

Pleasure and Danger: Women, alcohol use and dance in club spaces

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Our social activities tend to reveal deeper meanings and structures of our social world. In our contemporary society, where the dominant notion of femininity (expectations of what a woman should be and how she should behave) is that of domesticity and respectability, some women exercise their agency in interesting and innovative ways to simultaneously challenge and reinforce these dominant notions of womanhood. These young women are able to negotiate access to spaces that are 'bad' and 'forbidden', where no respectable woman would go; clubs, parties and taverns. And, it is within these spaces that they experience the elation and freedom that comes with dancing, the giddiness and release that comes from drinking, the flirtation and attraction to, usually, men. It is these spaces and these experiences that draw young women to clubs and parties time and time again. Simultaneously, there is an attraction to the dangerous aspects of club culture¹ that exists in addition to the more pleasurable aspects.

The young women I worked with come from Langa, the oldest township in Cape Town, built to house the black² labour force far away from the white suburb of Pinelands and those that surround it, in order to appease the fears of the white residents, worried that filth and disease will spread into their pristine homes. Today, almost 12 years since the first democratic elections, Langa is a bustling place, almost all black and Xhosa-speaking, but diverse in class, age, religion and culture. The streets are lined with large double storey houses, small multi-coloured homes and tiny shacks made from a variety of materials. These people exist on the margins of Cape Town; caught between their traditional beliefs and practices, *amaXhosa*, and Western³ values and attractions. They exist in a time of change in South Africa, which many feel may have passed them by; they exist in a space where one constantly has to negotiate the shifting notions of personhood, of womanhood and manhood, of feminine and masculine. As young black South African women, they challenge these notions.

The research⁴ I have carried out over the past two years has explored the fluidity of femininity that is performed by young black women in Langa. In addition, it has looked at how young women negotiate meanings of femininity, how they challenge and reinforce dominant notions of femininity, and how through the 'culture of music' they have created subversive/hidden femininities⁵.

Methodology

Gaining Access: Langa and the women

The commencement of fieldwork research is always daunting as one is never completely confident that everything will go according to plan. My entrance into Langa was an interesting one, somewhat of a journey. Therefore, the process of gaining access into Langa and meeting the young women with whom I worked is presented as a narrative, a story of the journey into the unknown space of fieldwork research. It also illustrates the

complexity and difficulties encountered when conducting this kind of research as one is working with real people, with lives of their own, where one often feels like an interference. The young women I worked with were dynamic, interesting and hardworking in whatever they did. This meant that I could not always rely on their availability. This frequently led to missed meetings, cancelled appointments and general frustration, on my part. However, it is through these experiences that one is able to carry out research and more importantly is given insight into the lives of the informants. In many cases, one is invited into the inner folds of family and friends- as I was. Those experiences are presented here.

Having worked in Langa during the year before, I was more familiar with the space geographically, as a result I was more comfortable and confident there, and had a sense of the lifestyle and lived experiences of Langa residents. Therefore, I entered this research with the belief that meeting young women to participate would be easier than during my prior experience in which my research partner and I struggled for many months. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

From my previous research I had formed social networks and connections that I had intended to use when embarking on research for this dissertation. Initially, this seemed successful as I managed to locate one of the young women who fit my criteria and who was willing to work with me and introduce me to more women of the same age group. I met Thandi⁶ one Friday afternoon while doing research in Langa last year. She lived right next door to *Mnqobonqobo*, a local hangout for young high-school students in Langa. In order to locate her I asked the young women whom I had worked with the previous year, to set up a meeting for us. At our meeting I explained to Thandi what the research entailed and she seemed willing and eager to help. She also promised to introduce me to more women of her age.

Thandi introduced me to two more women - her sister Lindiwe, and her friend Zinzi. I was able to meet with all three on one occasion and conducted an informal focus group interview with them in a restaurant, *Mojitos*, on Long Street. However, these women being older meant that they also had many responsibilities. All three are formally employed and Thandi and Zinzi have children, making it difficult to meet to conduct further focus groups. However, I was able to work with Lindiwe again, perhaps because she is neither married nor has children, unlike the other two women.

This led me to explore alternative options in terms of meeting women in Langa, making use of colleagues and friends that were able to introduce me to different women in Langa. I met Nomhle through an anthropology student from a foreign university, doing research on the Cape Flats who had participated in meetings held by my colleagues and me. I phoned Nomhle and explained my research to her and inquired whether she was interested in working with me, to which she agreed. Unfortunately, she was unable to introduce me to any other women but I was able to work with her throughout my research process and have since established a friendship with her.

Through a family friend I met cousins, Ayanda and Ntombi, at a dinner we were all invited to, and they both became informants for my research. Ayanda is a first-year student studying law. This meant that it was sometimes difficult to schedule meetings as she was very busy. During the time in which I was undertaking my research, Ntombi was in the early stages of starting a company. Despite this, I was able to meet with her on a number of occasions. In addition, Ntombi was able to set up meetings for me with two more women in Langa.

Ntombi had scheduled meetings with both Dudu and her friend for the same afternoon. Unfortunately, I never got to meet Dudu's friend as she was not home when we went round. However, I was able to meet with Dudu and conduct an interview with her in her home down the street from Ntombi – which was interestingly a few houses down the road from the late Brenda Fassie's home.

