

## **Background**

Soul Buddyz 3 is in its formative stage of development. Soul Buddyz is a multimedia health promotion vehicle for children aged between 8 and 12 years old. The vehicle consists of a 26 episode television drama, a 26 episode radio magazine programme in nine languages, a grade 7 lifeskills book as well as a booklet for parents in 4 languages. After the second series of Soul Buddyz the Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication together with SABC education and SABC 1 looked at the television aspect of Soul Buddyz and decided to make the following changes: The television drama will target 8-12 year olds, but will also target parents aged between 24-35 years old.

This research is about the one topic being dealt with in the series, manhood. Gender is one basic defining feature of a person's identity. In the changing South African society at present the role of men and boys, is not always positive and many young boys are struggling to find their identity in the society. The Soul Buddyz intervention aims to deal with the developing of a positive gender outlook for boys, assisting them to become a positive force in the society.

The research aimed to investigate parents and teachers perspectives about rites of passage, what the role of young boys is and what they believe is the role of men in the society.

## **Methodology**

Qualitative interviews were conducted with parents and teachers 24-35 years old. 8 groups were conducted where the issue "manhood" was explored. The groups were conducted in Limpopo, North West province, Gauteng, and Eastern Cape. There was one Indian group and two Coloured groups.

	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Peri-urban</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Male</b>	2	1	2	5
<b>Female</b>	2		1	3

The groups were transcribed verbatim and then analysed by themes using Atlas ti software.

## **Results**

•Initiation schools or rites of passage

These were obviously culturally determined and were mentioned spontaneously in some groups but in others they were things that had only been heard of in newspapers. In those communities the role played by the initiation schools is seen as very important though some are believe that the initiation schools have changed and are not as good as previously as they are money making institutions. Circumcision is also seen as an essential part of being a man by some.

*According to African culture you become a man when you have been to initiation school. When you come back ( from the school), now you are a man. According to African culture you can be a grown man but if you have not been to the school you are regarded as a boy. (rural teachers, male, Gauteng)*

*Here we live under White farmers and we tend take our children to the hospital for the 'white man's type' of initiation which is circumcision. They are circumcised by doctors and most young men around here go to Leratong hospital. (peri-urban, fathers, Gauteng)*

*“Mula” is very important because in teaches discipline to boys, they are taught good cultural conducts and ethics and we find that these days, this is no longer practiced. If a boy can be taught all these laws in the initiation school they easily understand (okay ... but what age do boys go to initiation schools?...Int) nn... out there according to me, he can go when he is in the age of eight. (Rural teachers male, Limpopo)*

*If a boy did not go to initiations school, it becomes so easy for him to be infected by diseases and this will disturb him in his life, so, the issue of initiation schools is the other way of trying to fight diseases. (Rural teachers male, Limpopo)*

*I think in this initiation school, when they go, infant children sometimes are ill-informed some even get confused. Because of physical changes taking place in their bodies (Rural teachers male, Limpopo)*

*Yeah the role of the initiation school is to educate kids about life and then as soon as they grow up, they need to respect other people.*

*According to Western culture when you turn twenty one you have a big party and you are told that you are now a man but in black terms if you went to the initiation school at fifteen you become a man then. But at the end of the day even if they said you were a man if you are not responsible you are not acting truly like a man.(rural teachers, male, Gauteng)*

*R: Yeah with me I've got the very same sentiments but I will also add that initially they were designed with good purpose, but as time goes by because now we are business minded, people are obsessed with profit making. So in a nutshell I will say the Fong-kongs are making it sound irrelevant understanding our situation but initially it was meant to make us become men at the right age, to realize what is expected from a*

*person in order to become a man.* (Urban teachers, male, Gauteng)

*I know in black communities they have an initiation ceremony where a boy becomes a man. We Indians don't have anything like that. When you get to a certain age and you start to show maturity – that's when you become a man. Sometimes you get men who act worse than boys. (Laughter).* (Indian fathers, urban, Gauteng)

*I know the Hindus and so on have certain things that makes a boy become a man at a certain age or at a certain time. I think in modern times you have the so-called 21st birthday. But to me that has no bearing or significance on a boy becoming a man. The boy is given a key and so on but that does not determine a boy becoming a man. I personally don't believe that a person has to be initiated into manhood.* (Indian fathers, urban, Gauteng)

*So, even though they don't go to initiation school, getting circumcised is part of becoming a man*(rural, mothers E Cape)

The age of attendance was discussed and for some going at a young age was problematic.

*In the past boys used to go to initiation school when they were 18 years of age now some go when they are 12years and when they come back from there they are told that they are now men.* (rural teachers, male, Gauteng)

Another rite of passage that was mentioned but not explored extensively was that of becoming a father.

*Yeah I will talk from experience during those years we used to say to one another once you have a child its when that you say that I am a man. So that promoted wrong perceptions about having a child which is the problem that my colleague indicated earlier. May be we are six, and three of us are having kids and the other three will be under pressure to have kids. So they will be pressured to have kids so that we can boast about being men now.* (urban teachers, male, Gauteng)

Taking responsibility and being respectable

The description of young boys becoming men was frequently discussed in terms of when the boy has his own family and learns to take responsibility. Following Christianity was mentioned as a way of becoming responsible.

