypical opposites. In this way, I see gender as performative through everyday social interaction.

Understanding gender in this way raises possibilities for accommodating alternative gender identities in schools and seeks to inform young people in interaction to relate with each other in ways that reflect fluid gender boundaries and, could accommodate non-hegemonic gender identities.

The preceding section suggests a need to critically engage with issues of gender among young people in school and create conditions that support and sustain alternative forms of gender identities. This will serve as a means of addressing existing forms of gender inequality in the school. In creating this enabling environment, it is important to emphasise the plurality and fluidity of gender boundaries as well as highlight the consequences of persuading young people to conform to dominant gender values as so defined by society. In my study, teachers' construction of femininity makes it almost impossible for girls to challenge forms of bullying in school due to the fear of being labelled "stubborn" by teachers. I understand such constructions as informed by the patriarchal constructions of hegemonic masculinities and the value attached to it in society. Therefore, it becomes pertinent for teachers and the school authorities to recognise the vulnerabilities of non-hegemonic masculine boys and girls in school and provide channels for victims of bullying to report such cases.

Here, in addition to providing channels for victims to report cases of bullying, I suggest that teachers in the school should closely supervise young people's interaction in school to control and punish boys found bullying girls or other boys with alternative masculinities. There should be a change in the preference shown to students constructed as "real boys" and "real girls" an identity that defines hegemonic masculine boys and emphasised feminine girls, respectively. Through an effective teaching and learning curriculum, boys and girls should be taught about the fluidity of gender and the need to acquire gender-neutral values. This will ensure young people freely exercise agency in their understanding and expression of gender identities.

### **Addressing the Regulation of Young People's Gender and Sexualities in School**

Existing discourses of gender and sexuality and schooling have presented evidence for the preference that schools have towards abstinent students. Zisan Secondary School is dominated by the assumption that sexuality should be reserved for adulthood. Hence, the construction of young people's sexual behaviours as problematic, thereby emphasising the need to regulate such "destructive" behaviours among young people. Existing forms of regulations in the school as silence, shaming, and corporal punishment, creates an unfavourable environment for young people's interaction as sexual beings and serves as a form of gendered violence towards sexually active students. It constructs young people who engage in sex as bad and immoral and

exposes them to forms of pain. The discourse of sexual innocence ascribed to young people is problematic as it denies young people the needed support to lead healthy sexual lives. On the contrary, it exposes young people to risky sexual practices. In my study, to avoid being punished by teachers, young people engage in sexual activities in clandestine conditions that could be detrimental to their physical and psychological wellbeing. For example, young people going to have sex in the bushes and other hidden locations at night, as well as lacking the needed information regarding the practice of safe sex.

In agreement with Allen (2008), I see the view that young people are sexually inexperienced as wrong and misleading. This view seeks to legitimise the domination of adult values in the discourse of young people's sexualities. I suggest the need to change the conception of young people in this way and begin to acknowledge them as sexual beings capable of expressing sexual desires in relationships. Recognising young people in this way entails teachers and the school authority to deconstruct already held ideas of young people's sexuality as a social problem and reconstructing values that present sexualities as an irrefutable part of young people's lives. In this way, the school will provide enabling spaces for young people to engage in discussions with their peers and teachers on the discourses of abstinence, sexual pleasure, contraception, affection, sexual orientation, and decision-making in relationships. This practice will ensure that young people are well informed about their sexual wellbeing. Consequently, enabling them to understand and construct their gender and sexual identities in ways that reflect their social reality.

### **Correcting Adults' Perception of Young People and its Implication for Social Practice**

A major criticism of the Sex-role Socialisation Theory of gender and sexuality is that it addresses young people as passive agents in their construction of social reality. The theory gives credence to the position of adults as the legitimate agents of young people's socialisation. Unfortunately, I find this idea dominating the forms of relationships that teachers enter with young people in Zisan Secondary School. Teachers construct young people in school as passive agents who are expected to adopt static and natural sets of identities being passed to them by adults. Conducting an ethnography with young people, I take a critical stand against this assumption. I find it problematic in two ways. Firstly, it deprives young people of the opportunity of self-expression. Secondly, it denies adults the opportunity to learn from the wealth of knowledge that young people have about their social reality.