Overall, I managed to locate a number of women from very diverse backgrounds and experience in terms of class, age, education and location within Langa. While the number of women I worked with was different at any given time, overall I worked with seven women throughout the research process. Their ages ranged from 19 years old to 26 years old. All of the women, except for one, had matriculated. Four women were currently employed while one was seeking employment. Only one woman was enrolled in university, while another had finished her matriculation exams, but whose family could not afford to send her to a technikon. These young women were interesting and diverse, and it was an honour to work with them.

Methods

Exploring issues of identity is a complex task requiring numerous research approaches that will ensure a holistic and detailed gathering of experiences, beliefs and social practices. In this case the exploration was further inhibited by the marginality of the space to which the young women informants belong. This research is grounded in a feminist discourse that views the experiences of marginalised people, especially women, as misrepresented and misunderstood. It is with this belief that this research has been undertaken.

Participant observation

My intention at the onset of my research was to 'hang out' with the young women in spaces that I felt would be most beneficial to the exploration of 'hidden' or 'subversive' femininities - these places being nightclubs, bars and taverns - while concurrently observing them in their day-to-day lives. I felt that this would reveal the ways in which young women negotiate these different spaces and shed some light on the fluid and shifting nature of identity, particularly gender identity. In addition, I felt I could also familiarise myself more with Langa as a complex social space.

Although I was unable to go to these spaces with the young women as often as I would have liked, I did observe behaviour in places which I knew the young women frequented, on my own. There were a number of places that were popular with the young women⁷. These also happened to be spaces where I regularly went too, and so was able to

incorporate my research into my social activities, which made the process easier, especially in terms of transport.

I was also able to spend time in the homes of some of the young women, which was a vastly different experience from my previous work in Langa. The majority of the interviews took place in the young women's houses - which meant that I not only observed the homes in which the young women lived, but also met their families, thus giving me a more in-depth understanding and insight into the lives of these women. Moreover, I could strengthen my ties with different people in Langa, in turn deepening the research process and enriching the information obtained. On the other hand, there were a number of disadvantages to being so close and involved in the lives of these women. On a number of occasions I was asked to drive people on their errands, which consumed time and petrol, but at the same time meant that they were able to gain something from the interaction, making it more of an equal transaction.

Journals

The journals were intended to provide an alternative space for the young women to record and share their experiences. Despite the failure of the journals as a reliable and useful research method for my honours project, I gave journals to three of the young women: Nomhle, Ntombi and Ayanda. The failure of the journals with the younger women in my previous research was seen as being due to language barriers and the age of the participants. Being of school-going age, the journals might have been perceived as a chore or activity resembling homework. However, since the current research was being undertaken with older women, with whom language was not an obstacle and who were no longer in school, it was hoped that the journals might prove more successful.

The young women were asked to write about their experiences and observations from their visits to parties or clubs. In addition, they were encouraged to write about their daily experiences. Unfortunately, this means of data collection did not fully live up to my expectations. Of the three journals given out, only one was used. The reasons given by the young women for not making use of the journals centred on free time. Both women had busy schedules, one as a student and the other as an entrepreneur in the early stages of a business. Therefore, they were not able to write in the journals.

Auspiciously, the young woman who did utilise the journal, went way beyond the expectations set for this method. At the end of my fieldwork I was handed back a book full of thoughts, feeling, experiences, pictures, songs and photographs. Clearly, she had put an immense amount of time and effort into the journal. From reading her journal I was able to share in these experiences and understand the finer layers of her reality. I understand the differences to be related to access to free time. Nomhle was unemployed, therefore having a great deal of free time. In addition, her ambition is to become a journalist, and for that reason she enjoyed writing in the journal and was eager to hear my feedback. Thus, I would assert that the success of the journals as a research method is dependant on the time the participants have access to.

Cameras

This method had proved useful and successful during my honours project, mainly due to the activities that followed with the photographs. I gave disposable cameras to Ntombi, Ayanda, Nomhle and Lindiwe, and instructed them to take photographs of whatever they thought was important in their lives, and whenever they went out partying or clubbing. The young women seemed quite excited by this exercise. The cameras were intended to serve as a means for the participants to introduce and share aspects of their lives that they had control over. However, similarly to the journals, the cameras had varying levels of success.

I delivered the cameras to Nomhle and Lindiwe through relatives at their houses. Neither of the two had ever used a disposable camera before, so I gave instructions over the phone. However, since I was unable to demonstrate to them how to use the cameras, particularly the flash function, many of the photographs were taken after dark without a flash, thus being of no use. Fortunately, the few photographs that were developed were useful and showed an interesting side to the young women - as were the photographs taken by Ntombi.

Ntombi was very helpful and enthusiastic throughout the whole research process and eager to take pictures. She told me on a number of occasions what she had taken photographs of - hence my surprise when I realised she had only used a third of the film. Once again, issues of free time impacted on how many photographs she could take. This was also the case with Ayanda, who was unable to make much use of the camera as she was preparing and writing exams at the time and was under a great deal of pressure. Unfortunately, the photograph quality was such that the photographs could not be included in this write up. Although this method was not as successful as expected, I would use cameras in future research as it provides the participant with ownership and control of what they share. In addition, the photographs act as mementos of the time spent together during the research process.

