DISCOURSES OF LOVE AND MONEY: EXPLORING CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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Declaration

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I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University

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Abstract

This dissertation considers gender relations and intimacy in romantic relationships within the context of economic globalization and consumer culture. The aim was to explore how the economic structure of South African society and the culture of consumption that has accompanied this structure influence the way men and women view themselves and each other, and the impact this has on the relationships they form. Social Constructionism was used as a theoretical framework and specific attention was paid to the discourses evident in the speech of participants and the effects these discourses may have had on the formation of intimate bonds. Data was collected from young middle class women aged 18-25 using focus groups and individual, semi-structured interviews and was analysed using discourse analysis to explore the ways in which ideas of identity, self-worth, status and value shape these relationships. The following discourses were identified from the data: Men and women are different, Romantic relationships as a means to social inclusion/self-esteem, Love as a risk, Love as hard work and Physical attractiveness as necessary for romantic relationships.

1. Introduction

"Human beings are born into this little span of life of which the best thing is its friendships and intimacies" (James, 1920, p. 109).

This study will focus on romantic relationships in the context of South African consumer culture and the construction of gender and intimacy within these relationships. Freud, Maslow and Bowlby have all pointed out, in different ways, the importance of forming and sustaining interpersonal bonds (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The desire to belong may be the driving force behind other desires such as for power or success as well as the desire to consume. However, the tendency to consume actively impairs the achievement of close interpersonal attachments when we come to view people as commodities to be used or owned (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

People need others in order to construct our realities and our identities, to make us feel worthwhile and loved. Both men and women are dependent, to a large extent, on relationships for their psychological wellbeing (Berscheid & Reis, 1998 as cited in Marshall, 2010). Fromm calls love the "deepest and most real need of any human being" (Fromm, 1956, p. 7). When our social bonds with others are disrupted we feel, "alienated, lost, dejected and depressed," (Callero, 2009, p. 119). It has been argued that healthy romantic relationships are important for the wellbeing of young adults (Rauer & Volling, 2007) and relationship satisfaction has also been found to be related to physical health and longevity (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001 as cited in Cohen, Schulz, Weiss, & Waldinger, 2012). In modern, westernised cultures especially, a long-term intimate relationship is understood as the ideal for most people (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1997).

Romantic relationships in the context of South African consumer culture have been addressed by Bruce (2007) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) (2008) who published studies concerning status and crime in South African townships. These studies explored the participants' need for recognition and respect from their peers and the means through which these were attained. One of the ways in which young men gained the approval they desired was through sexual relationships with attractive young women. The relationships served as a

means to social recognition and the young women were essentially status symbols. In this way both the young women and the relationships themselves were objectified.

A study done by Leclerc-Madlala (2003), addressing transactional sex among young South African women in an urban township uncovered similar themes of instrumentality with regards to relationships and romantic partners. The young women established relationships with older men in order to gain access to economic means which would enable them to purchase representations of an affluent lifestyle for example expensive clothing, jewellery or cellular phones. The older men engaged in these relationships as they provided them with prestige in their community. Men were dependent on possessing attractive women in order to achieve social status and therefore to be re-assured of their self-worth. This placed them in a conflicting situation as by selecting a girlfriend based purely on her appearance and for the approval of others rather than a feeling of connectedness and intimacy these men were sacrificing certain needs- for closeness, security, commitment and love- for needs for esteem and recognition.

Women were in a similar situation as they were sacrificing their need for commitment, love and connectedness for their need for approval from others, to fit in with their peers and to meet the demands of their society. These societal demands encourage exploitative relationships where the men exploited the women by placing them at risk for HIV infection, pregnancy as well as physically harming them while the women exploited the men for their money. Leclerc-Madlala (2003) suggests that globalisation and consumer culture play a structural role in the increase of instrumental sexual relationships:

> The opening of the South African economy with the dawn of democracy in 1994 has brought with it a proliferation of global images of material wealth, including images of easy sex and glamorous lifestyles portrayed through local and foreign soap operas that are extremely popular (p. 16).

This study aims to explore discursive constructions of romantic relationships among middle class South Africans as this has not been previously addressed. Focussing on the middle class

as opposed to marginalised or economically oppressed groups enables us to better understand those which dominant ideologies are meant to serve. These groups are often the ones invested in maintaining the current power structures as they keep them in positions of relative privilege and so understanding their experiences is necessary if we aim to challenge these structures. This study will also focus more explicitly on the constructions of gender in romantic relationships and experiences of intimacy.

2. Literature Review

Relationships

This section on relationships addresses how relationships are traditionally understood in the field of psychology. People's motives for entering into relationships, as well as how relationships are evaluated in terms of the satisfaction they bring, are discussed in the first two sections- relationship orientation and relationship satisfaction. It then moves on to explore the concept of love, specifically paying attention to how the way we understand and experience love has changed over time. In addition, Fromm's (1956) alternate perspective on understanding love is presented. Together these provide a background to understanding love which is the focus of this research. The section ends off with a brief summary of attachment theory which is one of the most commonly used psychological theories when attempting to understand interpersonal relationships.