Reflecting on my fourth research question; what are the pedagogic implications of engaging in ethnographic research with school attending youth, I engaged with young people as active agents that have a significant role to play in constructing their social identities. This approach raise implications for a good pedagogic practice that teachers could exemplify in their teaching practices especially, the teaching of sexuality education. By establishing friendly and non-judgmental relationships with young people in school, they could speak freely about their gender and sexuality in ways they would or could not do with their teachers. Engaging with students in my study as experts from whom I wanted to learn provides good models for the teaching and learning of sexuality education in the school.

I suggest the need for teachers, especially teachers in the guidance and counselling unit of Zisan Secondary School, to become more like student centred researchers by engaging in friendly relationships with young people in school, especially when discussing issues of sexual health. During my conversation with young people, they expressed concern about their teachers getting to know the content of our conversations regarding their sexuality. For example, as I discussed in Chapter Four, at the beginning of my fieldwork, young people were worried if I came to collect information and report to the school authority so they would be punished or expelled. However, I eventually, I gained their trust, and they were able to talk to me without fear of being punished. Although an adult, the non-authoritative relationships I engaged with young people made it possible for me to learn about their social world and how they constructed and experienced their sexuality. A practice that was not common among their teachers. Developing such non-authoritative relationships by teachers in Zisan Secondary School will provide the space for a young person-centered approach to the teaching and learning process in school. Engaging in a young person-centered approach creates an enabling environment for young people to comfortably speak about their gender and sexuality without fear of resentment from adults. This will provide teachers with information that will help in addressing the concerns of young people about their sexual life (Mayeza, 2015; Francis, 2022).

In my study, I engaged with young people as experts by assuming the position of ignorance and would often ask questions about the meanings they attach to their behaviours. This approach produced rich data that represents the subjective accounts of young people. I suggest that researchers working with young people should adopt this approach by establishing friendly and un-authoritative relationships that give young people the freedom to speak and express their concerns and experiences, especially about their sexual life. This entails that researchers should not conceive young people in research as research subjects from whom they want to

elicit information. Rather, researchers should approach young people as experts in their reality from whom they intend to learn, thereby collectively working towards producing relevant knowledge (Frosh, Pheonix & Pattman, 2001; Pattman, 2013; Pattman, 2015). I argue that this approach will help provide credible information about the experiences of young people. It will also help determine how adults could effectively and efficiently guide young people's behaviours to ensure their whole well-being.

Reflecting on my experiences with young people in my study and the need to ensure young people's healthy livelihood, my study roused the following pertinent questions: What if young people are involved in designing and implementing a sexuality education curriculum? What if young people's opinions are sought for, and considered in drafting the topics that inform the discussions of their gender and sexuality in school? What if schools incorporate the ideas and concerns of young people in developing school rules and regulations? What if policymakers at the government level consider young people's ideas in drafting policies regarding young people's gender and sexuality in society? While my study may not provide answers to all these important questions, it raised implications for ways that adults could engage with young people in pedagogic practices and policy development to ensure the overall wellbeing of young people.

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## Addendum A

### Research Ethics Committee (REC) Approval Letter



#### NOTICE OF APPROVAL

REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form

26 November 2019

Project number: 9768

Project Title: Gender, Sexuality and Schooling: An Ethnography of Young People in a Secondary School in Kaduna State, Nigeria Dear Mr Hilary Zaggi

Your response to stipulations submitted on 31 October 2019 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Humanities.

Please note the following for your approved submission:

#### **Ethics approval period:**

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
25 September 2019	24 September 2020

#### **GENERAL COMMENTS:**

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 (9768) 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
Budget	Budget	04/06/2019	MS Word
Default	Prof. Dennis A Francis CV June 2019	04/06/2019	PDF
Data collection tool	Interview guide with teachers	04/06/2019	MS WORD
Data collection tool	FGD guide with students	04/06/2019	MS WORD
Data collection tool	Observation schedule	04/06/2019	MS WORD
Proof of permission	Institutional Permission	04/06/2019	JPG
Parental consent form	Parent Consent	27/08/2019	MS Word
Assent form	Assent form for minors	27/08/2019	MS word
Proof of permission	Principal Permission Letter	27/08/2019	JPG
Default	Guidance and Counselling Letter	27/08/2019	JPG
Informed Consent Form	Consent form for participants	31/10/2019	MS WORD
Default	REC Response 2	31/10/2019	MS WORD
Research Protocol/Proposal	Final Proposal Edited	31/10/2019	MS Word

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at [cgraham@sun.ac.za](mailto: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:*

*Principles Structures and Processes (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.*

## Addendum B

### Institutional Permission Letter



**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**  
KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA

KDS/MOEST/ESP/475/2017/VOL.I

6<sup>TH</sup> May, 2019

Zaggi, Hilary Yacham  
Department of Sociology,  
University of Stellenbosch,  
Private Bag XI,  
Matieland, 7602,  
Stellenbosch,  
South Africa.