Focus Group Interviews

At the outset of my research, I had envisaged focus group interviews constituting the main part of my fieldwork research. The reasoning behind was based on the experiences my research partner and I had with conventional methods of research. Owing to the age and language barriers, interviews did not yield the information we had hoped to obtain⁸. Therefore, a theatrical approach was used and proved successful and beneficial to both the participants and the researchers. However, as in this case language and age were not a major factor, I had expected that conventional focus groups would be effective. This was not the case as the young women were not always available to meet in a group owing to the above-mentioned factors. In the event only two focus groups were undertaken.

There were positive, as well as negative aspects to both informal and formal focus groups. However, based on the nature and topic of this research, the focus group in the restaurant was more effective, as it was a similar space to the ones researched, namely club spaces. Nevertheless, the inability to gather the women together in a group meant that individual interviews became the best option.

Individual Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to allow for a deeper and personal exploration of the young women's lives¹. These proved to be useful in so far as the individual and unique experiences of the diverse women were captured, as well as allowing for the similarities of experience to become evident. I found this method valuable as I not only was able to ask the young women the interview questions but I was also invited into their homes. This was a vastly different experience from that of my honours project in which I was never invited to the young women's homes and, despite suggesting it, never met their families. In contrast, the young women I worked with for this research were very welcoming. I was thus able to conduct formal interviews, which were planned and recorded, as well as hold impromptu discussion, which were equally effective in terms of information gathering.

All formal interviews I conducted took place in the young women's family homes or the homes of their close relatives except for one, which took place in a café in the city centre. These were recorded - with the consent of the participant. The more informal interviews - the impromptu discussions - were not recorded; however I took pains to ensure I took notes in my research journal soon after the discussion. In this way I was able to conduct one in-depth interview with all of the young women. In addition, follow-up interviews were done with young women that I felt could share more or had interesting insights that I wished to learn more about.

And, throughout this whole process, aspects of my identity and myself were evident in many of the choices that I made during the research: who I talked to, what I researched, where I conducted my research and how I chose to conduct the research.

Issues of positionality⁹ were also major in shaping the nature of my research in terms of where, what and how I carried out the research. Therefore I feel it necessary to share this aspect of the research. Positionality refers to where the researcher is located in a context, in terms of race, class, ethnicity, education and language¹⁰. Positionality is also having an awareness of the power relations between researchers and the researched. This awareness is absent in most mainstream knowledge production. Spivak¹¹ speaks about reflexivity, which relates to positionality and accountability; researchers come to the field with preconceptions that shape who we research and what questions we ask. Who the researcher is also affects the interactions between researchers and participants.

The research I have carried out is directly influenced and impacted by my family and upbringing. It is essential that one understands my identity and background in order to understand my positioning in this research process.

I am the product of an atypical marriage whereby my parents shared nationality, language and to a large extent, culture, but were opposing in terms of race and religious orientation. With this kind of background one cannot escape from experiencing, at one time or another, the feeling of not fitting in, not knowing who one is, or where one is from. On the other hand, I have integrated myself into various racial, nationality and

religious groups because it has been difficult for other people to define who I am and to place me in a box. This has been my experience in Langa. Although I have a very limited experience of townships in and around Cape Town, I have spent time in townships, particularly Soweto, as my parents had family friends there that we visited. Due to the fact that both my parents speak Zulu, and in Zimbabwe I grew up hearing and sometimes speaking¹² Shona, I have a partial understanding of Xhosa, which meant communication between myself and the research participants was done in a mixture of my mangled Xhosa and their poorly spoken English. Occupying an interstitial existence means that the young women and I were able to relate on a profound level, which enriched the research and our interactions, as we are people who exist on the periphery and that do not completely fit into a space. It is this shared experience - between me and the women that I worked with - which impelled me to explore, unearth and reveal their stories.

For the purpose of this article I will address the aspects of pleasure and danger that young black women experience in club spaces, from the preliminary findings of my ongoing research.

The ‘Good Girl’: The Policing of Respectability and Domesticity

“Chores, yes, yes I do, like with helping to clean up the house, the cooking we take turns, like me and my grandmother. To cook today it’s me, tomorrow it’s her, that and even the dishes...I was in Standard 3, that’s when I started cleaning, like they gave me a little chore cleaning the toilet...” (Dudu)

“I get stressed...she [mother] complains once a month ‘I do everything. You don’t help out but you’re a girl!’ And I’m like, there’s a boy too!” (Ntombi)

Ayanda, who lives at home with both parents and her older brother, admits that she has more chores around the house than the male members of the family. She attributes this to her being a woman; she feels that it is her place in the household to contribute more than the men. In addition to her responsibilities around the house, her parents are more strict and watchful over her, in terms of where she goes and who her friends are, unlike her brother who enjoys more freedom to go out and do as he pleases. In spite of her parents’ watchfulness Ayanda finds ways to go out and have fun, ways which will not shatter her ‘good girl’ image.

