

Investigating How Women Negotiate and Navigate Relationships
Through Use of Cell Phones; Case study of Basotho Women in Maseru.

BY

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the academic

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Where would I be without You Jehovah Ebenezer? You know my sitting down and my getting up. Indeed Your mercies are new every day. It's only Your grace that re-wrote the story of my life, that turned my story around. Thank you for guidance and wisdom, lessons and victories that came with this dissertation.

To Prof Francis Nyamnjoh- I don't know what I can do for the world to know how great you are. You are just awesome; the world needs more people like you. You have pastoral skills and your knowledge of work makes everyone eager to do more. Thank you for your patience, your unwavering support; financial and otherwise. Thank you for everything sir, I love you.

To all people who had my back through this journey, may the God I serve bless you. I cannot mention you by name for the list would be lengthy, but all of you are important to me.

A special thank you to Nkhono 'Maholeata Sello, *Mokoena, Molimo a mpolokele oena. O tle o je litholoana tsa thuto eo o mphileng eona.*

To Tsabi, Mamneza and mon ami Polydor, - thank you.

To Anne, Ruth and Elizabeth; ladies this is to you- thank you for giving me your lives to do as I pleased.

ABSTRACT

This study is a guise at how cell phones are becoming power, identity and trend tools, through which women navigate and negotiate intimate relationships, particularly romantic and family relationships. I explore the threads that weave together the materiality of presence, space and the constantly changing definition of culture. This study also explores identity and authentication of personhood, which come along as relationships are being negotiated and navigated. All these are traced through three Basotho women from Maseru based in Cape Town, whose lives I shadowed for three months.

I argue that cell phones provide women a stance to negotiate and navigate relationships through offering them a space and position that goes beyond and challenges norms that have been in place before. Cell phones are placed in the theoretical framework of domestication and, more particularly, of cultural appropriation. They are regarded not only as devices to communicate, but also as material objects which cause economic problems and may affect social relations through the uneven disposition over such objects. As in many other African countries, the growth of cell phone usage in Maseru is higher than in Western countries, reflecting the particular appreciation of these devices. I also argue that personhood is authenticated through and by use of cell phones which have offered women the stage to showcase their lives without necessarily being present in the showcase. This argument is particularly valid for my case study because of the new ground that it breaks into as far as women and cell phone technologies are concerned in Maseru. Not only does this lead to understanding the 21st century woman in Maseru, but I believe it can lead to other studies such as negotiating power relations between men and women via cell phones .

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1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This research addresses how women use mobile technologies to navigate and negotiate relationships in their daily lives with spouses and family members. Anne*¹ lives in Maseru while Ruth* and Elizabeth* are based in Cape Town. At the beginning of the research Anne aged 27, born and raised in Lesotho, had been newly married to a Mosotho man. Throughout this dissertation I will, therefore, be referring to her as *makoti*², as the data I collected about her was circled around her being newly married and how she negotiated and navigated *bohali*³ negotiations and rites of passage using a cell phone. My findings form a story of how she was in constant communication with her paternal family through social communication media on her cell phone, despite her full knowledge that she was not allowed to be in contact with her paternal family. According to Sekese, (1991), *makoti* is permitted to be in touch with her paternal family only after a period of a year into marriage has lapsed, or this period could be cut short by the birth of a child to the newly married woman, in which case she may then visit her paternal home in the ninth month of pregnancy. The sole reason of alienating *makoti* from her paternal home is for her to learn and adopt the ways of her new home. Separating her from her own family serves to instil into her new consciousness, to make her feel estranged with her past and to embrace her new identity, which includes a change of name and clothes. During such a visit, her in-laws traditionally would send her home with a sheep and other gifts for the child and the rest of the family. Sending her to her paternal home serves the same purpose as a maternity leave in this present day for working women.

Ruth aged 29 also married to a Mosotho man, had just given birth to a *Letsibolo*⁴ at the time of this research. According to their family, she should have gone to her paternal home when she was eight months pregnant, to allow easy delivery of the baby. Part of the reason that a woman should go to her paternal family to give birth, especially with the first child is to deter sorcerers

¹*Fictional name.

²A newly married woman.

³Bride price.

⁴A first born son.

and witches from getting to the *letsibolo* through attacking the father's homestead, as discussed by Sekese (1991), and Makatsa, (1999). Moreover Makatsa (1999) discusses why a woman should go to her paternal home after giving birth, stating that the umbilical cord and placenta are buried under the ash hip by the grandmother to the new born soon after birth. It is also a belief that a breast feeding woman should not share a bed with her husband or any man, as that might poison the breast milk, compromising the child's health. When I started visiting Ruth and her husband, I found that they were fully aware of such beliefs, which they too shared, but because of costs and distance, they could not fully commit to the practices, rituals and rites. Through use of cell phones, Ruth and her husband had been able to perform some of the rituals for the child at their town house in Cape Town.

Elizabeth is a 28 year old Kenyan divorcee, who was married to a Mosotho man. She became Mosotho by virtue of civil and customary laws of marriage. When I started collecting data for the research she and her then husband were in the process of separation on grounds of *ho nyatsa*⁵. According to the Laws of Lerotholi that administrate the customary marriage among most clan groups within Basotho, cited in Ashton (1952), *bonyatsi* can never be grounds for divorce. Neglect and abuse can form grounds for divorce but *bonyatsi* is not recognised within customary law as grounds for divorce. Elizabeth and her husband were married in customary law. She had to use her cell phone to negotiate positionality and navigate space as *ngoetsi*⁶ to be able to file for divorce. She used her cell phone to cross over barriers that come with her gendered position and status, drawing on the unaccounted loop holes presented to her by a cell phone.

This dissertation explores the lives of these three young women discussed above, who I got acquainted to in different ways. I look at how these women navigate and negotiate relationships through the use of cell phones. The term relationship is broad and wide, it is for this reason that I chose to define what I mean by relationship and I will adopt that definition for the rest of the dissertation. The term relationship, as I will be applying it, is split up into two meanings. The first meaning that I seek to understand refers to that of a *makoti* or *ngoetsi* to

⁵The practice of having an extra marital affair, the noun which then becomes *bonyatsi*.

⁶A daughter in law.

her family, especially the conjugal family. As a newly married woman, the expectations, relational hierarchies and norms put a different spin to relating with a father and mother of the household. I delve into the heart of how *makoti* or *ngoetsi* use cell phones not only to communicate but also to have a stand within families, who continually view women as minors, as argued by Molapo, (2005) in her work on women and patriarchy in Lesotho. The second meaning of relationships that I develop explores romance and *bonyatsi*, through the life of one woman who uses a cell phone to be her mouth piece. Through a cell phone this woman traverses “a matter of cultural contact but of rethinking difference through contact”, (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 10). With each woman, I wanted to explore a different aspect of their life patterns and relationships.

I should mention that initially I wanted to explore the same themes for all three women, on how they navigate and negotiate relationships, but in the course of conversations with each woman it dawned on me that I stood to gain more by focusing on the aspects of life or theme that promised the most ethnographic richness with each woman leading to different themes per woman. As Green (2008) points out, “In fieldwork, one is never simply interviewing or observing – one is working with oneself, from oneself, in a relationship with others. In ethnography, the surface of learning is you, your body, your experience, and your ability to be a comfortable presence on the stranger’s threshold” (Green, 2008:2). I therefore chose for *makoti* to explore how she utilized the cell phone to keep in touch with her paternal family, while was physically in the place of solitude. Her own family politics and the fact that she was the newest member of another family steered her towards negotiating and navigating relationships with the manipulation and appropriation of her cell phone. For Ruth I will discuss how she employed her cell phone to negotiate being *ngoetsi* to one family and a daughter to the other. After child birth she had to navigate space and position through her cell phone to keep up with the customs of her paternal family, perform rites of passage for the son and convince the conjugal family of their importance to her as both *ngoetsi* and as a link between her son and the ancestors.

Lastly, I explored the life of Elizabeth whose brief marriage came to an abrupt end when she discovered that her husband was having an affair with her colleague. Initially I wanted to look at how she dealt with lost love, finding comfort and using her cell phone to negotiate space and position within a failing marriage. However, I ended up addressing how she navigated her way around *bonyatsi*, laws and customs that do not favour her as a woman and how she was able to negotiate her way out a marriage whose grounds for dissolvent were unacceptable. As I explored these issues of families and romance I stumbled across other social issues like ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’, consumption and continued negotiation of personhood. I will also address these issues in relation to how they played a role in the overall negotiation and navigation of family and romantic relationships.

Aware of my position as a girl child within my own family and also aware of the prospects of being a *makoti* to someone else’s family in the future, I was able to position myself as an insider to understand the gendered role of women in families and relationships; and how cell phones were an asset in the continued negotiation of positionality and space. Singling out the story of Anne, I observed how continued contribution of women to family matters was opening up spaces of influence for them. I therefore decided that a life story like that would shape how women are recognised within their own locality due to the salient changes that they are able to bring forth due to cell phone engagement. Despite a great contribution that her story would make to this dissertation, the challenge with Anne’s choice of theme is that as an unmarried woman, I am considered irrelevant as far as marriage and family issues are concerned, leading most times to getting one sided information from female relatives only. As far as the literature I found is concerned, there was not much written on rites of passage and the role of technology, making my work to be solely dependent on oral references. I am satisfied with how much I was able to uncover, though my ethnographic work was guided by intuition as far as rites of passage and technology among Basotho was concerned.

1.2 Mobility, Reflexivity, Cultures and Anthropology

Cultures and traditions are continually being negotiated through contact with ‘other’ cultures. “It is for this reason that we begin to speak of “a culture: the idea that a world of human differences is to be conceptualised as a diversity of separate societies...” (Gupta and Ferguson

2001:2). People have always been mobile and their identities less fixed to space and place, therefore, space and place can no longer be used to determine culture, (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992) as opposed to early 1900 where culture was assumed to be related to geographical spaces and borders, (Mofolo 1925, Segoe 1913, Ashton 1952). As I look at women and their appropriation of cell phones, I seek to address the issue of culture in the time of cell phones. I argue that cell phones have given people new citizenship of the world, where the new norms are battery life, air time and network connection. More often than not “the distinctiveness of societies, nations and cultures is based upon a seemingly unproblematic division of space on the fact that they occupy discontinuous space”, (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 6). In this dissertation I show how this notion of space, culture and identity is challenged by women through the use of cell phones.

From an historical perspective, anthropology can be seen as a discipline characterized by change; both in terms of the internal dynamics constituted by trends in theoretical approach, and in the ever-changing world from which, and in which, anthropology finds subjects of study. Earlier theoretical traditions, such as structural-functionalism, stressed the stability of societal foundations and used them as a background for understanding movements of people, ideas, and materials. This emphasis on the permanence of structures for enacting cultural continuity shaped the way anthropologists were able to conceptualize and debate global movements like culture and traditions. Culture and society are in a state of constant flux which affects the people in a population and the way they perceive their culture and how it relates to others. Globalization, that occurs with the movement of cultures, impacts both the giving and receiving cultures religiously, intellectually, structurally, economically, and historically.

Adey (2010) described how “mobilities have become a new code word for grasping the global” and explains the changing ways in which we live today (2010: 1). In Africa like everywhere, people are busy re-experiencing “cultural identities as heritage and as commodity, in an identity economy”, (Nyamnjoh 2013: 655) thus demonstrating the power of mobility and the influence it has on culture. Cell phones offer immobile women mobility, thus contacting a culture through diffusion while in one place. Anne and Elizabeth were able to get themselves to

positions which have otherwise been highly gendered and socially exclusive to women through appropriation of cell phones. Anne for instance was able to inform her fiancé of how much her family was going to charge him for *bohali*. *Bohali* negotiations is a men's affair (Sekese, 1991, Segoete, 1913 and Molapo 2005), a process which often is marked by testosterone sizing as described by Molapo (2005). As *ngoetsi*, Elizabeth could not have been able to sit and discuss with her father in-law how her husband treated her, as her family culture dictates, but her cell phone proved that her father in-law was just a phone call away.

The privilege and centrality of the anthropological gaze traditionally resulted in the construction and conceptualization of discrete regions or territories based on traits such as language, ethnicity, or geography. These regions were seen as having relative permanence and resilience in the face of movements in the form of trade, migration, and conflict, which operated across colonially-enacted boundaries. However, as anthropological attention turned to the increasing intensity of inter-regional connectivity and exchange, structures gradually gave way to processes as the primary means of understanding agency and cultural change (Appadurai, 2000). It is therefore a fallacy to fixate on immobilising women based on notions of culture that fails to take into consideration mobility and exchange of ideas. In the words of Appadurai, "areas are not facts but artefacts of our interests, and our fantasies as well as our needs to know, to remember, and to forget", (Appadurai, 2000: 8). To box a woman in an area of *makoti* or *ngoetsi* is still very similar to appropriating localities a culture as though fixed to that space or location. This therefore implies that we cannot equate Lesotho to any actions or bind certain acts to the geographical boundaries of Lesotho, or any place or space thereof.

The recognition of the previous tendencies of the academy to construct regions and represent them as mapped "cultural areas" brought into question the authority of the mobile anthropologist, especially in terms of the production of knowledge, sparking debate and conversation about the role of reflexivity in anthropology and the social sciences as a whole. What allowed anthropologists to represent other cultures with authority? How did the new awareness and consciousness of the power inherent in positionality come to influence their

representations of others? In the wake of the role culture plays in authentication and production of knowledge, I found it was best to understand that “the production of social meanings is therefore a necessary precondition for the functioning of all social practices...cultural description and analysis is therefore increasingly crucial to the production of knowledge” (Goggin, 2006: 6). In the scholarly sense, cultural mobility is the way through which a society is able to access a “heightened tolerance” of other cultures; however, that exposure can lead to paranoia and anxiety of their demise through globalization (Greenblatt et al, 2010: 7). While the religious and social practices of a society comprise the culture, as the examples of the Romans uncovers, the political and economic aspects of a society are equally as important (Adey, 2010: 5). Greenblatt defines this significance of codes, morals, laws, and structures and how they are taken as a “categorical mobility” (2010: 11). The policies that make up a culture “enable and shape mobilities” as they are adapted and copied through their movements from the originating culture to the other (Adey, 2010: 5). The local culture may suffer at the hands of intense globalization through cultural mobility, both on an inward and outward flowing direction. The implications of this unboundedness of culture and mobility, are evidenced in the ability of Ruth to still perform rites of passage for her son outside of her mother’s locality. It is further proven by my own ethnographic work at Anne’s *kapeso*⁷ with regard to perceptions of culture and tradition by those who were in charge of the ceremony. As an unmarried, childless woman, I stepped in the territory that my community had barred me from. Time and again I could hear people whispering around me “*mo tlohelleng eno o etsa ntho tsa sekolo sa makhood*” [let her be, she is here to do school work], “*hothoe o tsoa Cape Town ke lekhood le letso...*” [we hear she is from Cape Town, she is a white black person]. These comments and many others taught me that “otherness” of a culture is overcome by mobility, allowing contact to break down the barriers and walls of otherness.

1.3 Fluid Cultures and Boundaries; An Anthropological Take

Focusing on the production of boundaries through the mobilization of space and resources, Mbembe (2000) repositions regions that have been considered to be on the “margins” of the

⁷A ceremony at which a *makoti* is given permission to visit her paternal home.

world as regions that are actively engaged within a globalized network of flows. By unpacking how space is put to different uses and how territories are formed through the set of movements that take place within it, Mbembe addresses the 'misunderstanding' that explains conflict in Africa as a result of 'arbitrary' colonial borders. Cell phones are constantly used to negotiate space and relationships, often crossing the boundaries that are drawn by culturists. When tackling Elizabeth's story it becomes clear how cell phones have allowed the fluidity of culture to dismantle the strong walls of resistance hidden under the name of culture, when culture in itself is ever changing and subjective to a group's understanding. Take for example how Elizabeth was able to contact and meet up with her father in-law in a restaurant in Maseru, thus navigating a cultured space [in-law's homes] and negotiating position as *ngoetsi*. In essence, Mbembe (2000) argues that territories in Africa are defined by mobile spaces as opposed to state borders.