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

Above subject matter refers.

2. I am directed to convey the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's approval to enable the researcher conduct a study titled "**Gender, Sexuality and Schooling; An Ethnographic Study of Young People in a Secondary School in Kaduna State – Nigeria**".

Accept the esteem regards of the Hon. Commissioner now and always.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Yakubu Ubale Salisu'.

Yakubu Ubale Salisu  
D/ESP  
For: Commissioner

## Addendum C

### Principal's Consent Letter



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#### **PRINCIPAL'S CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE SCHOOL**

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My name is Zaggi, Hilary Yacham and I am a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. I would like to request your assistance with my research project entitled **Gender, Sexuality and Schooling; An Ethnography of Young People in a Secondary School in Kaduna State, Nigeria**. Please take some time to read the information presented below regarding the purpose of my research and how I would like [Name of school] to be involved.

#### **A short Introduction to the project:**

This proposed research study intends to ask the following questions – What are the meanings and significance young people attach to gender and sexuality in their account of themselves and in relation to others? How, if at all, are gender and sexuality regulated or produced within the school? How do young people in the study navigate, resist and respond to such regulation? What is the pedagogical implication of doing ethnography with young people in the research context? With these questions in mind, the proposed research aims to understand the ways that students construct their gender and sexual identities through the process of interaction with one another and the social environment within the school space.

#### **The purpose of the project:**

The non-supportive environment created in schools with regards to the discourse of sexuality among young people in Nigeria, especially Northern Nigeria, has continued to present challenges on the ability of young people to exercise agency in their constructions and expressions of gender and sexual identities. This study aims to explore how young people understand and construct gender and sexual identities through social interactions within the school environment. The study seeks to understand these from the students' perspective, exploring how they understand themselves as boys and girls as well as how this understanding is influenced by their social environment.

#### **The involvement of the school:**

As your school fits the criteria for my research, I would like [name of school] to be the school from which I select my participants. If you agree, I would like to include teachers and students in SS 1 and SS 2 to take part in this study as follows:

- Observations on the social interaction process existing among students within the school environment.
- In depth interviews with at least 4 teachers

- Focus Group Discussions with at least 3 groups of students (1 Male only, 1 female only and 1 mixed gender groups)

I will conduct unstructured observations with children both within and outside the classrooms. Within the classroom I will seek to understand the ways students interact with one another when the teacher is in class as well as in the absence of the teacher. Outside the classroom I will observe students and the ways they interact with one another and the school environment. By observing these interactions, I aim to understand the meanings and significance students attach to their gender and sexuality in constructing their identities as being boys and girls. During the observation process, I am likely to engage in informal conversations with students (if the need arises) to understand the meanings behind certain complex themes that may arise in the process of interactions. Students will also be expected to participate in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), this will enable me to understand group dynamics in the process of interaction among students as it concerns the understanding of masculinities and femininity.

I will also conduct interviews with teachers in the school in other to understand their experiences while growing to become adults and the bearing these experiences have on their adulthood and its reflection on their perceptions of the gender and sexual identities of their students within the school environment. Interviews will last approximately one hour.

FGDs and Interviews would be conducted within the school premises at times that are convenient to teachers and students ensuring that it does not disrupt their normal teaching and learning periods.

Accepting to be part of this study is voluntary. Although permission would be gotten from the State Ministry of Education, the school can decide whether to participate in the study. If the school accepts to participate in the study, students and teachers may also decide whether they want to be part of the study. If they accept to be part of the study, they will be required to sign a consent/assent form indicating their acceptance to be part of the study. However, they can decide to withdraw from the research at any time without any form of consequences. Parents and guardians of students under age 18 years will be required to sign a consent form permitting their children to be in the study; no student would be considered as part of the study without his parents/guardian signing the consent forms.

### **Confidentiality**

Any information gotten from the process of this research would be used purely for academic purposes and would always be treated with utmost confidentiality. All recordings and transcriptions of the interviews will be kept in a personal password-protected computer, to which only I will have access. Furthermore, all participants will be given pseudonyms in the writing up of my research, as will the school, to maintain anonymity.