As a young woman, one actively participates in work around the household from an early age¹³. For the young women in Langa, household chores include cooking for the family, cleaning, bathing and looking after siblings and grand-parents, and laundry, often done by hand. Homework and leisure time are often secondary to these responsibilities. It is not hard to imagine that these young women have very little leisure time, as do many women worldwide, due to the increase of women in the labour force and the gendered assumption that reproductive labour is women’s work¹⁴. This means that many women juggle having a job in order to earn an income and their responsibilities within their homes. Within the households that I have worked, ten out of the twelve families are headed by a single mother. Therefore, it is the women, who usually span three generations, who are not only responsible for the financial security of the family, but the

running of the household, leaving them little or no free time. According to Shaw, women's leisure is further constrained by dominant ideologies of femininity and masculinity, where 'appropriate' activities for women restricts access to 'male activities'¹⁵. 'Male activities' tend to take place in public spaces, once again excluding women as their 'place' is traditionally seen as the private domestic domain.

In the context of Langa, there are few spaces or activities viewed 'suitable' for young women because unfortunately, in terms of facilities available to young people in Langa, resources are severely lacking, which means there are few options. Only two of the young women were aware of activities available for the youth within Langa. Dudu, mentioned dance and drama classes at Guga S'thebe. Nomhle is an avid hand ball player. Aside from the two there was no mention of activities of a similar nature. Instead, most young people can be found partaking in activities that involve music, alcohol, and drugs in the many taverns scattered around the *kasi* and clubs in town. For most of the young women, their weekends are spent drinking and partying. However, to access these spaces the young women have to employ different strategies as these activities are in opposition to the accepted behaviour of the 'good girl' that they are often pressured to be.

Young women learn from various sources that in order to be viewed as respectable young women, they should be a 'good girl'. They learn this through their family, school, church and popular music, such as gospel music. The discourse of the 'good girl' is powerful in shaping the gender identity of young women as it dictates how a woman should behave, what spaces she should occupy and how her conduct impacts not only herself, but her family and her community. In many communities the reputation of a household is dependant on the daughters being 'good girls'¹⁶. This means that they should not occupy public spaces, such as hanging-out on the street, they should not drink alcohol, they should not take drugs, and they should not interact with boys romantically or sexually. The parents and guardians of the young women in Langa monitor and attempt to control their daughters' movements by restricting them from going to certain places that are considered dangerous and unsavoury for girls and women to be in. According to Campbell¹⁷, many young women feel controlled in terms of their mobility because their movements are policed by mothers, older woman, and men in their communities. The women are aware of how their parents and guardians feel about them going to places like Vudu Lounge and Snap (now Pata Pata). These spaces are free from watchful eyes and policing glares. The young women's mothers fear that when they go out to clubs or shebeens, they will be exposed to drinking and drugs, at risk of getting pregnant and/or contracting HIV/AIDS. As such, they try to keep the young women at home¹⁸. However, it is well known that young women are romantically and sexually active; this is evident from the HIV/Aids and teenage pregnancy statistics. In addition, week after week, clubs, bars and taverns are full of young women, drinking, and sometimes taking drugs. This then begs the questions: how do they negotiate access to these places? What does it mean for their identity as women to occupy these 'male' spaces? How does their pursuit of these 'fun' activities impact the people around them?

Hidden/Subversive Femininities: Experiences of Alcohol and Dance

“Like if I go to my family’s home...my aunt is hardly ever home...I can ask my friends to come and pick me up that’s no problem, but when I’m here [home] it’s like a jail” (Ayanda)

Young women find innovative ways to negotiate access to these ‘bad’ places, at the same time usually maintaining her reputation as a ‘good girl’. Many women employ similar tactics in order to go out. Often, relatives’ houses that are not as strict are used as a means to access these spaces, without having to deal with their parents. In this way, they are able to perform the expected and accepted femininity, while simultaneously experiencing the ‘forbidden’. This speaks to how notions of femininity are fluid and changing depending on context and space, and are indeed performances. The performance of a particular heterosexual femininity is heightened in spaces such as clubs, bars and parties. The amount of time and effort put into preparing one’s appearance reveals how much emphasis is placed on the physical. Clubs are a space where appearance is of the utmost importance: make-up, tight jeans, short tops, high heels, perfume and hair all signify the performance of this particular femininity that I have called ‘hidden/subversive’ femininity.

“Yo! Sometimes you are like ‘what am I gonna wear tonight?’ But I normally wear jeans and sharp pointy shoes” (Lindiwe)

“Like my friends like to dress up...wants us to all look good...Because you wanna feel good...you want someone to actually come up to you and say you actually look nice” (Ayanda)

The reasons for dressing up so extravagantly generally stem from a desire to be noticed and admired. Moreover, the young women do not want to be ridiculed or judged for wearing the wrong type of clothing. The attention that the young women are seeking does not only come from men, but other women as well. Ayanda confessed, somewhat ashamedly, that her and her friends are ‘guilty’ of judging other women by what they wear. She felt that you can tell a great deal about the kind of person someone is by how they carry themselves. Therefore, a too short mini-skirt or too low shirt is taken to mean that the woman is loose or easy. A woman wearing flip-flops when out in town is viewed not be ‘lady-like’. Interestingly, Ayanda did not have as many or as strict judgements for how men dress. In fact, she was somewhat taken aback by my question, as though she had never considered judging men by what they wear. She felt that men should not put as much time or effort into their looks, as this would imply that he is arrogant. All the young women felt that it is important to look nice when they go out, but also that what they are wearing is suitable for the place they are going to.