*The boy is given a key and so on but that does not determine a boy becoming a man. I personally don't believe that a person has to be initiated into manhood. Manhood shows when you are able to take responsibility and accountability for what you do. No matter what happens in life, as long as you are able to show that you're responsible now. I'm able to stand on my own two feet.* (Indian fathers, urban, Gauteng)

*A man is one who when he has matured physically also makes matured and responsible choices. Some grown men don't behave responsibly (rural fathers, E Cape)*

*Being a man is when you stop being childish and irresponsible. When a boy is able to look after himself he is a man. He is able to carry himself with maturity and responsibility. (Indian fathers, urban, Gauteng)*

*With boys you should start at the age of twelve and educate them about how to behave maturely, when they reach 18 years they should know how they should behave as responsible men. There are some men who at twenty five don't know anything about manly issues such as how to behave like a grown up man. This shows that the parents have not taken the time to teach them. (rural fathers, E Cape)*

*[I: what makes a boy a man?] He has to be responsible (rural mothers, E Cape)*

*Now the way you talk as a spiritual man, the way you present yourself before other people makes you a man and a respectable man. It doesn't mean that you are a man when you are good in screwing girls and changing girls like that doesn't make you a man. But it makes you a male prostitute (laughter) But if you ever have your norms and values guided by Christ you become a respectable man. (Urban teachers, male, Gauteng)*

*Well, mmm, where he maybe did something wrong. It will maybe come out in public. Then he mustn't run away. He must stand firm and tell his part of the story (rural mothers, E Cape)*

Being Independent and having a family  
Becoming a man means that you are independent and have a family

*When you leave your parents' home. (rural mothers, E Cape)*

*That's when you're on your own. And now you have to stand as a man. You have to look after yourself. But it doesn't mean that you don't have parents anymore. They can't say they don't know you, but you are now on your own. (Indian fathers, urban, Gauteng)*

*To be able to support yourself and not be dependent on your parents. So I think that that will enforce what being a man is. Because if you're a boy you're deemed as living under someone's authority. You're being supported by your parents. When you become a man you can take control – you can run a household. And if the father has passed away you're got to play the role of your dad. You need to have a good career. And you've got to be responsible – that would make you a man. I think it's being able to take responsibility and accountability for his actions. He must be able to show that I've done this because of these reasons. I've done this because I'm able to do it. So, to me that's what makes a boy become a man. He must be able to take responsibility for his actions. (Indian fathers, urban, Gauteng)*

*To be a man, they teach them about a family. They teach them how to handle a family when they have one and how to behave as a man and a family man. They teach them that you should not be lazy, you get a wife and you should satisfy her. (fathers, urban North West)*

Guidance and role-modelling

Parents need to guide young boys into manhood and fathers are seen as important role models

*Parents are very important in a boy's life. They need to be good role models. They need to be there for their son if he has a problem or if he is struggling with something. I agree that they should be there to guide their son. (mothers Indian, Gauteng)*

*Well, I don't think parents stop being parents, even if your child has reached manhood you still give them advise if need be. You cannot leave your child to go astray just because he has reached maturity. As a parent, you always guide. Even if your child is fifty eight years, you will always guide and advise. (rural teachers, male, Gauteng)*

*Parents should motivate their sons to do what is right. They should push him in the right direction. They should provide guidance and discipline for them. I think as parents you've got to teach your child how to be independent. You can't always rely on somebody else. And I think the only way you can teach is by example. You can't just tell them you must do this and that when you are not doing it yourself. You have to teach by example. (mothers Indian, Gauteng)*

*If our boys go at all [initiation school]it is because of peer pressure, no parent will allow his boy to go to the initiation school lately. We don't know what they are being taught there, whether they end up being responsible adults we don't know. We do notice some boys even after going to the school behave irresponsibly and have lots of girlfriends. The parent still has the responsibility to guide the child because the parent cannot blame the school for their child's bad behaviour. So as a parent you are still there to guide child until he become a responsible person. (rural teachers, male, Gauteng)*

*If its' a boy I think the father would obviously play a major role. Because the boy is now watching the father-watching his role in the family. Obviously males tend to imitate their parents when they grow up. The fathers' role is vital because he sets the trend in which his son would follow (Rural teachers male, Limpopo)*

*Also, I think the father of the house also plays a very important role. He looks up to his father. (mothers Indian, Gauteng)*

*What we like for him is to be a man so that he can be our leader in future. He will also in turn teaches his younger brothers how he survived so that they can follow his steps, "you see how I grew up, I went to school, I listened to my parents, I did not rush into*

*marriage, I waited for the right time, now I am fully grown and now I have my family”, in other words he is teaching his brother some right manners. (Rural teachers male, Limpopo)*

Sex and sexuality

*And then it is also like this, you know. There is a discharge that can indicate that you're now a man. It's like that for women, too. There is a discharge. Because, you know, a little boy does not produce sperm. And at that stage he starts to produce sperm then. But you know that some of them sometimes also start at nine or ten. And then, if they have sex with a girl... but you know she also has to be in that phase already (rural fathers, E Cape)*

*A boy must be told of things that he will experience as he will be growing up, he must be told that his development takes place differently. If he is eighteen, he must be told that if he plays foolishly with girls, he may impregnate a girl and in the process, he may be infected by AIDS.*

*So they [initiation schools] tell them to be patient and abstain from sexual practices because of fear of sexual transmitted diseases. And then, these were the lesson of the day, more importantly, restrictions on sexual matters (Rural teachers male, Limpopo)*

There was some discussion about young boys growing up quicker in families where there is no father. The boys have to become responsible at a younger age and behave like a father.

*Also, maybe he could be the only son at home too. That could also make him be a man much quicker as well. Yeah. Maybe if he doesn't have a father he would become a man much quicker. (Indian mothers, urban, Gauteng)*

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Parents in general see growing up for boys as developing responsibility and having a family, and supporting the family. The pressures on boys to do this are very big. In some cases parents do not see a boy as a man until he has had a child. Initiation schools play a big role as a rite of passage though there was much debate about the changing nature of the initiation schools and the age at which young boys go. Parents mostly recognise their role as guiding young boys into manhood, and the importance of a male role model.