### **Ethics Approval**

Along with permission from your school, my research project must also receive approval from the Departmental Ethics Screening Committee (DESC) and the Research Ethics Committee (REC), as well as permission from the Kaduna State Ministry of Education before I can commence. DESC and REC approval is assurance to you that my research project is planned and will be executed with integrity and ethical responsibility.

I would greatly appreciate it if [name of school] participate in this research study. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact any of the following persons;

Researcher: Zaggi, Hilary Yacham  
 Email: 17280915@sun.ac.za  
 Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxx

Research supervisor: Professor Dennis Francis  
Email: dafrancis@sun.ac.za  
Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Co Supervisor: Professor Rob Pattman  
Email: rpattman@sun.ac.za  
Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Thank you for your consideration.

**SIGNATURE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

I hereby consent that Zaggi, Hilary Yacham may conduct his study in our school.

**Name of School Principal:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of School Principal:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Addendum D

### Consent Forms for Participants



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#### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

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Dear Research Participant

My name is Zaggi, Hilary Yacham and I am a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. I would like to invite you to participate in a research project entitled **Gender, Sexuality and Schooling; An Ethnography of Young People in a Secondary School in Kaduna State Nigeria**.

Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this research project and contact me if you require further explanation or clarification of any aspect of the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. 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 don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The data generated in this study will be used for writing my PhD thesis and any subsequent publications that may result from the thesis.

I will be conducting an ethnographic study, which involves me engaging in participant observation with students both within and outside the classroom, I will participate in and pay close attention to the various forms of social activities (including sports, clubs etc.) students engage in and whether at all these activities are structured along gender lines as well as the various ways that issues of sexuality arise and are been understood and displayed.

Also, If you agree to take part in this study, you may be asked to participate in interviews and group discussions with me. The interview/group discussion will last approximately one hour, and will explore topics relating to gender, sexuality and the schooling process, (the ways you understand your gender and sexual identity) The purpose of this interviews/group discussion is for you to share your opinions on these topics. All interviews/group discussions will be conducted on the premises of the school or at another location should you wish to do so.

The data for my research study will be collected as follows:

- Observation of social interactions among students
- In-depth interviews with teachers
- Focus group discussions with students.

The interview and FGD questions will be organised around the themes of gender, sexuality and schooling. With your permission, the sessions will be audio-taped for the sake of accuracy. The information that you share will be used for academic purposes only. All recordings will be

stored in a secure manner, and only the researcher will have access to them. Confidentiality will be maintained using pseudonyms for all participants as well as the schools. As a participant, you will be required to also adhere to the principle of confidentiality by not sharing what is discussed during the interview/group discussion with anyone. With regards to the discussions with students, while it is very unlikely, should any experiences of abuse be shared with the researcher, there is a legal obligation to report it which supersedes the researcher's commitment to confidentiality.

Your confidentiality and anonymity will be protected throughout the study by myself by ensuring that data is stored away safely and only accessible by myself. No identifiable information of yourself will be used throughout the study and all publications thereafter. However, I recognised that during focus groups, other participants would be able to know what your opinions and responses are, I will make efforts to appeal to the rest of the participants to not disclose any part of the discussion with people who are not part of the group.

If at any point you would like to withdraw from the research, you can do so. The data collected from you will be used, unless specified otherwise by yourself. There will be no foreseeable risks for you for participating in this study. I recognize that sensitive issues may arise during the data collection process that may cause some form of discomfort or emotional stress for respondents, to cushion this, I have made contact with the guidance and counselling unit in the school and they have agreed to attend to any participant who experience any form of emotional stress during the study. You are free to contact the counselling unit for their services.

Participants will not receive any payment and/or gratuities for participation in the research project. Furthermore, the participant will not benefit directly from this study, but the study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge about gender and sexuality among young people.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact any of the following persons;

Researcher: Zaggi, Hilary Yacham  
Email: 17280915@sun.ac.za  
Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Research supervisor: Professor Dennis Francis  
Email: dafrancis@sun.ac.za  
Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Co Supervisor: Professor Rob Pattman  
Email: rpattman@sun.ac.za  
Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Stellenbosch University Division for Research and Development

Name: Malene Fouche  
Email: [mfouche@sun.ac.za](mailto:mfouche@sun.ac.za)  
Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

**If you are willing to participate in this study please sign the attached Declaration of Consent and hand it back to the researcher (Zaggi, Hilary Yacham).**

**DECLARATION BY PARTICIPANTS**

By signing below, I ..... agree to take part in a research study entitled **Gender, Sexuality and Schooling; An Ethnography of Young People in a Secondary School in Kaduna State, Nigeria** and conducted by **Zaggi, Hilary Yacham**.