Gupta and Ferguson (1992) indicate how limiting culture to space has demonstrated to be problematic; this is contrary to what Sekese (1991) brings forth when he describes cultural practices in Lesotho. He articulates in his work that 'within Lesotho, the culture is that Basotho women are not allowed to communicate with their fathers' in law' (1991: 17), leaving women to either use a child or mother in law to communicate her message to the father, risking the message to be lost, forgotten or even miscommunicated. At this juncture, it is clear that the processes of cultural change in terms of mobility and sovereignty traverse state boundaries. The cell phone traverses, for Elizabeth, the power of cultural notions where a woman cannot communicate with her father in-law alone or directly, as discussed by Sekese, (1991). The state boundaries as per Laws of Leretholi and divorce grounds were traversed through mobility offered by a cell phone.

In order to understand the authority that a culture carries and the influence it ultimately has on intelligibility, I had to understand knowledge and how it is produced. It was the remarks of Bourdieu (2004) on his study of how researchers study others that the space for bias and fiction in the representations of others necessitates researchers to be reflexive. I realised that when I

was aware of my own biases I was able to draw the line at the point of my own realities and the views and realities of others. For example, I cannot understand how Ruth views *meetlo*⁸ without looking into how I view and relate to *meetlo*. To be mindful of my own prejudices and social constructs as I incorporate theory into representations of my subjects of study assists me in giving a balanced view of events, as opposed to a single sided, researcher-opinion-only view. Bourdieu (2004) points out that although ethnography may be a dynamic way to attain knowledge; this knowledge is mainly of representation and viewpoints informed by personal experiences. He argues that as researchers become reflexive, knowledge becomes a progress rather than a closed entity of recycled theories circulating within the academy.

Representations end up engendering their own habitus, and as homo academicus, we often are far more powerful than we imagine, in the production and reproduction of social reality in our quest for cultural capital and prestige (Bourdieu, 2004). Knowledge can challenge former ideas and theories, and enhance the ability to reflect on the past and the present. As Gupta and Ferguson (1997) have argued, doing ethnography in a ‘deterritorialized world’ calls for an idea of fieldwork that focuses more on shifting locations, than on bounded fields. It also means “cultivating an intellectual predisposition to see the familiar in unlikely places and the strange in familiar circles”, (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 35 – 40). Knowledge emerges out of particular locations, yet it is not bound fixedly to location or space, it is fluid, and through oral traditions and diffusion can be exchanged, modified, gained or lost. As knowledge is being produced, reflexivity and mobility become key ingredients to successful research.

1.4 Producing Personhood and Identity

While tackling work on navigation and negotiation of relationships in the next chapters, I will discuss other socially inserted actions and meanings that arise. These actions and meanings do not come about in isolation but simultaneously takes place with approval of personhood and identity. In adopting Fowler’s (2004) concept of personhood, which is common behaviour practised within a group and by individuals outside of the group, (Fowler 2004: 18), I will be linking to my argument how navigation and negotiation of relationships produces personhood

⁸Rituals

and identity. This holistically means I will be referring to the socially constructed definition of a person, not the natural definition, which means soul, mind and body. In this manner I view personhood being habitus in the cell phone community that comprises of family, lovers and friends who use cell phones. When linking the cell phone as an explicable commodity that causes social change to definition of habitus by Bourdieu where he made mention that habitus makes possible the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular conditions of its production" (Bourdieu, 1990: 55), I see my myself driving towards a conclusion that the cell phone plays a significant role in establishing habitus for Basotho women who use it to negotiate their social position in society. According to Lee (1993) "commodities were to help construct a wide variety of identities, through consumption, to confirm membership of particular cultural communities...to signify invidious and often antagonistic social and cultural differences", (Lee 1993: xi). In this sense, women find their worth, identity and being through use of their cell phones.

Cell phones are used as objects to make visible "personal affluence, to suggest sexual potency and physical attraction...and function as the index of intelligence, education and social literacy", (O'Shea 1989: 376), they give the user the same status they carry- thus lending their power to those who own them to navigate and negotiate relationships. This is reinforced by Appadurai (1986) where he points out that value is embedded in commodities and the same value creates the link of exchange for the user and the commodity itself, for example, if one can afford to pay M80, 000.00 *bohali*, the same value will be given to both the payee and the one making a payment; thus value given to the commodity, in this case a woman being married. The sexual potency and physical attraction I believe are the cause of *bonyatsi* associated with this desired commodity; cell phone.

1.5 Research Justification

Since the 1990's, and more so towards the 2000's, cell phones users have steadily risen in number in African societies. Statistics as provided by Nokia indicated that 15 million people use cell phones, and their aim as a company is that "by 2015 a billion people in Africa have access to cell phones" (Marsden December 2013, ICT4D Conference). With mobility provided by cell phones, new forms of contact have been made, which current literature does not cover.

Looking at EFT⁹s used to pay for *bohali*, cell phone records used as grounds for divorce for a marriage union under customary law and many other examples that will come up in the writing of this dissertation, I deemed it necessary to research on how cell phones were changing and being changed by norms. It was also important to contemplate some of these new norms, how they are constantly negotiated and navigated through cell phones. In our own experiences as ethnographers, the issue of cell phone research we often aired from an agency stance, neglecting authentication of personhood and identity, power and influence which form an immense part of cell phone research and human behaviour. These were the grounds that propelled me to undertake this study in my understanding that the cultural treatment of cell phones is rare.

1.6 Research Questions

- How do women use their cell phones to navigate and negotiate romantic and family relationships?
- How does the use of cell phones help women negotiate and navigate space and positionality?
- How is personhood authenticated through the use of Cell Phones by the same women?

1.7 Objectives

- To find out how women in relationships negotiate the material self through use of cell phones.
- To find out how the use of mobile phones becomes the authenticator or passport of personhood.
- To find out how women in relationships, especially with their partners and their family in-laws end up defining abstracts like space, presence and time using mobile phones.

1.8 Dissertation Organisation

This section lays out how the rest of the dissertation is structured.

Chapter One: Introduction

⁹Electronic Funds Transfer

I presented a general introduction of the discourse, justification of the study, objectives and definition of requisite terms. It is in this chapter also that I included the background information to the study.

Chapter Two; Literature Review: Cell Phone My Culture

This chapter gives a theoretical framework which expounds on how love, culture and relationships are negotiated through appropriation of cell phones. Furthermore, I look at how personhood and consumption is navigated through the very same appropriation of cell phones. This chapter emphasises the importance of reflexivity in doing or undoing culture and demonstrates the role habitus and social change play in the overall completion of social relations.

Chapter Three: Methods: How We Do What We Do

This chapter describes in detail on how the study was undertaken, uncovering the different techniques employed in data collection. The methods section is divided into two major themes: Ethnography and general Observations. The first part, ethnography, gazes at how individual life histories and stories of key informants unravelled through the use of cell phones. For each woman I looked at a different life event and explored the extent to which cell phones played a role in how they each negotiated and navigated their relationships.

The second part comprises my fieldwork journey including being in the field and my observations. In this part of the chapter I deploy how I navigated the field, how I interpreted Geertz's (1973) metaphor of "thick description" in collecting my field notes for informative ethnographic writing. This second part of my methods is influenced mainly by data collected through my own experiences and incidences occurring around me.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data: Boundless Ethnography

This chapter addresses the issues of: i) Romance and family time- which looks at how cell phone and were employed in this research. Supported by literature, I look at women and love, culture and space. ii) Consumption and personhood- this addresses the theory of consumption,

personhood and desiring of material things. The purpose of this sub-chapter is to show how women make choices and how their acts are 'justified'. iii) Technology, the enabler; this addresses how the literature and the findings weave together to understand Cell Phone culture, including how we constantly shape and are being shaped by mobile technologies.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

In this concluding chapter I sum up the main results of the dissertation, arguments and theories used throughout the paper.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter served to introduce the key informants of this research. I gave their demographic data and the individual stories that merited them to be part of this research. It is in this chapter that I also introduced my argument informed by my data and subsequent literature. This introductory chapter also sought to present key concepts that I will be tackling throughout this dissertation. Those key concepts are culture and space, identity and authentication of personhood through consumption. I laid down the foundation for many of the theories that I will be using to strengthen my argument and referencing in contrasting my work to any existing literature that will be employed to form the core of this dissertation. It is in this chapter that I discussed the research questions that informed the data collection and analysis. The section on objectives, research justification and how the rest of the dissertation is laid out is discussed in this chapter.

2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW; CELL PHONES, NEW KIDS ON THE CULTURAL BLOCK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter serves to substantiate and bridge some of the ideas that I found in the field through relating my study to on-going discourses in the literature. The purpose of this chapter is to share with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related. Among many other ethnographic studies that were undertaken to observe human behaviour as far as cell phones are concerned, I used s Miller and Horst's (2006) study in Trinidad, which explores the impact of the cell phone from personal issues of loneliness and depression to the global concerns of the modern economy and the trans-national family. As the technology of social networking, the cell phone has become central to establishing and maintaining relationships in areas from religion to love. The Cell Phone presents the first detailed ethnography of the impact of this new technology through the exploration of the cell phone's role in everyday lives (Miller and Slater, 2000: 11).

This chapter is divided into three major parts namely; relationships and the cell phone, the cell phone culture and personhood negotiated through consumption. The first part deals with romantic love and family, exploring how women use cell phones to navigate space within the institution of the family and how they negotiate positionality within relationships. The second part addresses the issues that stem from cell phone among women, especially Basotho women and culture as used in context by Sekese, (1991), Ashton, (1952) and Molapo (2005). These are contra-compared to works of other scholars who also covered similar areas of study. The last part explores how consumption of cell phones is being used to authenticate personhood, in the navigation and negotiation of personhood. This literature review is also informed by social change theory and habitus. The challenges I found were that there is not much ethnographical literature written on cell phone appropriation, however this is not to say there is no literature on material culture and its appropriation. Ethnographic studies on similar themes include Miller and Horst (2006) in Trinidad and Jamaica, where they look at people's attitudes towards cell

phones. The other ethnographic work that I used as only as a benchmark for my work was Miller and Slater's work on the Internet (2000) where he was addressing yet again attitudes of people to the internet. Attitudes of people come before people themselves can decide to make use of whatever tool presented to them, hence I think a study on attitudes can be a preliminary study to an investigation on appropriation of tools. Goggin, (2006) and Castells, M., Fernandez-Ardevol, M., Oiu L. J., and Sey, A., (2007) attest to this claim that the cell phone has been neglected by the scholars of society and culture. However, I did draw lessons from the same studies and many others like "Married But Available" Nyamnjoh (2005), "Alone Together", Turkle, (2011) and "Sacred King", Waineri (2012). The second challenge is that there is no ethnographic study on Basotho and or any Southern African society on cell phone use regarding behaviour and appropriation, which forced me to compare or use as a benchmark, studies on Western societies or accounts that are out of date. For example, there is no recent work on Basotho women and their 'culture', all the written accounts are at least a decade old, and in such a stretch of time a lot changes; in the light that culture is always changing.

2.2 Cell Phone Era: Our Hybrid Culture

Cultures and traditions are continually being negotiated as contacts with 'other' cultures continue. The cell phone has become much more than a device for voice call; it has become central cultural technology in itself as argued by Goggin (2006). The power relations that come as a result of the merge between a culture and cell phone are what I call the hybrid cell phone culture meaning a new culture in which no one group can claim sole ownership but rather each group has appropriated the cell phone for its own functionality. Taking into account that communication is embedded in media and culture, it is crucial to understand that a culture is not simply reflective or expressive of other processes; instead it is regarded as "being constitutive of the social world as economic or political processes", (Goggin 2006: 6).

Earlier theoretical traditions, such as structural-functionalism, stressed the stability of societal foundations and used them as a background for understanding movements of people, ideas, and materials. This emphasis on the permanence of devices for enacting cultural continuity shaped the way anthropologists were able to conceptualize and debate global movements like culture and traditions. Culture and society are in a state of constant flux which affects the

people in a population and the way they perceive their culture and how it relates to others. The globalization that occurs with the embodiment of cultures impacts both the giving and receiving cultures religiously, intellectually, structurally, economically, and historically, (Goggin, 2006).

Adey (2010) described how “mobilities have become a new code word for grasping the global” and explains the changing ways in which we live today (2010: 1). In Africa like everywhere, people are busy re-experiencing “cultural identities as heritage and as commodity, in an identity economy”, (Nyamnjoh 2013: 655) thus demonstrating the power of mobility and the influence it has on culture. Cell phones offer immobile women mobility, thus contacting a culture through diffusion while in one place. The privilege and centrality of the anthropological gaze traditionally resulted in the construction and conceptualization of discrete regions or territories based on traits such as language, ethnicity, or geography. These regions were seen as having relative permanence and resilience in the face of movements in the form of trade, migration, and conflict, which operated across colonially-enacted boundaries. However, as anthropological attention turned to the increasing intensity of inter-regional connectivity and exchange, structures gradually gave way to processes as the primary means of understanding agency and cultural change Appadurai, (2000). It is therefore a fallacy to fixate on immobilising women on notions of a culture that fails to take into consideration mobility and exchange of ideas that feed daily into a new culture.

2.2.1 Women and Love

This part of the literature review dwells on how women negotiate and navigate their positionality and space within family and romantic relationships. I will be exploring terms like marriage, *bonyatsi* and divorce as understood in the context of Basotho. It is important to understand these concepts so that when I delve into how the cell phone played a role in empowering or enabling them to manoeuvre their way through, it has been established how these notions are found within societies the women come from. According to Holland (2008), intimacy is birthed by a common ground which can be “shared by a community, sub-community or a dyad” (Holland 2008: 220). This intimacy is the common ground which offered me a

platform to research and study cell phone appropriation through negotiation and navigation of intimacy itself. According to Schwimmer (2003)

Marriage is an exclusive and permanent bond between a man and a woman that is centrally concerned with assigning sexual rights in each of the partners and establishing parental responsibility for the children of the union. In its traditional form, it also organizes parents and children into domestic groups in which basic roles are allocated according to age and gender, (Schwimmer 2003: 220).

It is an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually intimate and sexual, are acknowledged in a variety of ways, depending on the culture or subculture in which it is found. Such a union, often formalized via a wedding ceremony, may also be called matrimony (Spiegel, 1991). This general definition does not differ that much from the one Phillips and Morris (1971) give; except that they go a little further by adding that it is a “transaction and process” (Phillips and Morris 1971: 107), meaning before the contract of marriage is drawn; there are processes that the couple, kin group members and friends go through.

Among some groups within the Basotho nation, which Anne’s family is part of, this lengthy process that takes place before the marriage contract is sealed is called *ho hlabisa bohali*. It involves a process of *bohali* negotiations through to delivery of *bohali* cattle, which may take a day or few weeks. Ashton (1952) makes mention that even though *bohali* is referred to as cattle- this can be in a form of any other livestock or beast, even money. Due to the fall of agricultural practises among Basotho, young men resorted to working in the mines so that they may be able to transfer their *bohali* using monetary transactions or purchase live stock for such a task. Anne’s husband took it further by using EFTs to deliver *bohali* money to Anne’s family, meaning the process of *ho hlabisa bohali* took less than a minute.

Marriage is a whole life emotional investment and a contract between two families. I came to this conclusion as I listened to stories of these three women. I learned that marriage is full time job, which needs to be worked at all day, every day. Marriage is also a way to procreate kin groups, (Hammond- Tooke 1993) and the woman is the engine for such a task. According to Molapo (2005) *Bohali* was, and indeed still is, necessary in order to institutionalise all forms of

marriages. For Molapo (2005: 13) “*bohali* cattle signified the transfer of both uxorial and generic rights to the man and his lineage.” The transfer of *bohali* also makes sure that there are no women or children that are unaccounted for. After this, the girl can move out of her natal home to reside patrilocally with the husband’s kin or unilocally, that is, alone with her husband. Molapo, who has tended to idealise the past and, by using the ethnographic present, made it difficult to understand how circumstances and practices have changed, a marriage where *bohali* has not been transferred is not regarded as marriage, rather it is viewed as “cohabitation and the children born in such unions have a fate of being considered bastards” (Molapo, 2005: 14).