Class Identity: ‘Ghetto Fabulous’ and ‘Model C’

The young women enjoyed going to different places. Interestingly, where women went out clubbing was dependant on class identity. Within the township, there are various labels that describe the different kinds of young people found in Langa. Ayanda and Ntombi described a particular group of young women as ‘ghetto fabulous’, mainly

because they went to schools in the township, and this is seen as impacted their behaviour. From what Ayanda and Ntombi described, I deduced that these ‘ghetto fabulous’ women are from working class backgrounds. The boyfriends of the ‘ghetto fabulous’ women are also *kasi* boys who went to township schools. Ayanda and Ntombi described them as ‘rough’ and ‘raw’, due to the fact that they prefer to speak Xhosa and they, according to the two women, drink more alcohol. Because of their working class background the ‘ghetto fabulous’ young people cannot access clubs in town regularly because of lack of access to transport and high entrance fees charged at many clubs in town. If they do go out in town, there are specific clubs they will go to, such as Pata and Vudu Lounge. However, generally these young women party in the township and the many taverns in Langa and Gugulethu. Interestingly, the ‘ghetto fabulous’ girls did not self identify as that, but were labelled by young women who were from middle class backgrounds.

“It’s just that they are more ghetto fabulous, there are these Ghetto Fabulous girls who are ghetto like township...they speak Xhosa and slang, y’know the Xhosa slang can be quite rough, it sounds rough” (Ntombi)

“It’s just that it is their [ghetto fabulous girls] attitude, they’ve got a very bad attitude and behaviour as girls, they don’t know how to treat themselves, they are always getting into fights...they don’t know how to act” (Ayanda)

The ‘ghetto fabulous’ girls are often compared to the ‘Model C’ girls. This distinction come directly from what school one attended, but indirectly is a signifier of class. Young women from middle class backgrounds were able to attend Model C schools in the suburbs, therefore were schooled in a different context that has shaped their attitudes and behaviours. The attitudes towards the ‘Model C’ girls vary greatly in Langa. On the one hand, they are seen as epitomising the ‘good girl’ in the way they speak and behave. Nomhle revealed that because the ‘Model C’ girls speak English as opposed to Xhosa, and party outside the township, they appear to the older members of the community to be better behaved and more learned. On the other hand, to the ‘Ghetto fabulous’ girls, the ‘model C’ girls are snobbish and are trying to deny their township identity.

“And there are some girls that are very much like bitchy...particularly to me and my friends...and they do go on about us as well, that we got bad attitudes and whatnot.” (Ayanda)

“The Model C girls...are quiet, we don’t see them in the township so they are seen as the good girls in the township, that’s why their parents send their kids to white schools or Model C schools, so they have better opportunities” (Ntombi)

Although class impacts the young women’s experiences of club culture in very different and profound ways, there are also many similarities that thread through their experiences. All the young women have to negotiating their different identities between the expectations from their families and communities to be the ‘good girl’, and their desires to experience the ‘bad’ and ‘forbidden’ in clubs and at parties. And, all the young women

perform similar and particular femininities in these club spaces that I have called hidden/subversive femininities.

Hidden/Subversive Femininity

I use the term 'hidden' to describe this particular performance of femininity for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the experience of clubs, parties and bars often happens at night. After dark, when the older people have left the city centre and are home, off the streets, the streets then fill up with similar-thinking young people, ready to have a good time. Due to the policing and restricting of mobility of the young women, their movements and activities are shrouded in secrecy. Secondly, the clubs and bars themselves, tend to be dark and offer some sense of anonymity, where the controls usually experienced by women fall away. There are no mothers, fathers, teachers or preachers in this space. It is dark, the music is loud and most people share the desire to have fun and let go.

For many of these young women, 'home' symbolises monotony and restrictions. It is a place where they feel the pressure of household responsibilities, overcrowding, as many of the households include extended family, tensions caused by the number of people within the home, and a sense of entrapment. Parties and clubs offer an escape; a way to break away from the monotony of their day-to-day lives. When I asked the young women why they went to clubs, and what they got out of them, they all expressed how they want to have fun, to let go and enjoy themselves. They see the club spaces as an escape from the controls, rules and boundaries.

At this juncture, it is important to note that, generally, young men do not experience these same controls and restrictions. Without going into a lengthy discussion on young black men's masculinity in South Africa, I will simply mention that young men occupy the public space freely. Merely driving through Langa illustrates this point. The corners are often occupied by groups of men, young and old, who clearly feel ownership over the space. Driving past Tiger's Place will show cars being washed, beers being drunk and fun being had...by men. My observations have shown that while young women are controlled in almost all aspects of their lives by various people in their community, the attitude 'boys will be boys', is adopted when dealing with young men. This clear bias that surely resonates with many people and in many communities has major implications for the young men themselves, the community *and* young women¹⁹.