I declare that:

- I have read the information above and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests.
- All issues related to privacy and the confidentiality and use of the information I provide have been explained to my satisfaction.

Signed on (Date) .....

**Signature of participant** .....

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER**

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to \_\_\_\_\_

*[name of the participant]* *[He/she]* was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## Addendum E

### Consent Forms for Parents of Minors



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#### PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN CONSENT FOR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

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Dear Parent/ Guardian

I would like to invite your son/daughter to take part in a study conducted by myself, Zaggi, Hilary Yacham, a PhD student in the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at Stellenbosch University South Africa. The results of this study will contribute to a research project on Gender, Sexuality and Schooling among Young People in a Secondary School in Kaduna State Nigeria. Your child has volunteered to participate and with your permission will be included as a possible participant because they meet the criteria for the purpose of the study.

#### 1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

My research project explores topics relating to the understanding and constructions of gender and sexual identities by young people through social interaction within the school environment.

#### 2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF MY CHILD?

If you consent to your child taking part in this study, the researcher will then include your child to take part in the study. If the child agrees to take part in the study, the researcher will engage in participant observation with students both within and outside the classroom, I will participate in and pay close attention to the various forms of social activities (including sports, clubs etc.) students engage in and whether at all these activities are structured along gender lines as well as the various ways that issues of sexuality arise and are been understood and displayed. Your child may be asked to be part of informal interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with the researcher. The discussions will last approximately one hour and will explore topics relating to how they come to understand themselves as boys and girls through the schooling process as well as the various influences the school environment have on them through the process of constructing these identities. The purpose of this discussion is for your child and their fellow students to share their opinions about the topic of study. Interviews and FGDs would be conducted within the school environment and during school hours, it will be conducted at the student's free periods to ensure that it does not affect the learning time of the student.

#### 3. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There will be no foreseeable risks for the participant in this study.

#### 4. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO THE CHILD OR TO THE SOCIETY

The participant will not benefit directly from this study, but the study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on gender and sexuality work in schools in Nigeria.

#### 5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

The participant will not receive any payment for participating in this study.

## **6. PROTECTION OF YOUR AND YOUR CHILD'S INFORMATION, CONFIDENTIALITY AND IDENTITY**

With yours and your child's permission, the interviews and focus groups would be audio-taped for the sake of accuracy. The information that your child shares will be used for purposes of this study only. All recordings will be stored in a secure manner, and only the researcher will have access to them. Anonymity will be maintained using pseudonyms for all participants as well as for the school. While it is unlikely, should any experiences of abuse be shared with the researcher, there is a legal obligation to report it which supersedes the researcher's commitment to confidentiality. I also recognised that during focus groups, other participants in the group would be able to know what the opinions and responses of your child are, I will make efforts to appeal to the rest of the participants to not speak about any part of the discussion with people who are not part of the group.

## **7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You and your child can choose whether to be part of this study or not. If you consent to your child taking part in the study, please note that your child may choose to withdraw or decline participation at any time without any consequence. Your child may also refuse to answer any questions they don't want to answer and remain in the study. The data generated in this study will be used for writing my PhD thesis and any subsequent publications that may result from the thesis.

Although unlikely, I recognize that sensitive issues may arise during the data collection process that may cause some form of discomfort or emotional stress for respondents, to cushion this, I have made contact with the guidance and counselling unit in the school and they have agreed to attend to such participants immediately.

## **8. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

Your child may withdraw their consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. Neither you nor your child are waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your or your child's rights as a research participant, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

## **9. RESEARCHERS IDENTITY**

For any inquiry about the research, please feel free to contact any of the following;

Researcher: Zaggi, Hilary Yacham  
Email: 17280915@sun.ac.za  
Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxx

Research supervisor: Prof. Dennis Francis  
Email: dafrancis@sun.ac.za  
Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxx

Co Supervisor: Prof. Rob Pattman  
Email: rpattman@sun.ac.za  
Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxx

**DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARENT/ LEGAL GUARDIAN OF THE CHILD- PARTICIPANT**

As the parent/legal guardian of the child 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 these questions were answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form.