However, most Basotho, argued Sekese, (1991) find it not a realistic situation as most of them resort to giving *koae*¹⁰ as form of marriage authentication. The children that are born through marriage not only tie her to the husband and his kin group, but also tie her to the ancestors as rituals will be performed during pregnancy, birth and lactation processes; all which are part of her being a married woman as attested by Ashton (1952), Molapo (2005), Murray (1981). It therefore makes sense that women will need to negotiate visibility and invisibility daily, depending on their emotional needs. Space and position become important as they navigate their way through the maze of family and romance, as understood from Orlove (2005).

Though at the end only two people are married, marriage is not just a couple’s thing. From the start, the process involves many other people- a person who goes to ask the hand in marriage, then a group of people who will negotiate the *bohali*, there has to be a team that escorts the bride to the groom’s locality (Ashton 1952, Molapo 2005, Murray 1981). One can only imagine how a woman being married deals with being surrounded by new people, new expectations and all pressures that come with being a *makoti*. In order to strike the balance, Anne had to ask her mother over the cell phone for recipes to cook. Instead of just being limited to the household and domestic sphere as argued by Ashton (1952), Murray (1981) and Sekese (1991), women can now tap into new social space accorded by cell phone use. This grey area that is neither covered in Laws of Lerotholi nor in the scholarly ethnographies is continually explored and enjoyed by women, who otherwise would be crippled by the law, customs or traditions.

¹⁰ A goat or sheep slaughtered at the time a woman first takes up residence with a man, signifying acceptance of coitus by the woman.

Not only does the use of cell phone accord a woman new social space by providing a platform for her to perform the otherwise socially-tabooed actions within the same gendered space, as evidenced by Anne, but it also helps recompense socio-status inequalities. Horst and Miller, (2006), de Bruinjn et al (2009) and Tazanu (2012) also concur that cell phones are a social navigation tool through which (women) continually find their way through life and relationships. Anne had to give a cell phone to her aunt to keep the relationship going, she had to teach her mother how to use Whatsapp application on her cell phone so that the mother could have a cheaper way of communicating with her, and the Skype application on her cell phone made it possible for she and I to continue our conversations despite the fact that 'culturally' a "*makoti* should not mingle with people from her past before the seclusion period had elapsed", (Sekese 1991:23).

Tazanu (2012) and Powell (2012) have argued that possession of a cell phone is a basic proof of membership in a consumerist world that remains otherwise elusive for most. I observed through this study that this is true for these women as well. In families where privacy is scarce, most women like Anne spring to cell phone use because telecommunication for them opens up new spaces of sociality, backed Orlove (2005). Anne, Ruth and Elizabeth have shown that indeed the cell phone transforms experiences in space and latitude. In their marriages, and family relationships, the phone became a vital component in the navigation of everyday issues. The cell phone has allowed them to take part in matters that would otherwise be oblivious to them. For example, Anne knew how much *bohali* her husband was going to pay, Elizabeth called a family meeting and told her father-in-law about her then husband's actions and Ruth buried her own son's umbilical cord; all these actions by these women ought not have been done by them, but their cell phones accorded them the platform to do so. In deed cell phones facilitate conversations and discussions beyond time and place.

2.2.2 Showing Off, But With So Much to Hide

As others have argued de Bruijn M, Nyamnjoh F and Brinkman I. (2009), Miller and Horst (2006), possession of a cell phone is a basic proof of membership in a world that remains otherwise elusive for most. However, as I show below, cell phones are just as much about disguise as they are about display, if not more so. While information and communication

technologies (ICTs) have contributed to the erosion of privacy in some settings (Katz 2006), their impact in other contexts is more ambiguous (Horst and Miller 2006). In a place like Mokhotlong, where privacy is scarce and where “most people have passed directly from no phone to cell phone” (Orlove 2005: 699), telecommunication opens up new spaces of sociality. Indeed, the phone “transforms experiences with space not only in terms of space–time compression but also by providing individuals with more latitude”, (Archambault 2013: 88).

Not only have cell phones extended women’s social space, they have also expanded their reach to matters otherwise seen as unfeminine. Cell phones are known to increase sexual relationships among men and women alike, as discussed by Cole (2004) and Hunter (2009). This chapter explores how cell phone use among women has affected their romantic relationships; it also addresses the issues of *bonyatsi*, which the data I collected showed to be on the high. Of the 50 women who responded to the online questionnaire that I loaded online, 32 claimed that they had online relationships with all the men they had pursued romance with.

In the negotiation and navigation of romantic relationships, virtual relationships are on the rise, facilitated by cell phones and internet. In their study in Trinidad, Miller and Horst (2006), unearthed that most relationships between lovers, family and friends relied mainly on the use of the cell phone. This is because of the privacy, mobility and affordability, as Mardsen (2009) argues, whom I am inclined to agree with. From a general point of view, cell phones are frequently equated with modernity, and the notions of increasing speed and decreasing distance, (Mardsen 2009: 18). Among other aspects, their high prestige is based on their unique capability to spatially delimit communication (Katz 2006: 145). This is one of the reasons why cell phones have become such an icon of globalisation, worldwide communication and borderless connections Warnier (2009). The ubiquitous presence of the cell phone and the constant expectancy of being called up and immediately becoming part of the global communication network, are at the root of the image of this technology as a generally accepted symbol of globalisation. The reason for high use of cell phones, I observed, is also linked to authentication of personhood, which I discuss later on in the chapter. Cell phones offer what

Katz, (2006) called “an extension to self” (2006: 74). It is this extension, coupled with privacy that seems to give rise to *bonyatsi*. If I take *bonyatsi* as an extension of a woman existence, it would therefore conclusively mean that a cell phone allows or grants a woman to co-exist as a wife and someone else’s lover. However, I cannot say being a side dish is pursued and desired by all women.

Women carry on addressing life’s obstacles as they come across them, stealing things once in a while or exchanging sexual favors for material gain and usually relying on face-to-face interaction to activate social networks, Archambault (2013). Based on the 32 women of the 50, I can say that most of the women could concur with Archambault’s assertion. Cell phones are put to the service of what Horst and Miller call “expansive realization” (2006:6). It is through the creation of virtual spaces of sociality and the resultant expansion of privacy that such ideals are played out, Archambault (2013). Csordas (1990) explains habitus as “the socially informed body”, (1990: 5) where the body is the existential of culture. For Bourdieu (1990), habitus is inclusive of emotion and feeling; “it’s a product of embodied history, internalized ...second nature,” (1990: 56). Linking habitus to the cell phones and appropriation by women, with Katz, (2006) in mind where he says cell phones are becoming our extensions, our virtual bodies, I delve into the issue of habitus, cell phones and *bonyatsi*.

My own assumptions about *bonyatsi* were that people wanted more sexual encounters with more people; hence they would be willing to risk their marriages to quench sexual thirst. As I endeavoured into the field, I found that though the affairs may start as sexual thing, they usually grow to be something more than just sex. A cell phone as a virtual body in the hands of a woman learns to have multiple relationships through flirting, chatting and sexting with many other virtual bodies. But because cell phone habitus is what we have become through socialisation through family and society, these virtual bodies get used to maintain multiple relationships. The actual physical body is involved in the cell phone and learns the multi-tasking habitus presented by the cell phone, provided a cell phone would actually have a habitus, leading to the actual, physical *bonyatsi*. For Basotho women, who have cultural idioms like

“mosali ke cabbage oa ipopa” meaning a woman should not have more than one sexual partner, their cell phones may have more than society would approve of, while men are *“mekopu e ea nama”*[men can sleep around no one will know], and these idioms afford the image in which prejudices are fashioned and are also socially ordered or constructed.

What the body knows, it is hard for the body to deny, this is an observation I made with body related activities. Still sticking with the allegory that due to employment of cell phones we have two bodies; the virtual and the physical, the body acts as a “memory pad through which learning takes place and is inscribed”, (Bourdieu, 1990: 101). The cell phone is not necessarily independent from the user; as the user takes on tasks that she would not easily accomplish without the cell phone. Her existence becomes extended. Reading her messages from her phone does not mean one is reading her life but about her life, at the end of which the implication could be reading about her life. I want to make a conclusive statement that the socialisation of the body becomes the body itself. What the cell phone captures, is what the owner of the cell phone goes through. Butler (2004), when talking of the physical body and culture, says that culture is inscribed and carried in bodies. Therefore, virtual culture, carried in cell phones and through emotions in habitus, is acted out by the physical body. Since behaviour is learned and concepts constructed and re-constructed through mimicking what has been observed, *bonyatsi* too is a concept which through observed behaviour is constantly being reconstructed into social circles.

I should mention that I am not saying cell phones are solely responsible for the high level of *bonyatsi*, but rather that cell phones are enabling because of their ability to be used to negotiate and navigate space and positionality. Charismatic people like King Solomon, from the bible, are said to have had over 700 wives and 1000 concubines. He was a king and as an authority figure, what he did could have been looked upon as excellent. The other controversial individual, who is even closer to home is King Moshoeshoe of Lesotho, who I read, (Joel 1956, Ashton 1952, Makatsa 1980) played a major role in the spread of *bonyatsi* amongst the Basotho: he had many wives, who he would offer to other men to please, as he would not be able to please all the wives himself (Spiegel, 1991). As a result, men learned that they could

have affairs with other men's wives- and this became a custom. However, though common *bonyatsi* might be among Basotho men, among women *bonyatsi* is frowned upon whereas *bonyatsi* among men is treated as a norm that no one can really openly accept (Spiegel, 1991). While this norm is socially not acceptable, there is little that anyone can do because of two main reasons. Firstly, those who practise it, if ever confronted, claim it to culture and secondly, there are hardly ever any people who agree to have *linyatsi*. It is at this point where the cell phone changed the game because stored messages can be the evidence for infertility.

The geographical distance birthed by migrant labour, and marrying at a young age contributed to people opting for *bonyatsi*, as I had discussed in Sello (2011). The geographical has been revoked by Ling (2004, 2009), Ben-Zeév (2004), Turkle, (2011) and Bourdieu (1990) among others who show that distance lies not so much where it is looked for, but rather in the gaps between cultures often understood as culture shock, leaving those at the margins of cultures to fall off in the gaps. I realize that understanding a certain way of life more than anything contributes to shared activities. Whether one is far or close geographically, initiation into a culture or subculture determines how s/he goes about acts. For example Elizabeth's husband is used to "*monna ke mokopu, o oa nama*" hence he had no problem having extra marital sex. To him he was well within his rights as a man, and also his expectations for his wife was to remain faithful, which he cannot really attest to because of the privacy provided by cell phones.

In the context of cyber *bonyatsi*, where 'the more' seems to be 'the merrier', women are enjoying being able to manoeuvre relationships without anyone being the wiser. Because 'too much of everything' is not good, and because "too much exposure causes boredom", (Ben-Zeév, 2004: 224), women may use their new found social space to explore or maintain relationships that they never tried, thus exposing themselves to this habitus. The vibrant nature of cyberspace defeats the delicate balance between change and stability, particularly in the romantic sphere as it significantly increases the role for change. "Offline boundaries are not applied online...social and moral behaviour are not applied..." Ben-Zeév (2004: 226) had argued, and dismissal of norms, navigation and negotiation is left to the discretion of an individual. She went on to explain that as more bonds are created over cyberspace, the more meaning of such

bonds are reduced. With cell phones, women and men alike are often online, bonding and finding alternative cyber-relationships, which might end up in the real world or not. As I observed from Elizabeth's case and backed by Ben-Ze'ev (2004), Holland (2007) and Castells et al (2007) cyberspace might for a minute provide a thrill of romance that a marriage might lack, but that thrill is short lived forcing the user to seek pleasure from yet other users of the cyberspace. Cyberspace in this context refers to communication carried over computers or cell phones.

In the use of space to negotiate and navigate romantic relationships, one might have to deal with the open secret of *bonyatsi*, whether they are the ones doing the cheating, or they are being cheated on. Cell phones have made it possible to track the whereabouts of others, what with Whatsapp and Facebook that gives feedback of the other person's online status. Like I had discussed earlier when expounding on habitus, women's emotions come into play in partaking habitus. The embodied norm for them could also mean being able to be identified as person just by doing what others do- thus crossing the 'cultural' difference and gaps that I discussed earlier, even if that is something that you show off with so much to hide.

2.3 Consumption and Personhood as GPS for navigation and Negotiation of Relationships

This section is aimed at addressing the theoretical implication of personhood and consumption in the navigation and negotiation of relationships. It is in this section also that I will look at the role of habitus, social change and structures and its function. I also aim to address the ways in which women replicate patterns of life based on others, which I strongly believe form their authentication of identity. This serves to navigate and negotiate positionality and space in relationships. In this decade where emphasis on image, style, design and fashion are the mouth piece for those who need to be seen and known; it is in this chapter where I reconnoitre how use of cell phones help women to achieve such.

Consumption of things material and social goes hand in hand with social change. Patterns of consumption as pattern of life style set a tone to the new and emerging social patterns that are

eventually set as norms. Lee (1993) reasoned that the subjects of consumption and social change cannot be addressed independently. The social life of things cannot be explored without addressing the issue of social change and meaning that comes with consumption of commodities. Commodity in this instance is an object of exchange, which appears to hold a privileged and magical status in contemporary life, as attested by Lee (1993). Miller, (2009) points out that a cell phone is a hottest communication tool, both by demand and cost. Katz (2006) notes that a cell phone is a communication tool that also acts as a fashion accessory (Katz 2006: 66), in which he defined fashion as “an important form of symbolic communication that can drive human behaviour...” Taking all these points, I understand how women could get to a place where they navigate and negotiate relationships using cell phones. I also understand how cell phones as commodities give value to women in the long run.

When linking the cell phone as the explicable commodity that causes social change to the definition of habitus by Bourdieu where he made mention that “habitus makes possible the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular conditions of its production” (Bourdieu, 1990: 55), I come to a conclusion that indeed the cell phone is the establishing factor for the 21st century habitus, especially among Basotho women. My argument in this regard is supported by Lee where he attested that “commodities were to help construct a wide variety of identities, through consumption, to confirm membership of particular cultural communities...to signify invidious and often antagonistic social and cultural differences”, (Lee 1993: xi) in which sense women find their worth, identity and being in their ordered use of cell phones. This argument can be associated to the one I made earlier in the chapter about membership in social groups through ability to consume certain material things. This explains the high use of cell phones that accords the user automatic authentication of personhood, which is supported by Fortunati (2002) where he attested that cell phones improve the status and appearance of those who wear them, showing just how much they are desired on the part of others, Fortunati, (2002).

For the reason that commodities, particularly cell phones, are used as objects to make visible “personal affluence, to suggest sexual potency and physical attraction...and function as the

index of intelligence, education and social literacy”, (O’Shea 1989: 376), they give the user the same status they carry- thus lending their power to those who own them. The power is based on how one navigates and negotiates relationships. This point is reinforced by Appadurai (1986) where he points out that value is embedded in commodities. The same value creates the link of exchange for the user and the commodity itself. For example, if one buys a cell phone worth R10, 000 the same value will be given to the buyer. Cell phones, like any other commodities are socially understood and have “souls” that are tied up to their social meaning, consumers use their definitions tactically, to position themselves in the social fields as part of the social game, as suggested by (Bourdieu, 1992). This leads to users having cell phone-like personalities or identities that can be understood as habitus meaning geographical space and societal norms can be negotiated.

According to Dichter (1960), Lee (1993), Appadurai (1986) and O’Shea (1989), commodity consumption often provides a source of pleasure and enjoyment, which I too concur with. Consumption of cell phones as commodities has not only enabled women to enjoy the luxury of space and position within relationships but also, they have allowed women to determine the generative habitus that is shaped towards the consciousness of the social systems they live within; namely kinship and marriage. The joy of being able to be in spaces that one would otherwise not be in, is “the ability to invest a certain amount of their self into material objects as a way of managing their sense of place, social position and identity”, (Belk 1988: 145). Initially commodities were linked to human needs and how these needs would be satisfied. Material things are appropriated to curb physical and social needs- and social needs in this regard are the need to be identified as a person, to be recognised as relevant within society. Therefore, if owning a material thing like a cell phone would satisfy that need and simultaneously offer authentication of personhood, then owning a cell phone is indeed a commodity-value exchange performance.