"Cause he's a guy he can do whatever he wants. Cause I'm a girl they are much more scared." (Ayanda)

"Oh yes, there are gangs here. Even younger people are in them, like 15, 14, ja the younger ones...I don't know how they get involved but they name themselves, they carry guns, they smoke TIC" (Dudu)

The term 'subversive' is also used as I feel that the particular engagement with and performance of femininity that occurs in club spaces is opposed to, and challenges, the dominant ideas of femininity, although it does not completely escape it, as discussed earlier. It speaks to women occupying the public space as opposed to the expected

private, domestic space; it speaks to women ‘indulging’ in bad behaviour, such as drinking; it speaks to allowing women to engage and explore aspects of their sexuality, which is often kept under lock and key. There is a powerful pull towards experiencing these things - the pleasure of drinking, dancing and flirting.

“At least you must start in the location, ne? You mustn’t get drunk that much... Sometimes we buy a bottle of Jack Daniels, then we drink here in the location, then maybe four 6-packs, we are four...and then we get drunk” (Lindiwe)

“I think they [women from the township] drink a little bit more...for instance, every weekend I cant’ sleep because...they are walking around they are drunk and they are carrying these Spins probably walking from one tavern to the next” (Ntombi)

All the young women agreed that the main activity when they go out is drinking. The majority of the young women’s drink of choice was ciders, which included Savanna, Hunter’s Dry, and Spin, which is a vodka-based drink. A few of the young women enjoyed drinking whisky, while others enjoyed cream liqueur. None of the young women drank beer, as they felt that beer was a bitter drink that only men enjoy. A great deal of meaning is placed on what people drink and how much people drink. Unfortunately, limited research has been undertaken on women and alcohol. Traditionally, approaches to alcohol studies has been from a male perspective, thus marginalising women and viewing them as merely an appendage to men within the family²⁰. They fail to see women as active agents who engage with alcohol in particular ways, giving it particular meaning in their lives. The work available tends to look at aspects of abuse, neglecting to explore the cultural meanings attached to the practice²¹. According to Papagaroufali, drinking practices are sites of resistance enacted by women against established ideas about female gender, sexuality and pleasure²². My research reveals that alcohol use makes up a large part of these young women’s day-to-day lives. Attached to this practice are feelings of merriment, freedom and release. Alcohol is seen as a pleasurable indulgence, successfully hidden from parents and guardians. According to the young women, their parents were not aware of their drinking, and if they were, they did not know the extent of it.

Although in the club space, which generally allows for women to escape, to some extent, the expectations and pressures to be a ‘good girl’, there are levels of respectability that are still maintained. The young women often made it clear that although they drink, they are careful not to drink too much. They felt that there were judgments made about women that allowed themselves to get drunk. They were also aware of the danger in it. Lindiwe described a situation where a man was buying copious amounts of alcohol for a young teenage girl that Lindiwe knew from Langa. Lindiwe knew that he intended to get the girl drunk in order to take advantage of her and at that point the girl was too intoxicated to realise what was happening. When the man proceeded to drag the girl out of the club, presumably to his car, Lindiwe stepped in. He then turned violent, pushing and insulting her. She went to the manager who kicked the man out of the club. Lindiwe did not say what happened to the girl, but mentioned that that kind of situation happens often. Many of the young women were wary of accepting drinks from men. They viewed these types of men as predators and knew that there was the expectation of reciprocity. Moreover,

some of the young women were cautious about receiving drinks from strange men for fear that the drinks could be spiked with drugs. The politics of alcohol drinking shapes a major part of young women's clubbing experiences, which are pleasurable as well as dangerous.

Dance goes hand in hand with this.

“When you dance, you are doing the moves, all the moves...cause when dancing with someone you touch like this...” (Lindiwe)

“I dance with my friends...[but] if he's cute and you got the right moves, I will dance with you!” (Nomhle)

As with alcohol consumption, dance and music are major factors in the going-out experience. The young women choose the clubs they go to based on which people go there and what music is played. The young women who enjoy going out to Pata and Vudu Lounge were the young women who enjoy listening and dancing to House music and R'n'B, as that is the kind of music played at these clubs. In addition, these clubs often host famous DJs from national radio stations, particularly Metro FM, which the young women enjoyed greatly. The young women who enjoyed hip-hop and R'n'B music frequented places like Marvel and Ivory Room, where they play that type of music. It was important that the music played allowed the women to dance in the style that they enjoy and with the people they enjoy dancing with.

Dancing signifies a number of things within club spaces. Firstly, dancing, of course, is a performance that reveals to onlookers one's individual style, as well as one's knowledge of the latest dance moves. Very often, these dance moves are made popular by music videos or a trend develops that catches on fast, causing everyone to know the dance move. This was the case at *Mnqobonqobo* in Langa, where everyone on the dance floor performed the exact same moves, with some personal renditions added for an individual twist. Dancing is a way to show off one's rhythm and creativity, to have people notice and admire one's talent on the dance floor, with one's girlfriends or boyfriend. How the young women dance depended on whom they were dancing with.