By signing below, I \_\_\_\_\_ (name of parent) agree that the researcher may approach my child to take part in this research study, as conducted by Zaggi Hilary Yacham.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**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 parent/legal guardian. I also declare that the parent/legal guardian was encouraged and given ample time to ask any questions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Principal Investigator**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## Addendum F

### Assent Form for Minors



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#### STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

#### ASSENT FORM FOR MINORS

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**TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:** Gender, Sexuality and Schooling; an Ethnography of Young People in a Secondary School in Kaduna State Northern Nigeria.

**RESEARCHER'S NAME:** Zaggi, Hilary Yacham

#### **What is RESEARCH?**

Research is something we do to find **new knowledge** about the way things (and people) work. We use research projects or studies to help us find out more about young people and the things that affect their lives, their schools, their families and their health. We do this to try and make schooling more social, just and safe.

#### **What is this research project all about?**

This research project explores topics relating to the ways young people construct their gender and sexual identities through the schooling process. The purpose of your participation is for you to share your opinions on these topics.

#### **Why have I been invited to take part in this research project?**

You have been invited to take part in this research project because you are a student enrolled at the school in my study.

#### **What will happen to me in this study?**

The researcher will engage in participant observation with students both within and outside the classroom, I will participate in and pay close attention to the various forms of social activities (including sports, clubs etc.) students engage in and whether at all these activities are structured along gender lines as well as the various ways that issues of sexuality arise and are been understood and displayed.

You may be expected to be part of an informal individual interviews with the researcher if you agree to take part in the study. You may also be asked to participate in group discussions with other students and the researcher. The discussion will last approximately one hour and will explore topics relating to gender and sexuality within the school. The purpose of this discussion is for you and your fellow learners to share your opinions about the topic.

#### **Can anything bad happen to me?**

There should not be anything frightening about taking part in the research, and it should be a fun learning experience. All research activities will take place on the school grounds and will

only occur during school times, and only during daylight hours. This is to make sure that your safety and wellbeing is protected at all times.

### **Can anything good happen to me?**

There are no direct benefits to the participants, but it does provide information about how young people construct their gender and sexual identities within the school environment. The proposed research will aim to add to existing knowledge on gender and sexuality among young people.

### **Will anyone know who I am in the study?**

No one will be able to know who you are in the study, and any information about you will be kept confidential. I will be using pseudonyms instead of your real name in the final written report, so that you cannot be identified by any other person. Your confidentiality and anonymity will be protected throughout the study by myself by ensuring that data is stored away safely and only accessible by myself. No identifiable information of yourself will be used throughout the study. I recognised that during focus groups, other participants would be able to know what your opinions and responses are, I will make efforts to appeal to the rest of the participants to not disclose any part of the discussion with people who are not part of the group.

If at any point you would like to withdraw from the research, you can do so without consequences of any kind. The data collected from you will be used, unless specified otherwise by yourself. There will be no foreseeable risks for you for participating in this study. Although, I recognize that sensitive issues may arise during the data collection process that may cause some form of discomfort or emotional stress for respondents, to cushion this, I have made contact with the guidance and counselling unit in the school and they have agreed to attend to such participants immediately, therefore, feel free to contact them at their office if need be. With your permission, informal interviews and focus group sessions would be audio-taped to ensure accuracy.

### **Who can I talk to about the study?**

If you have any more questions about the study or about how you can be involved, please feel free to contact any of the following people;

Researcher: Zaggi, Hilary Yacham  
 Email: 17280915@sun.ac.za  
 Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Research supervisor: Professor Dennis Francis  
 Email: dafrancis@sun.ac.za  
 Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Co Supervisor: Professor Rob Pattman  
 Email: rpattman@sun.ac.za  
 Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Stellenbosch University Division for Research and Development

Name: Malene Fouche  
 Email: [mfouche@sun.ac.za](mailto:mfouche@sun.ac.za)  
 Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

**What if I do not want to do this?**

You can refuse to take part in the research project, even if your parents'/legal guardians'/caregivers' have given you permission to participate. You are also allowed to stop taking part in the study at any time, without getting in trouble. If you choose not to participate, there will be no negative consequences, and it will not have any impact on your school grades. I have contacted the guidance and counselling unit in the school, and they have agreed to attend to you in case you experience any form of emotional stress during the study. You are free to contact the counselling unit for their services.

Do you understand this research study and are you willing to take part in it?

YES

NO

Has the researcher answered all your questions?

YES

NO

Do you understand that you can STOP being in the study at any time?

YES

NO

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**Signature of Child**

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**Date**