Cell phones are consumed symbolically; as cultural goods as well as quantifiable substances of practical efficacy as indicated by Jhally (1989). They (cell phones) have their “souls” emptied out of them and filled with social meaning. Soul in this instance is a metaphorically used to

mean ability to multi-task. They cease to be mere communication tools, as they take on the role of passports- identifying citizenship and membership of a prestigious community, thus according the user the ability to manoeuvre relationships, space and positionality. In modern consumer society that we are in, Lee (1993) has argued that “we are confronted with unprecedented cornucopia of commodities and exchange values...the commodity has become our standard means to life, our means to reproduction both as flesh-and-blood and as a social species-being”, (Lee 1993: 16), therefore implying that consumption is the key factor to social change and what then eventually becomes habitus. In this line of reasoning, I comprehend that the fall of use-value of a commodity as opposed to social-meaning value is confronted by alienation of the consumer outside of cultural significance. What this means is that if one were to buy a cell phone without understanding the social meaning rested on the ownership and use of a cell phone, they would find themselves operating outside of “the logic governing the commodity-form that is necessary obfuscation of the social meaning”, (Marcuse 1986: 8).

Given that Marcuse (1986), Berger (1972) and Lee (1993) all concur that what is being lost in modern forms of consumption is the idea that commodities embody real-use value despite of the social meaning they might carry, of which I to agree too, I come to a conclusion that the embodied real-use value is as important as the social-exchange value. This is contrary to the argument brought forth by Jhally (1989) and Appadurai (1986) who contend that the use-value of a commodity is not as important as the social life of commodities and the symbolic meaning that are embodied in the commodity itself. It is therefore clear that in negotiating and navigating relationships, women use cell phones not because they are communication tool per se but rather because they accord them identity as capable consumers who are worth listening to. Cellphones have social meanings that extend beyond their mere use value. They are thus tools for communication on a number of levels; practical communication, communication of class and the communication therefore of particular forms of power: buying power, the ability to construct an individualized identity, and the ability to attract specific kinds of individuals.

I made mention that I would address the issue of personhood as a secondary result of cell phone use. The foundation of what I understand by personhood was laid in the introductory chapter of this dissertation; however, I will now be discussing in depth the concept personhood and how it links to the main argument in this research work. The contemporary conception of the individual as indivisible is an influential construct as implied by Fowler (2004), which is also regarded as personhood. Consumerism like I have been discussing in this chapter, perpetuates personhood, this is because through consumption we are able to see boundaries that make equal and limitations that make us unequal. As the case of this study, cell phone have become the sword that removes the chaff from the marrow, thus enabling those who use them, in this instance women, the apparatuses to manoeuvre their relationships with kin members and spouses alike. Because personhood does not necessarily mean individuality, habitus is always recognised within personhood. This means common behaviour recognised within a group and also practised by an individual outside the group, “and this individual personhood does not mean individual nature of a person which is inclusive of mind, body and soul” argued (Fowler 2004: 18). He went on to say that personhood is, rather, addressed through substance codes which are diffused from one body to the other, one individual to the other- including money (and cell phones that money can buy) and knowledge. This stance I am obliged to agree with because of the observation that I made when reading Butler (2004) in her discussion of persons being identified as the material culture they embody as opposed their biological make up. A person can exist as biological species but she can only be recognised as a person through the practises and habits that they embody.

The principle of personhood as a manner of becoming voiced itself in every aspect of social existence. View, for example, marriage, a collaboration of practices often treated as the site, *par excellence*, of social formation and reproduction. The production of personhood is an irreducibly social process because the initiative lay with individuals for ‘building themselves up’. The emphasis on self-construction was embodied, “metonymically and metapragmatically”, (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 16-17). To endorse the above argument about personhood being a social existence of an individual, Comaroff and Comaroff (2001) attested that “personhood can be a social construct because no one can be known or exist except in relation to others”,

(2001: 4). The same is true for habitus and personhood; people embody what their environment is saturated with, and they also draw and give meaning to the very environment. Habitus, which is articulated by the individual as an active and contributing member of society, is “constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore, constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures” (Hillier and Rooksby, 2005: 21).

Furthermore, habitus is a product and fabricator of history. It produces individual and collective practices that are formed from a history of practices and which in turn become a history of practices. Habitus, Bourdieu went on to explain, “ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposit in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time” (Bourdieu, 1990: 54). I believe this is the same supposition that Katz (2006) based his work on, when he attested that technologies, especially cell phones, are constantly being shaped by and shaping societies. I cannot dispute that meaning is a production of knowledge because of the informed stance produced by change, however meaning that informs the norm is based not on the prerogative of individual knowledge, but rather on shared knowledge that eventually authenticates personhood itself. I, therefore, reach an informed conclusion that what define a person are the social relationships they establish and accommodate.

2.4 Conclusion

A collection of anthropological studies have sought to investigate the ways in which objects function symbolically. In this chapter I articulated my thoughts gathered on empirically observed patterns, and compared and contrasted them to those of established scholars in the field who have covered the similar work. Citing the work of others opened up my own interest in the gaps and contradictions, affirmations and limitations of the literature available on the issue of cell phone use, women and their positionality as far as relationship navigation and negotiation is concerned. I discussed in depth the theories that hold the symbolic function of rituals and customs as forms of expressing kinship and other social relations that are embodied through behaviour, patterns and histories. I paid close attention to concepts like *bonyatsi*,

personhood and identity, consumption and culture to make a substantiated argument on how women navigate and negotiate their relationships in view of their position and space.

3 CHAPTER 3: METHODS; HOW WE DO WHAT WE DO

3.1 Introduction

This chapter of my dissertation serves to introduce the methods I used to get to the core of this work. Like Guss (1989) alleged, to tell a story of how you do things, is like weaving a basket, building a house, clearing a garden or dying- it is reflective of many other moments that do not necessarily take precedence in the finished item and form the greatest part of the product. In this chapter, held together by my argument that cell phones accord women the stage to negotiate and navigate relationships, I put down how I went about identifying the field, collecting data and other research designs that go into making a comprehensive research. According to Emerson et al (1995), ethnographic field research involves “the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives”, (Emerson et al 1995: 1). Face to face interactions allows an ethnographer to be able to capture the ‘otherness’ of a group or people being studied through writing down accounts of what happened during face to face encounters, which, according to Geertz, is meant to “inscribe the social discourses...”, (Geertz 1973: 19).

When talking about an entry into field, I am not referring to going a particular place or space but rather entering into a space or place where I am fully conscious of the rawness and availability of data. Leaning on Gupta and Ferguson (1997), I therefore considered my daily observations and experiences as field because the field site can not only be interpreted by space or place, but rather by being in a place or space. Because of the continued presence in the field, (cell phone use is everywhere not necessarily by my informants but by people around me), I had to be careful of ever changing field sites, accurate reflections of methods and their empirical realities. While conducting this study I had to always be aware of my own biases and I was therefore obligated to reassess the concept of reflexivity, entry into the field site and the ever changing definitions of key concepts such as culture and identity. In this chapter I also explore the ethical implications of conducting field work with personal information, the research site that was multi-sited and reasons for my research sample that is undersized.

This chapter is divided into two major themes: the ethnography and observations. The first part gazes at the ethnography; the life histories of my three key informants unravelled through the use of cell phones. Their stories differed in nature, for each woman I choose a prominent life stage and looked at how they were making use of cell phones. The period from November 2012 to February 2013, also included focus group discussions with family members, participant observation in some rituals and rite ceremonies and unstructured interviews with family members and key informants. Participant observation, however profoundly engaging, could always be complemented with insider accounts to ensure the multivocality and multiplicity of perspectives that come with the recognition and provision for knowledge-making as a process of co-production and co-implication (Nyamnjoh 2012).

Through interactions on Facebook, Tweets and going through my participants' emails with their permission, I employed a snow ball approach to collecting information. Ethnography allows for acute observation of the everyday through lived experiences that are interpreted to elicit social meaning. To quote Marcel Mauss (cited in Ferguson 1999:17), "Ethnography is like fishing; all you need is a net to swing; and you will be sure to catch something." The second part comprises of the bridges and subways that I took as an ethnographer to get to the point where I could write. These are the stories, literature, incidences, online questionnaires, whose specimen can be found under appendices at the end of the dissertation, and day to day observations that at the end made this study a success which also formed a good part of the analysis of data. My method in participant observation took into consideration Gupta and Ferguson's challenge to the idea of bounded culture; that is, "the idea that 'a culture' is naturally the property of a spatially localized people and that the way to study such a culture is to go 'there'" (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997:3).

3.2 Cell Phone Relationships: Ethnography; Life Histories and Observations

3.2.1 With *Makoti*

Anne is a *makoti* whose *bohali* was paid through electronic money transfer. Her whole *bohali* negotiation and marriage processes were done via SMS (short messages services), calls, and

email. It is a custom in Lesotho that *makoti* does not go to her paternal home for a stated period of time or that period may be forfeited by birth of a child. But through use of cell phones Anne's parents never really missed out much in their daughter's new life. The cell phone accorded her a new and 'culturally' undefined space through which she was able to navigate her relationship with her paternal family without bridging any of the red tape that goes with being a *makoti*.

As part of my field work, I had unstructured interviews and focus group discussions with Anne's relatives; her parents, her husband and her aunts from both sides of her families. My objective with meeting Anne's parents was to understand how they came into agreement to have negotiations through cell phones. Interviews form a focal part of the data because interviews give "access to the perspective of the person being interviewed", (Patton, 1990: 133), "the data are the words of the interviewee" (Scheurich, 1997: 63) and most importantly, unlike in the transcribed texts where nonverbal communication disappears, the variation in tone, its intensity, silences and gasps can clearly be recorded. The relationship between language and meaning can be captured, as Scheurich (1997) explained "meaning and understanding shift across people and time," (Scheurich, 1997: 62). According to Sekese (1991), Ashton (1952), Murray (1981) and Segoete (1931), marriage is a process in time, not a single point of transaction between the unmarried and the married state, which is best expressed in Sesotho that "*bohali ha bo phethoe*", meaning that marriage is continually being appreciated (*bohali* is a token of appreciation from the groom's family to the bride's family, Sello, (2011)). This Sesotho maxim provoked me to find out if more EFTs (Electronic Funds Transfer) would be going to Anne's family or if they had been able to complete their gratitude. Listening to someone describe the effects of cell phone use was far better than reading entries and entries of pages of cell phone use, hence this methods chapter adopted a mainly descriptive and narrative style, incited by Piot, (1999).

While describing how they felt about the EFTs, I found that to them it was much easier to have negotiations through cell phones, as the tension that results due to face to face interaction was avoided. It is believed by Sekese (1991), Ashton (1952) and Murray (1981), that when those

who come to negotiate meet with the girl's family, they enter into a Russian nesting doll of material possessions. During negotiations, not only do the two families meet, but also this is believed to be the time also where there is much "sizing up", each family trying to see how better they are over the other. A call made through a Blackberry to a Nokia 3310 cannot accomplish this. A Blackberry is a sign of prestige, whereas a Nokia 3310 was a hit in the year 2000. Anne's mother had attested to this saying "my child, though foreign this was, at least the stress of having to impress strangers was avoided..." She used the word strangers because though marrying into her family, she had never personally met them. Having exchanged conversations on the cell phone does not qualify people as family or friends, as confirmed by Powell, (2012). How do people stop being strangers if they marrying one's daughter is not enough to make them family or friends? *Bohali* negotiations often serve as the bridge from stranger to friend of family. From Anne's family I gathered that cell phones were just a matter of convenience, to be used as the consumer deem fit. To them, like Fonlon (1965) says, "culture takes rise from this that a man is born into the world incomplete," (1965:10) and therefore "cannot think about the world outside his mind unless that outside world is somehow ... represented in his mind," (1965:11). This statement implies that Anne's family understood that because of availability of cell phone, Anne can make use the cell phone to keep in touch; making keeping in touch a new norm for them.

After this interview I went on to attend Anne's *kapeso* as part of my methods, which was held at Anne's in-laws residence. At this event I had hoped to meet with Anne's uncles in-law, have unstructured interviews on how they felt about having had to make relationships over the cell phone. Having called one of them, to get a lift to the venue, I had expected to get a warm welcome but instead the uncle asked me if I was the one teaching their *makoti* this horrible behaviour of calling the elders instead of meeting them. That statement made clearer what Fonlon, (1965) meant when he talked of "culture being an African ideal". The embedded meaning of 'horrible behaviour' signified unacceptable challenge to patriarchy that is so highly practised in Lesotho, especial in rural areas. The cell phone had enabled *makoti* to expand her presence, which in person she could not have done. (Sekese) 1991 explains how *makoti* can never have a face to face interaction with her father in-law except when giving him food; she is

not even allowed to call him by his first name, but all that changes when the presence is over a cell phone, thus giving her a platform to navigate spaces she would otherwise not enter, and she is able to negotiate relationships in the same manner.

At the *kapeso*, I had an unstructured group discussion with aunts from both sides of the families while some of them prepared food, while others just observed and casually fiddled with their cell phones from time to time. From Anne's side of the family, they felt because they were poor and could not afford expensive phones they were forgotten. At the end, from listening in on the women's conversations, what became clear to me was that it is not necessarily about ownership of a cell phone, but rather a functional cell phone was the one that mattered. Airtime and battery life determined how relationships were kicked off and maintained. Failure to respond to messages may be understood as ignoring others, exchanging SMSes and other forms of communication on the phone with those who have airtime to hold conversations, appear as side lining those who don't have airtime. A fully charged operational phone gives a better access to those who want to reach the owner than a dead cell phone which might be interpreted differently by those who fail to reach the owner of such a phone, which makes easier for women to navigate and negotiate not only space and position but also relationships.

3.2.2 ...And the New Mother

Ruth is a young, ambitious, energetic career woman by day, and busy house keeper and mother after office hours. Ruth and I met for a semi-structured interview with her husband where I was to find out how they dealt with pregnancy and birth of their son without the help of the elders, as is a custom for a couple's first pregnancy. I asked questions on their feelings from the moment they knew she was pregnant to the time she gave birth. Given that they live alone with their new-born son in the suburbs of Cape Town, far from family and ancestors, the purpose of this interview was to understand if all traditions among Basotho, as discussed by Sekese (1991), Murray (1981), and Ashton (1952), that accustom pregnancy, especially first pregnancy were performed, and who would have performed them in what and whose authority. Instructions on

how to perform rituals were exchanged via email between herself and her mother, and eventually her mother and aunts sent *lipitsa*¹¹ through overnight couriers.

At the time of the first interview, she had recently had a pre-mature son and was still with the husband alone. The birth of *letsibolo* usually calls for a celebration, which includes slaughtering of a cow, making traditional beer and burying of the child's umbilical cord. I learned when I went to attend the son's *kamohelo*¹², which was also part of methods, that the umbilical cord had been buried in Cape Town. The paternal aunts felt the son was premature because of the way his parents conducted rituals during the pregnancy. At this ceremony I met with Ruth's aunt in-law who ought to have cut the umbilical cord of the new-born. She seemed to understand that the life of today is so demanding on the young couples that "cultures" and traditions have to take a back seat. As their son continues to grow, they keep the family part of his journey through Whatsapp, Facebook and email, which they have gladly included me in.

3.2.3 ...And the Divorcee

The method I relied on the most was the use of Facebook, Skype, email and phone calls to carry out my data collection. I would spend hours on end on Facebook, going through statuses, combing through comments with the hope to see how other people interacted with my key informants. This is the method I employed mostly with Elizabeth. She just finalized her divorce to a husband of 18 months. Elizabeth and I met at University of Cape Town, while she was doing her M.Sc. She was married to a Mosotho man, and because of that she and I would talk a lot about Lesotho and our traditions as a Basotho community. The husband worked as a lecturer at Kasukiland* University, and stayed there fulltime while she was in Cape Town. However, I had not planned to interview her then husband, but I received an email from Elizabeth whose details had prompted me to embark on a trip to Kasukiland for an impromptu interview with her and her husband to see how far cell phones were responsible for the failed love relationship and also how the use of cell phones had opened new spaces for a Elizabeth to interact with her father in-law.