Many of the young women preferred going out with their girlfriends, as a 'Girls' Night Out' or 'Ladies' Night', as they felt that they were less restricted than when they went out with their boyfriends. All the young women expressed the feeling that they have a great deal of fun when they go out with their girlfriends, especially when they go out dancing. Often, they make a circle that they all dance around in, and from time to time, one of the young women would enter the circle and dance, to the great excitement and entertainment of her friends. Having this circle of girlfriends makes it difficult for unwanted men to infiltrate, therefore protecting themselves from harassment. This is one of the many ways that young women guard against unwelcome male attention. On these nights the young women simply want to enjoy themselves dancing without the bother of men.

However, there are times when the young women do want to, and will dance with men. Of course, this happens when they are at the clubs without their boyfriends because their boyfriends do not approve of the young women dancing with other men. According to Lindiwe, “Eh, when you dance, you doing the moves, all the moves that’s what he thinks when we are dancing with another guy...cause when I am dancing with someone you touch like this [*as she touches her chest and hips*]”. Similarly, the young women disapprove of their boyfriends dancing with other women. The reason for this is quite simple, the manner in which men and women dance in certain clubs, is often very raunchy and suggestive. One could say that the dancing is so suggestive of sex that a partner looking on would feel as though infidelity were occurring right there in his or her presence. This is confirmed by the young women confessing to me that they would only dance with a man, other than their boyfriend, if he is good-looking. The thinking being that it would be more enjoyable to dance with an attractive man.

According to Hanna²³ sexuality and dance share the same instrument - the body - and it is through dance that feelings and ideas about sexuality and sex roles (gender) take shape. What does this mean for my study on club spaces? Where women’s sexuality is controlled and policed at home, schools and church, in the club space they are able to explore and experience their sexuality through movement of the body. There are powerful meanings attached to dance; what music one dances to, how one dances and whom one dances with. My research revealed that when women dance among themselves, the particular way of dancing differs greatly from how they would dance with boyfriends, or men they find attractive²⁴. The manner in which they dance with men is highly sensual and sexual, and often mimics sex. Dancing is one of the major pleasurable experiences in club spaces.

The pleasurable elements of the club experience that have been explored so far are alcohol use and dance. However, it is these elements that also impact the dangerous aspects of club culture, as explored briefly earlier. As mentioned earlier, women use, consciously or unconsciously, hidden/subversive femininities to challenge dominant notions of femininity by accessing and occupying ‘male-spaces’ and indulging in ‘bad-girl’ behaviour. On the other hand, young women reinforce a different kind of heterosexual femininity that is performed in club spaces, and instead of their behaviour being monitored by their mothers and grandmothers; it is policed by other young women and men. It is a space where women judge one another based on what they are wearing, drinking and who they are interacting with. It is a space where men are constantly on the prowl. They offer to buy women drinks. They ask them to dance. They want to take them home. Every now and then, young women will agree to any one of these advances. At the same time, my research has revealed that these young women often feel unsafe or in danger, especially when they accept or refuse these advances. The aspects of danger range from getting too drunk and not remembering what happened that night or, to being forced to go home with a man, where any number of things could occur, such as rape or physical violence. The same threat of physical violence and rape exists between the young women and their boyfriends, who often disapprove of their girlfriend’s behaviour in clubs.

Another interesting aspect of young women's club experiences is that, although it appears to provide them with freedom and independence, a more in-depth understanding of club spaces will reveal that this freedom and independence is only from their parents and guardians. The monitoring and controlling of behaviour by parents is replaced by that of the young women's boyfriends and other men in the clubs. These men often determine where and when the young women can go out, and more importantly what they do when they are there. When asked how clubbing was different without their boyfriends the young women answered, after much laughter and giggles, that they can be 'naughty' and do what they want. This means that they can drink as much as they like, talk to other men and dance with them, if they so choose. Others have gone further than that and hooked up²⁵ with men other than their boyfriends. Random hook-ups tend to occur on 'ladies' nights', when the women go out with only their girl-friends, and the intention is meet other men. The young women expressed how different and often boring it is to go out with their boyfriends. The young women have to sit with their boyfriends, and talk and dance with only them. In addition, when the women are out without their boyfriends, they are often worried that the friends of their boyfriends will observe their behaviour and later report it to the boyfriend. This reveals an interesting shift in the policing and monitoring of young women's movements and behaviour outside of the domestic space.

"He (boyfriend) used to not like it [going out], but he got used to it. He says that I could get raped by the people or they may take advantage of me because they buy me clothes and I get lifts in their cars" (Nomhle)

"I didn't feel like it would be okay to just say no if one [of the men] was interested. I felt like they would keep nagging...until I said something maybe I shouldn't have said, then I would get into trouble" (Ntombi)

"I don't usually accept drinks from guys because I know where it will end. Its either the person will demand you into chatting with him or you will go outside with him and sit in the car or he'll offer you a lift." (Nomhle)

The young women are very aware of boundaries in terms of how much they should drink and how far they want to take flirtation with men. They know that by crossing these boundaries, which they sometimes do, they are putting themselves in danger, and although they have some protection,²⁶ frequently dangerous things do happen in these, otherwise pleasurable spaces. These experiences reveal the more nuanced nature of spaces and the meanings attached to them.