¹¹ Fertility herbs

¹² A ritual ceremony where a baby is introduced to the ancestors.

3.3 The Bridges, the Subways and Highways- Observations

“Fishing in Troubled Waters” by Nyamnjoh, (2006) touches upon discussions on metaphors of consumerism, sex and sexified commodities that breed throughout Africa, indicating the intensified globalization of images of desire and opportunity, poverty and destitution. The main focus of the paper is on sexual- economic exchange in Dakar, and it attempts to analyse how lack, sex, language, possession, self-corruption and self-construction shape each other. In this paper, Nyamnjoh, (2006) he describes young desirable girls as diskettes, able to store up as much data as possible. I thought to myself- so Elizabeth is like a 512MB diskette that has reached its capacity, though young she is, she is married and nothing more can happen for her, unless she gets formatted through divorce but even then she would have a limited usage because of the hard drives that are being manufactured of late. The new (young) hard drives are now made for flash drives, diskettes are not marketable anymore. On the other hand, Elizabeth’s husband appears to be a 3 TG hand held hard drive, it can store as much as possible and because it is hand held, it can be used by Macs, Lenovo, Dell and all other machines that have a slot for a USB or flash drive. Being a young man, educated, with money, married or not he can have any woman- young or old. The only thing that can take him out is replacement or discontinuation of hard drive, say saving on the cloud, which I would equate to lesbianism- that’s the only time when a hard drive might not be use, but even in such instances one can find an individual who saves both on the cloud and hard drive.

3.4 Research location

Leaning on Gupta and Ferguson (1997), I therefore considered my daily observations and experiences as field because the field site can not only be interpreted by space or place, but rather by being in a place or space. I attended a child’s *kamohelo* in Mafikeng where I had group discussions with Ruth’s relatives, went to Kavukiland to have interviews with Elizabeth and her then husband, and attended Anne’s *kapeso* in Mokhotlong where I conducted interviews and group discussions. However, my research location was Maseru when talking of geographical location. Maseru is the residential place for Anne and her family, Ruth and her husband are from the same area, so is Elizabeth’s husband. I want to believe that an influence by place justifies Maseru to be research location as all my key informants come from this place.

I am not, however, saying that the influences are limited to place and space within which they were found.

3.5 Research Population

The choice of my three key informants and the subsequent fifty online participants was based not on the population of women using cell phones or women in Maseru. My choice of the three ladies was mainly influenced by the fact that I had established friendships with them before my field work and they were willing to give me access to their private lives. They had also agreed to act as gate keepers for me to gain access to their extended families and spouses. The fifty online participants formed a group of women who accepted my Facebook invitation to women around Maseru to take a survey online. I had hoped for 100 women to respond as that would have given me more variety, nonetheless, their contribution was helpful.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

“One of the most important dimensions of research, which unfortunately often gets ignored even by the most well-meaning of researchers, is the question of ethics” Nyamnjoh Francis.

The literature addresses “the difficulties in constructing an ethical consent process and obtaining genuinely informed consent” (Mackenzie, McDowell, Pittaway, 2007:300). These are ethical issues that arouse during my field work. Some of the issues that are discussed arose as I reflected on what had gone on during in the field. Basing myself with the above quote I undertook my fieldwork with the knowledge that as a researcher, I had a moral responsibility towards the people I was studying. This means that there are “demands, claims, rights, approvals, punishment, imputations and obligations”, (Winter, 1962:218) that I, as researcher, always had to take into consideration. This part therefore addresses such ethical predicaments which are part and parcel of research. It is important to understand the service of ethics in studying people, which is to shield the rights and dignity of the people we interact with. Nyamnjoh (2010), points that although rights and morality are relative and vary according to cultural contexts, the bottom line is that human rights and dignity should be put first. In the section that follows I discuss some of the ethical issues that I tackled in this research.

3.6.1 Informed consent

Informed consent is an agreement between the researcher and the participant, with the participant fully aware of what they are getting themselves into. During the course of my field research I made sure to uphold full lucidity in my research goals and intentions. I did this by asking each participant that I interacted with to provide verbal informed consent with the option of maintaining confidentiality/anonymity throughout the study. This is to ensure that participants do not at any time feel powerless or obliged to participate. Because I had a close relationship with all my key informants, I didn't have to write a letter, but rather I gave them a copy of my proposal and explained what my research would be looking into and how much of their personal information I would need. The total number of days I was to be there, the kind of interaction I was to have and overall information of the project. Bulmer (1982), points that those who give consent should be at the position to do so, they should feel that they have an option to refuse to participate. Fortunately for me, my key informants were my friends and they acted as gate keepers for me to get access to rest of their family members.

3.6.2 Confidentiality

Data collected from participants has to be kept and be used in confidence. Gaining knowledge of issues that otherwise are private to the general public should never be used for purposes other than data collection. Taking for example the fact that Elizabeth forwarded me an email that has private details, it would be unethical to publish those details that were sent to me in confidence. In the quest of writing the best report, a researcher may be inclined to use data that s/he was not given the authority to use.

Taking for example what happened when I overheard a conversation about Ruth it would be unethical to go publicize such information as there was neither consent nor authority to use such data. When dealing with confidentiality, it stretches from data, people's names, location or anything that can make them distinguishable. This might call for using pseudonyms or omitting using names at all like I did.

I also remained continuously conscious of my own social role and position within the Basotho community, particularly my gendered role as a woman meeting with elderly men especially,

discussing issues that a young, unmarried and childless woman I am, is not allowed to be acquainted with.

3.6.3 Fair representation

When she criticises Nancy Scheper- Hughes, Ramphela (1996), points that Scheper- Hughes bases her argument (as form of data) on hear- say, casual comments and takes things from a minority to make conclusions for the whole society. Misrepresentation can cost people more than they had bargained for. I cannot stand and make conclusions that all people use phones to authenticate personhood based on the data I collected from only 3 women of which belong to one social class, one geographical location and more or less similar back grounds. It is wise to observe carefully, ask tactic questions such that when conclusions are drawn, they represent the whole group, not just a fraction of the group.

3.6.4 Objectivity and Truthfulness

It is critical for a researcher to remain objective and truthful throughout research, especially for a qualitative research where so much is left to the researcher's narration and discretion. As a researcher I sought believability based on consistency, insight and trustworthiness. Guided by the Anthropology Southern Africa and American Anthropological Association codes of ethical conduct, I continuously reflected on ethical considerations and potential outcomes that may arise during the course of my research. I steered away from being persuaded by anything other than my research questions.

3.6.5 Neutrality

By giving participants a voice through direct quotations and telling their stories I distanced myself from influencing the outcome of this research. Brudvig (2013) advises against over-romanticizing culture, relationships and identity but aim to bring forth my ethnographic expert witness to those whose stories form the basis for this dissertation. She further goes on to state that "it is not impossible to do full justice to research questions, nor postulate to understand informants fully or to express their knowledge and experience through my word and world of knowledge", (Brudvig, 2013: 17). I relied on ethnography as authority of my epistemology. This ethnography is what James Clifford terms "partial truths", in which a rigorous sense of partiality contributes to the writing of "true fiction" (Clifford, 1986:5).

3.6.6 Restitution and Acknowledgements

Research becomes a success because of the participants, who avail their time, their emotions and their lives to absolute strangers. It is not often that researchers go back to thank the participants, (Nyamnjoh, 2010:23). I plan to have a copy for the women I worked with. Not only do researchers fail to give back, but also we fail to acknowledge our empirical sources. We reference scholars and theorists but it is not often that we acknowledge a mere so-and-so; rather we pass their interesting facts as our own. I also bought a solar operated charger for people in Mokhotlong, it stays at local café, so that all people can have access to it and the petty issues like those that happened to Anne and aunt Busi may not happen again.

3.6.7 Ethical consistency

It is important that at all points of the research project that the researcher remains ethical, (Nyamnjoh 2010:31) says that “from the design stage, including how subjects are recruited... to the consequences of their participation...” This means that even the way the report is written long after the research is put to bed; the researcher should be mind-full of the participants and their well-being.

Ethical consideration becomes key in research because the success or failure thereof of the project is based on how those who have the empirical knowledge are approached, treated and represented. If meaning is lost in translation of what the people said, did, felt and thought, the whole project becomes a lie as it does not transparently reflect the unit of study but the fabrication of the researcher.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed all research methods that I deployed to collect data for this dissertation. For a qualitative study like this one, using the epistemological assumption elucidated by Creswell, (2007) I as a researcher had to get as close as possible to the participants I was studying and it is in this chapter that I divulged how I did it. From participating to interviews, my epistemological assumption on methodological choice was guided by how knowledge claims made in the study are justified. I relied on conversations and interviews from participants, time spent in the field as participant observer as justification of knowledge production and use as methods for this study. Ethical consideration becomes

fundamental in research because the success or failure thereof of the project is based on how those who have the empirical knowledge are approached, treated and represented. If meaning is lost in translation of what the people said, did, felt and thought, the whole project becomes a lie as it does not transparently reflect the unit of study but the fabrication of the researcher.

4 CHAPTER 4: PERCEIVING THE FIELD; ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

This chapter contributes to the discussion of findings, making sense out of text and image statistics that have been presented, and “making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data”, (Creswell 2009: 183). It is in this chapter that my field notes come to life as I present guided narratives of my research and field work. I explore the themes ranging from women and love to online relationships, linking these dynamics to theories of human behaviour and social change. Following these, I also present my own observations as a woman as I interacted with lovers and friends through the cell phone.

4.2 Women and the Paradox of Existence

Basotho married women are faced with the contradiction of existence because of the double burden of being daughter to one kin group and *ngoetsi* to the other. A girl child is under the guidance of her father up until such a time where she is married, at which point she comes to be under the guidance of her husband, (Ashton 1952). As a daughter you have roles that are expected of you to fulfil, which differ entirely from the roles and expectations that come with being *ngoetsi*. Like I discussed in the previous chapters, a *makoti* is expected to behave in a certain manner that most times is contrary to how she would normally behave. Taking Anne for example, she and her father had a father-daughter relationship that in the virtue of being married she is denied. She cannot call her father-in law by name, nor can she address him directly, as discussed by Ashton (1952), Murray (1981) and Sekese (1991). It is norms like the one above, which women find they have to negotiate daily. Through usage of cell phones, I saw women overcome the irony of ghost existence which does exist only in part not fully. When she bought her mother a cell phone, Anne declared cold war to the ‘cultural’ connotation that a *makoti* cannot keep in touch with her paternal family because of locality.

According to Hammond-Tooke (1993), marriage among the Basotho is a union of a man and a woman and of their respective agnatic kin groups, and is essential for the continuation of lineages. From such a perspective, marriage is seen and said to be beneficial not only to the

respective kin groups but also to the society at large, as the children born out of such unions automatically become appropriately identifiable part of society in that they take their fathers' names, clans and become recognised as part of the kin groups, such that during ceremonies like funerals they are involved and included. However, the habit of cell phone use seems to have over powered the strength and authority that the family had over young married couples. Anne had all the information that pertained to her *bohali* negotiations despite the fact that "*bohali ke taba tsa banna, li buua ke banna feela*", (Sekese 1991: 45) directly meaning "*bohali* is men's concern, discussed by men only". She also kept in touch with her family throughout the alienation period which is meant for her to adapt to the new life; new clothes, new name and new stories.

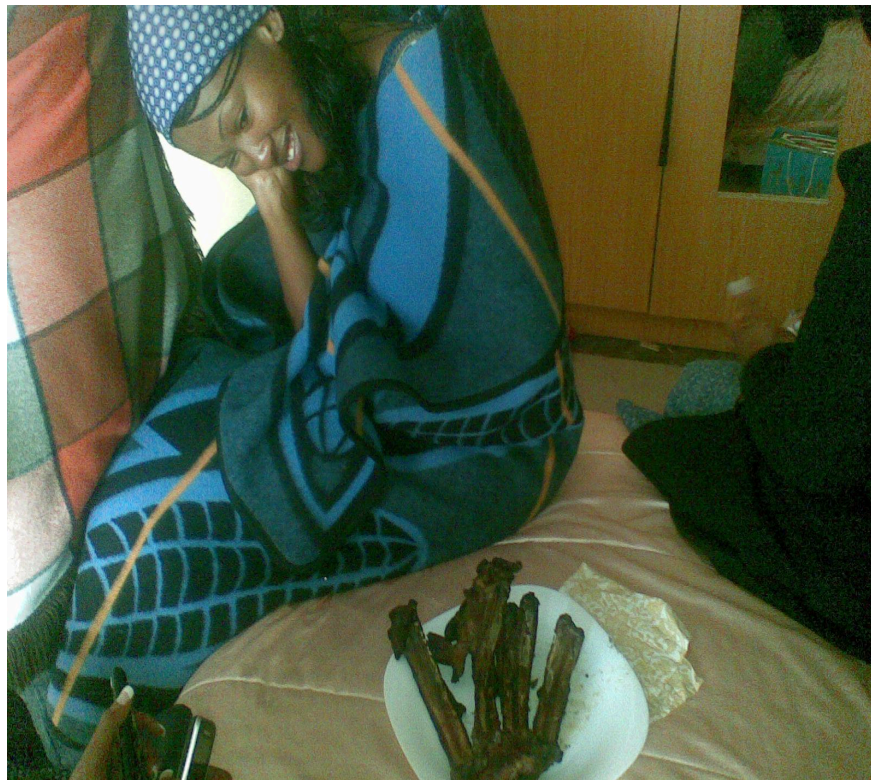


Figure 1: *Ngoetsi* in her new clothes. Notice her cell phone in her friend's hand, at the right hand corner.

"I needed to keep in touch with my family, imagine how it would have felt if I had to rely on Thabo [her husband] alone for company until I got acquainted to these people...my mother gave me recipes that made me famous with my family in-law..." Anne had told me. Because of the grey areas brought forth by cell phone usage, which exists outside the binaries of paternal

and conjugal families, control, navigation and negotiation have been left solely to the cell phone user. Another example is that Anne's mother was able to give her recipes without questioning the validity of cell phone usage during isolation period. Among the Basotho, the lengthy process that takes place before the marriage contract is sealed is called *ho hlabisa bohali*- it is the process of *bohali* negotiations through to delivery of *bohali* cattle. Ashton (1952) makes mention that even though *bohali* is referred to as cattle- this can be in a form of any other livestock or beast, even money. However, because of the time in which he wrote, he did not mention how *ho hlabisa bohali* could be handled in the time of cell phones. Moreover, practices like *pula molomo* [mouth opener] and *monyala ka peli o nyala oa hae* [he who doesn't rush to finish *bohali* stays married longer] fall to the side, when *bohali* is paid through EFTs.

I can conclusively attest that the cell phone has indeed helped women negotiate kin relationships and navigate social space and existence as far as their gendered identity is concerned. The ability to transcend the stated norms through use of cell phone defeats and challenges the notion that an old dog cannot be taught new tricks. Throughout this research I have followed women who indeed have thrown bones to cultural dogs using cell phones thus defining their existence as daughters and *lingoetsi* in a manner fitting the information and communication age. Mobility of humans, ideas and things entails encounters and the production or reproduction of similarities and difference, as those who move or are moved always tend to position themselves or be positioned (hierarchically) in relation to those they meet and to one another. While every cultural community is mobile within itself, technologies make possible movement between places and cultural spaces, Goggin, (2006). Thanks to technologies of mobility, cultural encounters informed by 'interconnecting local and global hierarchies' are possible, (Goggin, 2006: 37).

The cell phone has become a vital cog in the navigation and negotiation of women's everyday life. It has allowed them to play more active roles in relationships with families. For example, Anne knew how much *bohali* her family was going to ask from her husband's family, she even 'negotiated' with her family to go down a bit, all because of the text messages and calls exchanged between her and the then fiancé. Even if she had a landline in her house, she still

could not have succeeded in accessing and controlling such information because a landline telephone does not allow much privacy as compared to a cell phone. Elizabeth was able to tell her parents in-law about the husband's behaviour, though according to Basotho culture a young married woman cannot address her father in-law, all because she had his number: because the space was changed, the rules changed I am let to believe. These women have showed that the cell phone transforms experiences in space and latitude.

4.3 *141# Marriage: The Economic Transaction

When the missionaries from Europe invaded Lesotho, *bohali* was among one of the norms they openly discredited. The anthropological argument presented by Ashton (1952) states that *bohali* was viewed as the sale of women; hence Christian marriages could not constitute *bohali*, (Ashton 1952, Molapo 2005, Murray 1981).None the less; many Christian marriages still constitute the transfer of *bohali*. All the three women who served as key informants for this study are Christians and had *bohali* paid to their families. However, because my interest was not necessarily how much *bohali* was paid but instead how *bohali* was paid, I never inquired on that issue. Anne had the *bohali* money transferred electronically through her husband's Samsung Galaxy S3, during the time of the transaction; he (Anne's husband) was in his office in the city. He had later informed his elders that he had paid *bohali*, the amount agreed upon and they had to believe him.



Figure 2: Samsung Galaxy S3. This is the cell phone that replaced the uncles in Anne's *bohali* payment.

Furthermore, there is a Sesotho saying that *bohali ha bofele*, captioned by Murray (1981) meaning that there is never a time when one can say they have completely paid off their *bohali*. The function of this was to make sure the woman is treated right in fear of her returning to her kin group (taking into consideration that she had not been fully paid for). In the time that I write, I ask questions around the authentication of marriage when *bohali* was paid through a cell phone. Will this man and his kinsmen always do EFTs? Into whose account is the money deposited? Furthermore, because so many stakeholders were eliminated by the process of EFT, then who is the elder? The money was deposited to Anne's sister's account because both her parents did not have accounts with banks that allow interbank transfers. None the less, these questions reinforce what I said earlier about an old dog being taught new tricks and power and control being negotiated through use of cell phones.

The use of cell phones has replaced the uncles in *bohali* negotiations as seen in Anne's *bohali* negotiation and payment. It is also important for me to discuss the implications of uncles-free *bohali* payment while discussing the issue of cell phones and *bohali* money. Because the attempt of a qualitative research is to understand not one side but numerous representations,

as indicated by Lincoln and Guba (1895), I set out to meet with Anne's family. My objective with meeting Anne's family had been to understand how they had come into agreement with *bohali* negotiations being carried out through cell phones and finally endure the money come through the bank. I found that to them it had been preferable to have negotiations through cell phones, as the tension that results due to face to face interaction was avoided. During negotiations, not only do the two families meet, but also this is believed to be the time also where there is much "sizing up", each family trying to see how better they are over the other. A call made through a Blackberry to a Nokia 3310 cannot accomplish this.

A Blackberry is a sign of prestige, whereas a Nokia 3310 which was a hit in the year 2000 is an obvious used-to-be. Anne's mother had attested to this saying "*ngoanaka, ntho tsa sejoale-joale li nfokolelitse stress sa ho hlekela baeti...*" [my child, though foreign this was, at least the stress of having to impress strangers was avoided...]. She used the word strangers because though marrying into her family, she had never personally met the Mokoena's*. Having exchanged conversations on the cell phone does not qualify people as family or friends. Powell, (2012) had agreed with what Anne's mother had said. It takes more than calls and virtual presence to belong to a group or community. Orlove (2005) and Ben-Zeév (2004) make mention of online relationships existing only on virtual space, and more effort being needed for online relationships to be moved to offline, as the realities of the two worlds vary.

After interviews with Anne's family, I went on to attend her *kapeso* which was held at Anne's in-laws residence. At this ritual I met with Anne's uncles in-law, had unstructured interviews on how they felt about having had to make relationships over the cell phone. Having called one of them, to get a lift to the venue, I had expected to get a warm welcome but instead the uncle asked me if I was the one teaching their *makoti* this horrible behaviour of calling the elders instead of meeting them. "*Mokhotsi eno oa hao o rata hampe ho ntetsetsa...hore naa 'mae ha a mo ruta mekhoa*", [that friend of yours likes to call me all the time, I wonder if her mother ever taught her to respect her elders]- so much for teaching old dog new tricks. However, I also felt that uncle might have been one of the respondent in O'Shea (1989), Orlove (2005) or Ben-

Zeév (2004) who had alluded to the fact that cell phones were offering people an easy way out by feigning to have forgotten how life outside cell phones is like.

The cell phone has enabled *makoti* to expand her presence and allowed her to tap into spaces which she could not have entered into in her physical presence. Sekese (1991) explains how *makoti* can never have a face to face interaction with her father in-law except when giving him food; she is not even allowed to call him by his first name, but the rules of the game changes when the presence is carried over through a cell phone. However, using her cell phone, Elizabeth was able to penetrate a highly gendered and prejudiced space, Anne 'negotiated' her own *bohali* and Ruth's husband was able '*ho kena motlo-matsoana*' meaning to stay and have sexual relations with a woman who has recently given birth to a first child, all because her cell phone had jurisdiction on who and how she went about things.

From the conversations I gathered at the *kapeso*, I drew up that cell phones were equated to being wealthy or at least being able to afford finer things in life. The spread of cell phones has created a very prominent sphere in which the micro-politics of social inequality are enacted (Barber 1995; Cornwall 2002; and Smith 2004). Although Basotho's cell phone-related social behaviours demonstrate the significance of economics in how people manage their phone usage, as well as manoeuvring about the social representation of one's wealth, it would remain an inaccuracy to highlight simply the economic magnitudes of Lesotho's emerging cell phone culture and its associated behaviour. While people's cell phone practices demonstrate the influence of economic inequality in the micro-politics of communication in social relationships, Guyer (1995), just as salient and noteworthy is the degree to which Basotho women have merged cell phone behaviour into a customary pattern of social interaction that privileges sharing, gift exchange, and reciprocity over the impersonal aspects of monetary transactions (Guyer 1995; Smith 2001). This brings me to a conclusion that a good deal of cell phone-related behaviour requires a social rather than an economic interpretation.

As Urry (2007: 9) puts it, 'Moving between places physically or virtually can be a source of status and power, an expression of the rights to movement either temporarily or permanently. And where movement is coerced it may generate social deprivation and exclusion'. Aunt Busi

vented, “I am the one who helped her [Anne] to go to the toilet as a young girl, now she sends my neighbour, my neighbour, the message to tell me that she is having a *kapeso*. When she got married she gave me an old phone, whose battery dies day and night because I told her I too would like to have a phone, but because I’m poor, I was given an old phone”. I sat listening to the conversation as it went back and forth about how “people were inconsiderate because they had cell phones and were rich”. Most of the anger seemed to be directed directly to family members who were termed “*baikhohomosi*¹³” as opposed to the use of cell phones by the general public. As the women and I continued to peel and chop vegetables for the ceremony, more facts about cell phones arose. Not only was the use of cell phone a stone in a shoe, an uncomfortable issue to deal with, but it also brought to surface how the marriage was an economic transaction, and minute things like cell phones are currencies.

4.4 Online Love

According Parker and Aggleton (2007) and Ben-Zeév (2004) online relationships are more adventurous and intriguing than offline relationships. The virtual presence of a lover means ability to explore more sexual things as opposed to offline relationships where morals could be questioned. Because of the virtue of the relationship being online, it implies lovers are always together. Ruth’s husband had asked me if I knew a Sesotho song title “*mokh’anthufa nthule nthoaka*” which directly translates to “my girlfriend kiss me”. In that statement he had implied that with distance, one ought to have someone within reach that can entertain. He had found a quick fix by moving a friendship from Twitter which he did not have on his cell phone to Whatsapp and email- so that he could enjoy fully the indiscretion of virtual relationships.

With the concept of deviance in mind, I realise how and why the cell phone infidelity could be more exciting than an offline relationship. “Expectations are low, yet you feel like you know this person because you talk to them all day...and the element of naughtiness makes things more exciting”, Elizabeth had exclaimed when asked how she had felt when her relationship and then husband had started, especially because it started and ended on cyber space. “Whenever he was quiet for more than an hour I would sent him a picture on his email, and follow it up with a

¹³Derogatory name for rich people

text or Whatsapp message saying ‘Mosotho, you got mail’...the picture would spark his interest and the conversations would continue”, she had explained further. She had explained further that though she still had a boyfriend at home (Kenya), she felt closer to the other boyfriend who was in Johannesburg because they hardly fought, they had talked about ‘everything’ and the fact that their cybersex had been out of this world had only made them eager to meet and carry on with their little rendezvous.

The moral conundrum that faces online relationships and women I have observed is drawing the line as far as what is and what is not appropriate. Because of the oxymoron of existence that cannot really be separated; though online, one is fully aware that there is a real person, at the other end, yet the fact that this person is at the end can be blurred by the fact that they do not physically exist in one’s reality. With the cell phone giving mobility to the immobile, one can afford to have a thousand online romances and just label the lovers differently, thus negotiating the entry and navigating the stay of online lovers. According to Parker and Aggleton (2007), society accepts as true that it is the responsibility of a man to test the waters, while women passively wait for men. Funnelled by my observations, I am led to disagree with this statement because with cell phones, like Nyamnjoh (2013) had attested, mobility is given to the immobile. Women too are able to transcend the societal expectation in the privacy of their rooms.

Moreover, for both women and men, it is possible to gauge the interest that one might have without compromising their own integrity. Instead of being told off at a face to face conversation, it is much easier to see from unreturned calls, unanswered messages and monosyllabic answers that one might not be interested. When a man does not resist a woman’s advances, she assumes he wants what she wants too. The challenge often arises where ‘what is wanted’ is understood differently. Taking Elizabeth’s husband and his mistress; they were following each other on Twitter, then decided to chat more their cell phones. He wanted a *mopenyo*¹⁴, while she was hoping for something more permanent, she had thought him to be a ‘married but available’ kind of guy. However he had said “you don’t want a girl that’s that easy as a wife...she offered me what was lacking in my marriage but I knew I would never marry

¹⁴A casual sex partner

her". When I finally met the other woman, she had explained that he had claimed to be in the process of divorce hence she went all out to woo him. As a matter of fact, Ben-Zeév (2004) has claimed that sixty-two per cent of people seeking divorces are due to virtual infidelity, (2004: 199) and Elizabeth and the husband are part of that statistic.

Of the fifty women who took the online survey, forty-two had admitted to enjoying to chatting to other men on their cell phones other than their own partners. Six of these women said they found it annoying, while two of them had felt indifferent about chatting with other men other their partners online. This data confirmed to me that cell phones had indeed been employed by women to navigate and negotiate relationships in a manner that could not compromise their gendered image.

Below is a presentation of the data collected from the online survey on the question: How do you feel about chatting with strange men online? The pie chart shows that the majority of the women who took the survey said they liked talking to these men. The aim of this question was to establish and validate what Elizabeth's husband had said about women online being friendly and flirty. I should also make clear the choice of using online survey which is a quantitative method over visits because for the 50 women who volunteered, time and space was essential for them. Most of the respondents would fill in their survey at random times, like 2 am, a time which I would be sleeping. Some of the women had actually dropped me inboxses on Facebook to say it was actually a good idea that the survey was done online than hard copy questionnaires which could force face to face interaction thus leading to people to shy off from opening up.

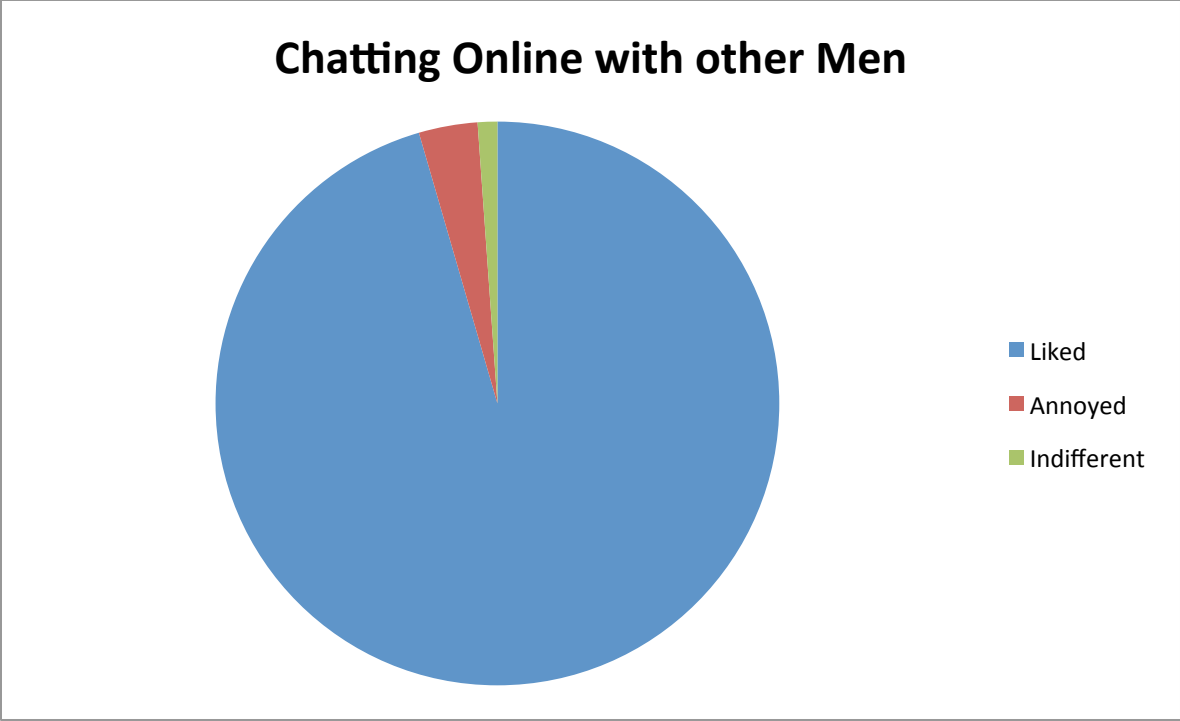


Figure 3: Pie chat representing the feelings of women about chatting to men other than their partners Online.

Still on online love, I had also wanted to know what the women were hoping for in their continued chatting with other men online. Forty per cent of the respondents had alluded that they were actually entertaining the other men with hopes of prospects of romantic relationship, fourteen per cent were hoping to make networks that could up their careers or businesses, fifteen per cent agreed to seeking fun while the other ten per cent were just going with the flow.

Things Women Hope for When They Entertain Men Online		
Variable	Number of Women	Percentage
Prospects of relationship	20	40
Networks	7	14
Fun	15	30
Going with the flow	8	16

Total	50	100
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The above table shows that most women who took the survey were expecting more from the conversations with the men they met online. Though the degree of what they were looking for varies, most of them at least all agree that they are usually hoping to get something out of the chats. In order to fully grasp the extent to which cell phones enabled women to negotiate and navigate their romance, I had also asked a question on how many ‘Chat- lovers’ they each juggled. In the virtue of women being expected to be “cabbage ea ipopa”, but who can be the wiser if they use cell phones to rebel against the stipulated norm? Sixty-three per cent of those who had looked for relationships online said they keep all the men, juggling them depending on who was available to chat, who showed most interest or even who met their online expectations. Twenty-five per cent said they kept just one man who was consistent with chatting and twelve per cent claimed they kept one or two to be able to weigh their options.