Conclusion

As stated at the beginning of this article, the experiences of these young women from Langa are not completely different or isolated from other young people in South Africa. While their's is informed by issues of race, class, location, age and culture, as is true of all other women, there are also common links around issues of pleasure and danger in the social activities of young women in South Africa. Women, at some point or another, are all subject to controls and restrictions that aim to mould them from 'good girls' into good wives and mothers, whether it is through their parents, religion or media. However, this

research has also revealed the intricacies of identity, in that it is fluid and changing, and therefore, can be performed in different spaces, at different times, with different outcomes.

With regard to club cultures, young women simultaneously *challenge* dominant notions of femininity through hidden/subversive femininities, by accessing traditionally male spaces and partaking in male activities, and, *reinforce* particular ideas of femininity that centre on desirability (appearance) and heterosexual interaction with men, that are particularly gendered. In these spaces women experience pleasure through alcohol, music and dance; at the same time are exposed to danger, such as physical violence and/or rape, which is very much a reality for young black women in South Africa. Interestingly, the aspects of danger stem from the activities that bring the young women pleasure. In that sense, the experience of pleasure and danger simultaneously, attracts the young women, as they return time and time again. At what point will young women be free to experience the fun and carefree aspects of their social worlds without the controls on the behaviour, and the fear for their safety?

I strongly believe that the knowledge production that takes gender seriously is crucial to understanding our societies and transforming them. Traditionally, the experiences of the lived realities of young women in South Africa have either been ignored or misrepresented in mainstream knowledge production. It is therefore my intention to contribute to the production of knowledge that places the experiences of women in the forefront. I sincerely hope that the voices of the young women I have worked with are documented with honesty and sensitivity. The recording of their experiences are essential to rectify the gap in literature, as women's experiences will reveal important aspects of their gendered, raced, classed identity, at a personal level and at a broader social level.

¹ Thornton, S (1995) *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

² The racial category black refers to people who would previously, under Apartheid, be classified as African and Coloured is used in the same way, for people classified Coloured under Apartheid. These are contested terms and this is acknowledged, but necessary in that they enable one to name and distinguish the experiences of people that in South Africa are largely influenced by race.

³ By 'western' I am referring to the white population with South Africa that retain characteristics of their origins and European and US American influences, including African American.

⁴ The research and thesis fall under a project supervised by Dr. Elaine Salo from the African Gender Institute and funded by the South Africa and Netherlands Programme for Alternatives in Development. The title of the project is "Forging Coca-Cola Identities" and the broad focus of the SANPAD project is the influence popular culture has on gender and sexuality on youth on the Cape Flats. The research presented here is from my second year as part of this SANPAD project.

⁵ McLaren, G (2005) *Sweet My Baby: Negotiation of Femininity Through the Culture of Music*. UCT: Cape Town (unpublished Honours research project).

⁶ The names of the research participants has been changed as was agreed at the onset of my research.

⁷ Pata Pata, formerly Snap, was one of the more popular clubs, as well as Joburg's and Marvel, all in town.

⁸ See Haanyama, M (2005) and McLaren, MGT (2005)

⁹ Positionality was important in understanding how I experienced the space that is somewhat foreign to my lived experiences. My positionality impacted the topic of my research, the methods used and the interaction between myself and the women I worked with.

¹⁰ Bhavnani (1994)

¹¹ Spivak (1994)

¹² At that time in Zimbabwe, it was often against school rules to speak Shona, we were expected to speak English all the time.

¹³ Campbell, C. (1994). Township families and youth identity. Co-operative Research Programme on Marriage and Family Life. Human Sciences Research Council.

¹⁴ Green et al (1990). Women's Leisure: What Leisure?

¹⁵ Shaw, S. (2003). Feminist Approaches to the Study of Leisure. In P. Zeleza (ed.) Leisure in Urban Africa. Eritrea: Africa World Press.

¹⁶ Salo, E. (2004). Respectable mothers, tough men and good daughters: producing persons in Mannenberg township, South Africa. Emory University (Unpublished PhD Thesis).

¹⁷ Campbell (1994). Township families and youth identity. Co-operative Research Programme on Marriage and Family Life. Human Sciences Research Council

¹⁸ McLaren, G. (2005). Sweet My Baby: Negotiation of Femininity Through the Culture of Music. UCT: Cape Town (unpublished Honours research project)

¹⁹ While conducting my research I was informed how rampant gangsterism is in Langa, particularly for teenage boys aged 14 to 16 years. This has led to a rise in violent crimes, theft and rape.

²⁰ Ettore, E. (1997). Women and alcohol; A private pleasure or a public problem? London: The Women's Press Ltd.

²¹ Gefou-Madianou () Alcohol, Gender and Culture. London: Routledge.

²² Papagaroufali, E. (1992). Uses of alcohol among women; Games of resistance, power and pleasure. In D. Gefou-Madianou (ed.) Alcohol, Gender and Culture.

²³ Hanna, J.L.(1988). Dance, Sex and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance and Desire. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

²⁴ Whether they found the man attractive or not, dictated whether they interacted with him or not. They would only talk to, dance with or accept a drink from an attractive man.

²⁵ Hooking up can be understood as anything from kissing to having sex, but often implies temporality

²⁶ The young women explained that when they feel unsafe in clubs they either tell men from the location, the owner of the club or their women friends keep an eye out for trouble.