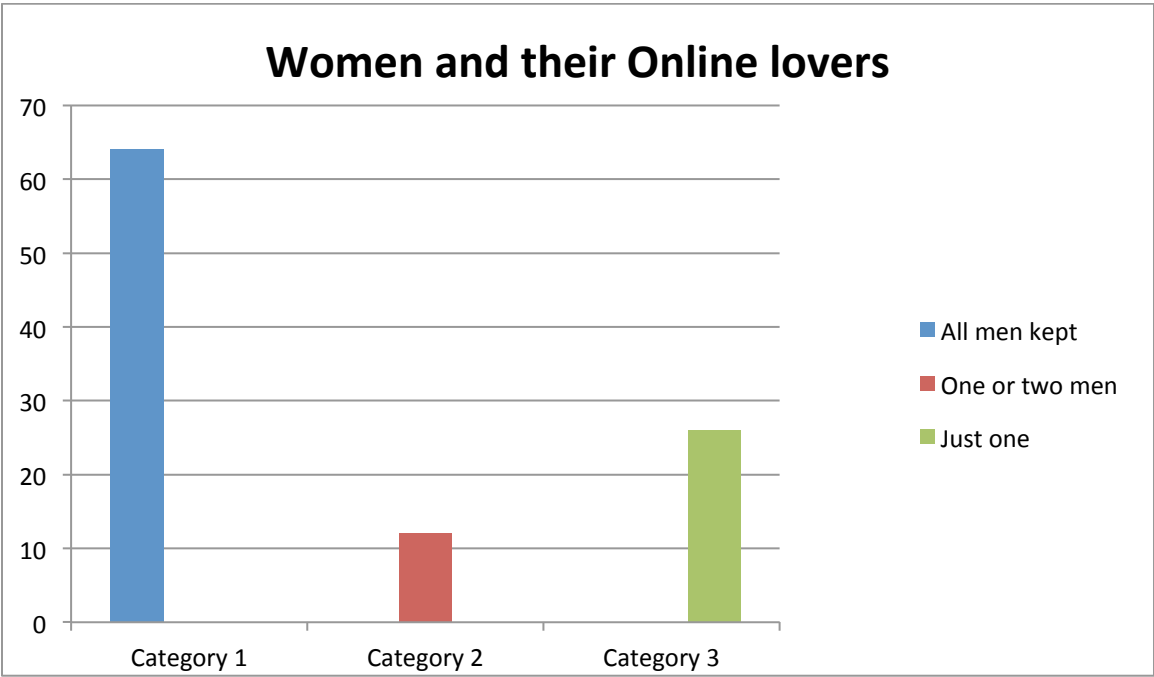


Figure 4: A chart depicting women’s navigation of romance as accorded by their cell phones

Ben-Zeév (2004) claimed that after having so much of ‘one good thing’, familiarity might cause one to get to a point where ‘the more is the merrier’. This is because too much familiarity

causes monotony and forces people to fish in other neighbouring lakes with greener grass. Twenty-six of the fifty women who took the survey claimed that they had actually moved their relationship from online to offline, meaning they met people online and ended up meeting them in person thus resulting in sexual engagement. Twelve of the women had said they got turned off by these men, as their offline personalities were different from the charming online personalities. The remaining twelve never pursued offline relationships as they understood that '*matlo a matle liotloana*' meaning all that glitters is not gold. Those who had pursued sexual relationships felt they had reached the climax of cell phone use, while those who had deterred from engaging in such also felt they had defeated the moral collapse brought about by virtual relationships that so "obviously attack our moral thinking", (Ben-Zeév 2004: 199). The debate that had carried on was whether chatting online was cheating or not, and one respondent had written "moral norms are less rigid online...cheating actually has a good part because you get home very happy and you are able to do to your partner what the other guy did to you- all are happy..." I understand that women might engage in online relationships not to totally eliminate the existing ones but rather to compliment them.

4.5 Structure or Function- *Bonyatsi* and the Cell Phone

Bonyatsi is a concept which through observed behaviour is constantly being reconstructed into social circles. In the words of Bourdieu (1994), I would say *bonyatsi* is a habitus, being reproduced by own histories and being reaffirmed by current realities. Among Basotho *bonyatsi* was suckled from the breast of King Moshoeshe of Lesotho, he had many wives and concubines, who he would offer to other men to please, as he would not be able to please all the wives himself (Spiegel, 1991). As a result men learned that they could have affairs with other men's wives- and this became a custom.

Though Moshoeshe's reasons of allowing *bonyatsi* might have been politically driven, the repercussions had more than he had bargained for. *Bonyatsi* is now treated as a norm that no one can really openly accept (Spiegel, 1991), though this norm is socially not acceptable, there is little that anyone can do because of two main reasons: one those who practise it, if ever confronted, claim it to culture and secondly, there are hardly ever any people who agree to being part takers. In a society like the Basotho's, I understood through conversations that

bonyatsi as a form of reinstating patriarchy, in that men feel as men by being able to be able to satisfy more than one woman, and this concept is also explored by Hills and Lake (1979). Moreover, the fall of polygamy, mostly due to principles of Christianity, has perpetuated men to seek ways of pleasure during times like lactation and menarche, where women are not sexually available. Lastly, the fact that among Basotho, divorces are not acceptable and kin groups are involved in marriages- making it hard for the couple to make decisions on their own to separate - spouses opt to having affairs where their needs and wants will be met enthusiastically (Ashton, 1952).

Because of the over romanticised idea of marriage, young women get married as a continuation of their adolescent emotions, they have the expectation that marriage will be like their relationships. Upon finding that things change, they start to doubt their relationships leading to pre-mature divorces or extra- marital affairs, (Hills and Lake 1979). Elizabeth's husband pointed out in our conversation that the wife was not pleasant to be with, she was resistant to many sexual things he wanted to explore; leading to his sexual desires and fantasies being fulfilled outside of marriage. In the quest to keep themselves sane, women might feel the need to spice up their lives by getting other people with whom they can explore their fantasies. Hills and Lake (1979) claim that due to the nature of man, people often will find it fun to do things that they know they are not supposed to do, "the psychological 'power structure' is achieved by the thrill brought by cheating" (Hills and Lake 1979:45). The very idea that people do not often meet their expectations in marriage, they go get it from the outside. Taking the example of Elizabeth, she married a man she met online, they were married for eighteen months and their marriage ended because of other online relationships that the husband chased. The cell phone for Elizabeth had not only been a means to an end, but it had also been an end in itself.

I look at some of the reasons why people still practice this age-old trade (*bonyatsi*) and how it has become functional to society in which is practised. As I also address the changing definition of this act, looking at how it is now applied in this time and age, I address also the role of mobility brought about by cell phone use. Initially *bonyatsi* was understood as an act of having an affair with some who was married to someone else, while they themselves were married to

another party. However, what I discovered as I looked at the online survey and Elizabeth's story is that *nyatsi* (plural *linyatsi*- action of that *bonyatsi*) no longer has to be between two married people. For as long as one party is married, they will be referred to as *linyatsi*, this is different from what Spiegel (1991) had described in his chapter *about Bonyatsi and Botekatse*.

According to Spiegel (1991), the absenteeism of men from their households for long periods while working in the mines was one of the origins of *bonyatsi*, which I contest by saying Moshoeshoe had laid down the foundation. As men went to work in the gold mines in South Africa, the grass widows would start "friendship" with men around. The absence of *Ma-weekend*, as migrant workers are commonly known, became a door opener for many sexual relationships to emerge. These extra- marital affairs would be common knowledge aside to the husband- who if got to know would beat the wife or even separate from her, (Spiegel, 1991). Non-the-less, *bonyatsi* is still practised even when migrant labour has decreased due to retrenchment in mines. However, in 2012 to 2013 when I collected data, I discovered that women do not need to be grass widows nor do men have to be in South African mines, all it takes is for people to exchange cell phone numbers and the fun begins. I discovered that most people were aware of the fact that "so-and-so *o matha* le so-and-so", literally meaning to run with. Though cell phones are private, the conversations are not necessarily private, leading to leaking of information to third parties, as happened with Elizabeth who found her husband's indiscretions on his cell phone.

When I had gone to meet with Elizabeth and the husband in Kavukiland, I had gathered that there was point where the husband cared less about what the wife thought, he had put a security code on his cell phone ensuring that no trespassers could gain access. It was during such conversations that I learned about the networks and support systems that one needs to smoothly engage in *bonyatsi*. Not only should the cell phone be locked but also it helps to have someone who knows about your dealings, so that one can always say "that was my cousin on the phone; ask her if you don't believe me". O'Shea (1984) pointed out that having cell phone buddies is also part of the roost in attempting to pull wool over the partner's eyes.

My conversations with some of the women who had *linyatsi* or knew of their partners' *linyatsi* revealed that it is a full time job to have a *nyatsi* as the affair has to be kept secret. On the question about how the affair had affected their relationships, these women gave answers like:

- “I am always happy because I always have extra cash for my own needs... I don't have to ask my husband for money all the time.”
- “He always takes his calls in the middle of the night...and that's time I call my own person.”
- “He left his phone charging the other day, I went through his messages, all of them- when he came back he found his mother there, reading the same messages.”

The above responses show the kind of effects that *bonyatsi* carried over cell phones have on marriages and romantic relationships. Women are able to negotiate how far they can turn a blind eye to cell phone romance and also they are able to navigate where they want to take their own relationships. Unlike confronting the husband about his infidelity, a woman can simply leave messages open as hints to the husband. Reading spouses' messages should not be seen as invasion of privacy as two have become one, therefore the cell phone can be shared.

4.6 Being in the Field

Observation taught me that a cell phone is a luxury appropriated by availability of network coverage, one's ability to use it properly and the capacity to charge it and to recharge airtime. It is not enough to have a cell phone that never has airtime because in the cell phone world, it takes two to tango. The more one calls and texts, the more relevant one becomes. The more territory one claims in the navigation of relationships, the more battery charging and airtime one requires. Addressing the feud that arose in Mokhotlong due to a charger issue, it became evident to me that it had not been enough that Anne had given her aunt a cell phone to keep in touch, but it ought to be a fully functional cell phone. In as much as battery life and network provision are important, the phonebook is as important.

The phone book represents the people who one is likely to engage with; depending on who the person is, it might be easy or difficult for a woman to negotiate space and positionality. Ruth had been able to stay with her husband throughout her post-natal period because of the people and relationships she had established with them through her cell phone. An observation I made so far was that SMSes to in-laws, especially of the opposite sex were kept to minimal, even face-to-face interaction is kept minimal. This could be because of what Sekese (1991) had attested about *ngoetsi* and father in-law. As exemplified by Anne's uncles, the older generation prefer face-to-face interaction or letters; however in the case of death most people would rather have a face-to-face interaction. Nonetheless, I also saw that depending on how the cell phone is interpreted, it can be an agent women use to negotiate territories that are left undefined. For example, neither does laws of Lerotholi or scholars writing about Lesotho deliberate on the issue of a woman sending pictures to her mother and vice versa- this territory has been claimed by women like Ruth and Anne.

According to (Fox 1993), fitness, beauty, health and illness are the makers of the physical body and I observed that airtime, network coverage and battery life in the same manner are the makers of these women's social life in the era they live in. I agree with Butler (2004) who says that our bodies are texts of culture inscribed in our performances, our new self-taught cultures of dependence are inscribed in our positioning of our technological devices. Our ability to employ technology with minimum destruction is due to being accustomed to its use. Butler is supported of course by Bourdieu's theory on habitus and history being embodied. By now I hope to have established beyond doubt that information and communication has been embodied in us, manifesting in ways strange to some and not-so strange to others, depending on how much of the history they carry in themselves.

According to McGregor (1999), in the event where women get sick, they are most likely to seek treatment than men. Drawing from this statement, I observed the technological world and how women were doing. It seem in the world of technology a chronic illness termed social retardation caused by over indulgence of technology still targets women more than men. Social retardation is the reluctance to relate with other humans on a face to face interaction because

of dependence on alternative communication methods or constant engagement with technology thus ignoring human interaction. I however argue that, this new illness that Holland (2008) recognises as “breaking the technological glass ceiling that had blocked women off from achieving what their counterparts were...” (Holland 2008: 174), is nothing but women negotiating and navigating space, relationships and manifesting personhood as consumers of cell phones. By allowing women to overindulge in social technology, they have climbed the metaphorical ladder of technological success thus breaking the glass ceiling that limited women to the kitchen and domestic chores.

As they consume their cell phones, women will relate to the cell phone use as they would any other aspect of their lives. Importance and priority will be given to things that contribute more to life, and the not so important will be let to be. The day I had attended the *kapeso* in Mokhotlong, I had seen a rooster with her chicks, she was feeding the small flock when suddenly a raven had appeared from nowhere. She ran to the raven with her outstretched ready to attack the raven which swiftly flew off. After witnessing such an incident, I was sure that is how women attacked technology and all its threats to her overall wellbeing. For someone who did not see the raven, the rooster might have been presumed to leave the chicks unattended, little would this obscured observer know that the rooster was deterring the actual danger from the chicks. In the same manner, women might be presumed to be over indulging in cell phones but they are actually deterring the danger of indefinitely being left behind.

4.7 “Siya Ba Ngena”¹⁵

In this section of the dissertation I want to take the argument that the high spread of cell phone use is perpetuated by women seeking to emulate personhood and status of others. They use this new found identity to navigate and negotiate their relationships. Women more so, buy to show that they too “*bayangena*”, they will opt for options like “*nchoathi*”¹⁶ which gives them access of making calls all day all night so that they may be seen as humans who have consumed the materiality of money and power. Because cell phones and the ability to communicate with people in distant places is perceived as some form of status, women like the 50 who took part

¹⁵A Xhosa phrase meaning we are among them or more literally we are entering.

¹⁶A caller option provided by Econet Lesotho, where users can call other users without paying for airtime

in the online survey will set loud ring tones, use their cell phones in places that others might easily see that they too “*bayangena*”.

Besides flaunted consumption, the other entity that I found to be characteristic of personhood is deviance. Doing what you know is not expected somehow get these women noticed. Some of the respondents on the survey had shown how they enjoyed flirting with married men more on their cell phones than single men. “Can I get away with texting this married man without his wife and my boyfriend finding out? Can I send naughty pictures to him?” These are some of the questions a respondent said were going through her head as she entertained the man at the other end of her cell phone. The cell phone agreeably has increased space for more women to gallivant peacefully, away from the watchful eyes of husbands, partners or mothers-in-law. Not only has the space increased for them, but also the autonomy to be omnipresent. In the context of Lesotho, where most women suffer oppression of patriarchy through customs and traditions, deviance might be rewarding as it might be equated to freedom, and this freedom does not come at the expense of anything else other than airtime and battery life. Women identify personhood through purchase and use of cell phones and the effects of their obvious personhood assist in their navigation and negotiation of positionality in their relationships with their partners and family.

One day, as I walked the streets of Mowbray, I saw two homeless gentlemen; the one was holding a Nokia 3310- he was dangling it in front of the other, saying to him “*siya ba ngena*”, and automatically that brought me back to cell phones, status and personhood. Warnier (2012) gives a talk about rituals that people have in place to identify with in their daily lives. He talks about subjects, objects and substances that come into play in the making of a ritual. He points out that there are itineraries that are followed in the ritual making and it sticking. He discusses the symbolism of a raffia bag, its contents and the way it might be open or closed. In the time of raffia bags, men were identified with one- meaning if you did have a raffia bag one was not there yet, unlike the homeless man in Mowbray; one could not be in a position to say “*siya ba ngena*”. The open zippers and contents all said something to the viewer- but in the context I write, the raffia bags are cell phones- instead of giving kola nuts or tobacco to show friendship

women give out numbers. Instead of zippers being open or closed cell phones have passwords and security codes. The two inner spaces in the raffia bags are represented by messages and email on cell phones- these are personal and we don't expect our family members and partners to look at them when they take our cell phones. Yet the camera, radio and music files are like the outer parts of the raffia bag accessible to anyone.

I am led to believe that when the raffia bag got a little old for the carrier, he would give it to the son while he got himself a new one and I also want to assume the son too would say "*siya bangena*", as now he too would be among the people whose personhood is recognised by ability to carry a status bag. He would have consumed that which is used to recognise personhood in people. Even though he had never been to the market to purchase a raffia bag, he can be counted among those who are "there". Like the raffia bag and its contents, we find and give meaning to things which at the end become norms, and eventually norms become laws as discussed by Bourdieu (1990) and Butler (2004).

In his paper "Technology as Efficacious Action" Warnier describes a ritual as "an action which is repeated according to fixed rules, and the accomplishment of which does not seem to produce any useful effect" (Warnier, 2009:413). If it was a ritual for a man to carry a raffia bag to be identified as a human, and now the raffia bag has gotten smaller and more expensive, what does that say about personhood? In as much as a raffia bag was a sign of status, it was also worn as an accessory. The data I have collected proves to me that women wear cell phones as fashion accessories as well. Identity through fashion and personhood are at the heart of co-creation that women are constantly negotiating and navigating in their relationships. I am also led to believe that is why women will use their best cell phones, with the best applications. Taking aunt Busi and Anne's story; Anne had wanted Busi to "*bangena*"- even if she uses an old phone to among those who will eventually navigate and negotiate relationships within her locality.

Still on mobile phones being fashion accessories, (Katz 2006: 66) defined fashion as "an important form of symbolic communication that can drive human behaviour..." Davis says "fashion includes the subjectivity of youth versus age, masculinity versus femininity, androgyny

versus singularity, domesticated versus worldliness, revelation versus concealment, license versus restraint, and conformity versus rebellion,”(1985:18) and (Kaiser 1998:34) describes fashion ambivalence as rooting from “people’s emotional need to keep abreast of fashion changes in order to maintain their social identity.” All these definitions have a common denominator- women’s agency. When studying the way women use cell phones it is important to consider the relationship between fashion, cell phones and identity or at least the perceptions of such. Women are attentive to fashion, and it is within this ever changing environment of fashion that I find technology to be shaped; it is adopted as an accessory in the presentation of self and ends up incorporated into repertoire of personal front and authentication of self or personhood.

The ability to communicate with distant people is a status, which is why ownership of a cell phone automatically attributes to power and status. I remember how growing up I was regarded as rich just because our family had a land line telephone and the rest of the people in our area didn’t. The same attribution of cell phones to wealth is very one that caused havoc between aunt Busi and Anne to fight over ‘a rich neighbour’ who was called to inform Busi about the ceremony arrangement. Needless to say, our social status has since changed since the cell phone became accessible to most. To uphold our “rich” status, we have to own top of the range cell phones that the neighbours do not have, this is because cell phones are strongly connected to ability to navigate power and status, moreover the capability to negotiate identity and personhood.

4.8 The Cell Phone on the Centre Stage

The cell phone improves the status and appearance of those who wear it because it shows just how much they are the object of communicative interest and are thereby desired on the part of others (Fortunati, 2002). Cell phones are on centre stage as far as identity is concerned. They act like car head lights in the fog or at night- you know there is someone coming even before they arrive. The brighter and sharper the headlights, the more expensive the car is likely to be. In the same manner, cell phones clear the stage for the user, the fancier the cell phones, the more the likeliness that it is an expensive phone, automatically making the user a power machine. The cell phones performs the task of an MC (Master of Ceremonies), introducing the

key-note speaker, giving out his accreditations such that by the time they come on stage, the audience looks at her in awe and give her the respect that she “deserves”. (Katz 2006) agrees to this speaker- audience performance by saying that “there is a reciprocal process of negotiating of meanings between an industry seeking to frame the technology and the public that responds to, adopts and modifies further the technology” (Katz 2006: 74).

Ling (2001) adds to this performance orientated theory that people feel the need to move in sync with others whether they are aware of it or not. Because of the authentication of personhood that I will be discussing next, women feel the need to show others and themselves that they are indeed “people”- defined by their consumption of all the necessary accessories that are defining personhood across all economic and social status. At the focus group discussion that I had with aunts from both sides of Anne’s family, people would make an excuse to bring out their cell phones. “*Bathong, ke utloile eka e ealla*” would exclaim one, “did you see how old my son is now?” The other would say to her neighbour, and on and on the conversations surrounding cell phones would continue and so will the sizing up of who was the richest of them all.

A ringing cell phone acts like a cue for the performance to start. This performance i have observed is a merge of personhood and identity, positionality and habitus. In this performance the first user of the cell phone becomes the soprano of the choir, starting the song, and setting a key for the rest of the choir members to follow. The other person who is forced to eavesdrop because of a cell phone conversation that starts in her presence, might resort to using her own cell phone thus being an alto in the choir and thus accepting the performance. Being forced to “catch” the choreography, this individual might find that she is not even that interested but because of the ingredients of this specific performance personhood dictates that they join the performance. Like any choreographed piece, (Katz 2006) says that there is culture consistency that goes hand in hand with the piece.

4.9 Same Cast, Different Script

This brief sub heading presents the similarities and differences that arose in the stories of my three key informants as they went about negotiating and navigating their relationships. This

section puts together stories from each of my informants to compare them, using the research questions laid down in chapter one as bench mark for comparison. One of the first questions I had wanted to investigate was how these women use cell phones in the negotiation and navigation of romantic and family relationships.

- “His family treats me well, they say we *makoerekoere*¹⁷ sound like babies when we speak on the phone, and that makes them laugh...while they laugh I get to tell them what I want ignoring the rules,” Elizabeth pointed out.
- “My uncle likes people to see he has a new phone...I call him so often especially during the day when I know he is busy. He can never say no to me when all he wants is to show off that his niece is in Cape Town” exclaimed Ruth to the same question.
- “*Oa tseba cell phone ha e tsebe moetlo. Ha ke qala ke penya 587... feela ho felile, le motho a arabelang a tsebe hore tsa meetlo li felile. Ha ke le ha hao ke teng moo o ka ntjoetsang ka meetlo, empa ha re li buile phonong kannete se re li qetile...*” Anne had said that a cell phone is not a respecter of a culture, the minute one dials 587... the cultural boundary that might have existed is crossed. She went on to say whatever is discussed on the phone, outside of any culture, remains so even after the call is ended.

The similarity in all their stories is that these women challenged their position within their families. With her cell phone Anne proved that the *makoti*-daughter position can be surpassed for as long as the relational position is wisely conveyed. Ruth like Anne challenged space and position by turning her flower bed into a burial ground for her son’s umbilical cord- thus performing a grandmother’s duty to the her own child. I am let to believe that had she been around to suggest to cut her son’s umbilical cord and burying it in the city, her family could have had a fit, but through texts, calls and pictures, she was given permission to take on the role of the grandmother. The difference in their stories is that Ruth was dealing with her own family. Like I discussed in the paradox of existence, dealing with paternal family is much easier as one negotiates within a known territory, whereas the in-laws are different because of the key element of the *bohali* they paid for the transfer of right from the paternal father to the

¹⁷Derogatory name for foreigners

father-in-law. Anne and Elizabeth had to conquer not only the paternal family beast but also the *bohali* beast that ties them to a pole with an even shorter rope.

The second similarity that arose from the research questions, evidenced in the data is that of constant identity and personhood negotiation. As discussed in the previous chapters, personhood is habitus embodied. All these women wanted that aspect to come out and to be recognised by their family members and in their love relationships. By introducing a culture of open communication, these women seem to me to have wanted and succeeded in doing away with barriers that gendered them into less relevant members of families or relationships. Anne, Ruth and Elizabeth manipulated the power that cell phones are accorded in their families to gain the same power, identity and recognition for themselves. However, though they all negotiated identity, it was identity in differing spheres that they did as such. Ruth wanted to be seen as an independent woman who can be a family maker, watch out for rites and ritual in her own space and locality. Ownership of her life is central to her cell phone use to communicate with her family.

Table 1: How Ruth negotiated and Navigated Relationships with her family

“I think having gone through the pregnancy without asking for help made them aware that I can actually do things on my own...”

“Most times I would Google things, and then call them to inform them what I have done, it is then that they would courier herbs and powders for the baby...they finally got it that I was independent”

Anne, torn by the demands made on her because of the double role of position as a daughter and *makoti* wanted to excise some power. Personhood and identity bring along to some extent the notion of power; it is this power that Anne needed and finally negotiated across both families.

Table 2: How Anne went about her gendered position as a daughter and *Makoti*

“My uncles and his dad did not like me calling them...most times when I want to ask for anything that I know they are likely to raise an eye brow to, I ask for their account number to deposit money for them to buy some drink. I always blame the cell phone for the loss of the account number each time...the drink money paves my way to discussing other issues on the phone. It has now gotten to the point where I don't have to pave the way...”

The ability to traverse space for Elizabeth marked victory over navigation of space. Although she and Anne could have been in the same boat of demanding *makoti* roles, her case was made shoddier by the fact that she was non Mosotho. Not only did she have to navigate space as a *makoti*, but also she had to constantly understand language use and meaning, and social meaning of things that was not familiar to. Let me make a remark that personhood is socially constructed and given meaning by those in the vicinity. She therefore had to navigate with much care the spaces and position, identity and personhood associated with *makoerekoere* in the community and family she was in.

Table 3: Elizabeth' response to negotiation of space and position as a foreigner

“My husband and I decided to get a divorce in the absence of our parents. I had been told by his family that *lobola* [*bohali*] cattle cannot be taken back from Kenya, so I had to work things out with him. I called his father, his father and told him we were divorcing. History had taught me he was afraid of his father because his mother was lenient with him... I knew I was not to call him but it is not like he would end the call...”

Lastly, the similarities that these three women share is that they seemingly won the battle against gendering and bounded cultures that clip their wings as far as involvement in family

affairs are concerned. Because of the experiences they all had with families, they have paved their way for easier communication in families. I believe that these battles have also paved pathways for their daughters to be able to be identified not by gender, but by contribution to their families and love relationships. However, I feel that though the battles have been won, the wars are far from being won. Taking the example I used earlier where my family had been thought to be rich because we had a telephone when everyone else did not, I feel the same is happening for these ladies, especially Anne and Ruth. Until something better comes up, they may be able to negotiate and navigate positionality and space using cell phones, but I fear it is only a matter of time before their families decide cell phones are not good enough.

4.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I linked my field findings to the existing literature that was written in the similar subject. I explored the theories of habitus, personhood and identity, consumption and relationships navigation and negotiation by women through appropriation of cell phones. I arrived to conclusions that in order to navigate and negotiate relationships, women have to be fully aware of their identities within relationships they wish to navigate. They also have to establish new spaces and territory in which they can negotiate how they are perceived through the use their cell phones. The data proved also that romance and family relations are and can be manoeuvred through accordance of power that comes with ownership of a cell phone as a socio-economically understood communication tool that camouflages the status of the holder. I also compared and contrasted how the women used their cell phones to navigate and negotiate family and love relationships. I showed how the women were able to prove identity and personhood, position and traverse space.

5 CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This concluding chapter draws to an end the study on women and how they negotiate and navigate relationships using their cell phones. Of the many routes that this research could have followed, but none were more challenging than to theorize people's perceptions and put away my own in order to produce a fairly objective dissertation. Time and time again, I would feel like my spade would be turned up but as I delved further I would find an ankle would direct my data and research questions into a broad encompassing study. In order to successfully conceptualise this study, I had to be conscious of my own biases as far as a gendered role and definition of women in Lesotho was concerned. I also had to be mindful of my age and marital status because of the prejudice that encircles the two variables in the community I was to study in. Lastly, even before I could study, I had to make my own familiar strange, to avoid missing out on crucial aspects that I could be blinded to due to familiarity.

Looking at the methods I employed in this study, I used participant observation to fully capture my day to day walk with the women who informed this study. I had had to purchase a cell phone that would allow me the luxury to engage fully in data collection. Purchasing this cell phone was also my own entry into an ethnographic world- as the cell phones allowed exchange and storage of data. I also relied on interviews, focus group discussions and a survey to collect data that would form empirical and epistemological grounds for this research. At times I would simply rely on day to day conversation for data. It was through those by-the way news that I came to understand more how the social definition of cell phones help women meander around the cultural fabric that would otherwise keep them in the kitchen. In understanding this new found mobility, I also got to understand how women reproduced, shaped and reshaped their own world through cyber space. As a participant observer most times, I found myself reproducing the lives of my key informants to see if in my own world their realities could be true- and in fact most times, I was able to sway and influence others around me.

The literature I read pointed me to ideas of challenging culture, understanding habitus and its direct link to personhood. Through tackling issues like *bohali*, *bonyatsi* and position of women within these institutions, I was able to show how women use their cell phones to navigate space and negotiate position within their families and love relationships. My aim in undertaking this study had been to uncover how women get to influence their world through use of cell phones. I discussed in this dissertation that through making cell phone use a habitus, women are able to persuade how history is made. I should, however, point out that it was not that straightforward to undertake this study because of the limited literature that is written on the subject matter. As a bench mark of what has been done, I had to refer to other academic work on women and cell phones- but unfortunately the material that I found was perhaps old, for example, when addressing issues like *bohali*, there is not any recent literature that takes into account that technology has affect the way thing might be done e.g. transfer of *bohali* over EFT. Because of the ability of the cell phone to transgress over existing norms without necessarily compromising the user, the cell phone has afforded these women an extension of their selves in which they are able to be what main stream would not. Moreover, because of the social status that a cell phone has, the social meaning of a cell phone is rich and powerful. In itself, this meaning gives women the platform to navigate space and positionality that is camouflaged by the cell phone.

In the analysis of data I addressed the use and meaning of cell phone as understood by women who took part in this study. In this research I have observed that a cell phone has social meaning. I understand that is more than it just a communication tool, neither is it a mere technical object that has been engineered to cache and buffer messages and calls. It is with such realisation that I used the term cell phone as socially understood communication device, which fully works and can be used to negotiate and navigate space and position. Through appropriating their cell phone use, the women show that they were able to go across the socially constructed and initially unchallenged territories.

Through an online survey I was able to reach a conclusion that fulfilment in relationships can be found in using to the maximum the extended space of cell phones. As extensions of self, cell

phones authenticate the membership of a woman into a “born-free” generation, giving her identity and reinstating her position as a well able consumer. I do believe this study was able to shed some light on issues pertaining to navigation of personhood, identity, consumption and negotiation of positions and power relations in romantic and family relationships.

I think this research can serve to open doors to other studies for instance; negotiation of power relations between men and women in Maseru. Some of the highly contested strongholds among the people I worked with in this research are power and tradition identities. The men I had a chance of interacting with showed reluctance in admitting that the cell phone could be bring a culture of its own; in which women are not subordinates and dependent on their male counterparts. Women too felt that the cell phone has given them an extension of self where they could be who they are without a watchful eye of a husband or father- the cell phone helps them declare a cold war on patriarchy. It is therefore a recommendation to look into this negotiation of power relations and how it affects the existing power structures within families.

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Appendix A

This is the specimen of the online survey that I posted. Fifty women responded to this survey, some of their responses are shown in chapter four while others formed a deeper understanding of this research.

Part i

1. Marital Status

Yes

No

2. Age

20 – 25

25 - 30

30 - 35

35 and above

3. Who do you contact most on your cell phone?

My Family

Friends

Lover/ partner

Work / business

5. Do you think cell phones are a necessary piece of technology in today's age?

I cannot imagine my life without a cell phone

I can remember what it was like before cell phones, but I prefer to own one

I can remember what it was like before cell phones and I wish it had stayed that way

- I just own a cell phone in case of an emergency. I do not think they are necessary in today's age.

Done

Part ii

1. Ever had or thought of having an online lover?

- Yes
- No

2. What do you hope for from online chats?

- Prospects of a relationship
- Networks
- Fun
- Other

3. What happens to online relationships?

- Move them to offline
- Get turned off
- Did not pursue them
- Other

4. How often do your online relationships lead to sexual relations?

- Always
- Most times

Hardly

Never

5. Do you have other lovers?n,

- Just online
- Both off and online
- I don't have any
- Other

Done

Appendix B

Below is the letter that I had requested in order to get funding to purchase a solar charger for the people of Mokhotlong, where aunt Busi resides.

National ManPower Development Secretariat

P. O. Box 530

Maseru 100

To whom it may concern

Kefiloe Sello is an MSc Anthropology candidate in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Cape Town. I am her supervisor and herewith confirm that I have full knowledge of her research project which entails the use of Information and Communication Technologies. She needs to undertake this Research Project as it is a requirement for her of Masters' degree.

Sincerely

Francis Nyamnjoh (Prof)