Relationship orientation

Vangelisti & Perlman (2006) discuss relationship orientation when addressing what motivates people to enter into romantic relationships. According to them, how people see themselves, the labels they attach to themselves and the values they hold influence how relationship oriented they are. For example someone with an "independent self-construal" sees themselves as autonomous and unique and values their independence. They will try to maintain this autonomy by avoiding dependence on others (Vangelisti & Perlman, 2006). Individualism would be likely to cultivate people with independent self-construals which would undermine the formation of meaningful relationships. Someone with an "interdependent self-construal" values relationships and includes her relationships in her view of herself. These people will seek out meaningful attachments with others (Vangelisti & Perlman, 2006).

Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships often refers to the partners', "subjective affective experiencing of their own hapiness and contentment with their close relationship," (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1997, p. 58) and, according to social learning theory, exchange theory

and interdependence theory, may depend on the degree to which partners behave in a way which pleases each other (Du Plessis, 2007). Self-disclosure has also been identified as essential for relational intimacy, but on the other hand it has been suggested that sharing certain information or sharing too much can hinder the development of romantic relationships (Anderson, Kunkel, & Dennis, 2011). Love, although not solely responsible for or the only thing necessary for satisfaction in romantic relationships, also plays a significant role (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1997).

Love

"To return to love, to get the love we always wanted but never had, to have the love we want but are not prepared to give, we turn to romantic relationships," (hooks, 2000, p. 193).

Before exploring the role of love in romantic relationships it is important to consider what love is. The emotion of romantic love (as opposed to love towards family members or love as a duty) has tended to be understood as an internal, personal reaction. Looking at love in this way disregards the cultural and social context in which feelings of love are experienced, as well as the social functions of emotions such as love, especially their communicative functions (Parkinson, 1996). Parkinson (1996) critiques this more individualistic view of emotion in general and demonstrates how important social context is in the causation of emotion. Romantic love especially, is an emotion which necessarily involves another person and a concern with interpersonal relationship status. It is important therefore, to acknowledge the role of others in influencing emotional experience. Under the assumption that other people, particularly those who make up a part of our social environment, are often fairly important to us, the things they say and do will matter to us personally. According to Appraisal Theory it is when something matters to us that we experience an emotional reaction to it. Therefore, others are often the cause of emotional reactions because they are usually important to us (Parkinson, 1996). Parkinson (1996) suggests that we extend appraisal theory, which argues that the emotional significance of a person, object or event is dependent on how one internally assesses how important it is through a process of cognitive interpretation. He proposes that this assessment takes place in the context of our interpersonal interactions and that our conversations with others as well as non-verbal interactions allow us to dynamically

negotiate appraisals of the relationship and the situation. These appraisals do not then occur in isolation inside each individuals mind based on their own cognitions and personality but can be viewed as reciprocal.

de Botton (2004) argues that the love of others is so important to us because it assures us of our worth as human beings. If others want to be around us then we can endure ourselves, our attractive characteristics are confirmed and we can therefore bring into consciousness a positive self-esteem. As adults love becomes conditional on how well we meet the requirements of others- if they require us to be successful, attractive, wealthy or well-known we must strive to attain these attributes so that we may be loved (de Botton, 2004).

The changing nature of love

Illouz (1997) examined how discourses of love have changed over the years in American and Western culture. Due to the globalised nature of the world these changes are relevant to South Africa which is exposed to and often adopts aspects of western culture and its ideas through mass media. During the Victorian era love, even romantic love, was intimately intertwined with religious, especially Christian, discourse. Love was seen as a holy pursuit and was believed to be a means to self-knowledge, to be capable of overcoming unwanted, sinful instincts and of uplifting the soul. At the end of the nineteenth and early in the twentieth century, when religion became less central a focus of western life, romantic love is described by some historians as taking the place of Christianity as a new sort of religion (Illouz, 1997).

One source of the powerful influence of romantic love in the lives of Americans was the equation of romantic love and marriage to happiness. Representations of love in literature and film at the time reinforced this idea of love resulting in and being necessary for personal happiness and of love as a means to self-affirmation. Movies about love, which were exceedingly popular at the time, as early as 1910 began to incorporate key characteristics of American culture, such as individualism, consumerism and leisure, whilst forming a new moral code relating to romance. The messages in these movies indicated that women were required to be as physically attractive as possible for their romantic partner and men would

need to provide entertainment for the women (Illouz, 1997). The actors who starred in these films became more famous and their personal lives and romantic attachments were reported on in such a way that mirrored, to some extent, the lives and loves of the characters they played. Many couples in films became couples in real life too. This led to the stories and ideas depicted in the films to be perceived as more credible and relevant to the viewers' personal lives. These stars were not only idealised as actors but as love icons who were evidence of real life romantic success and happiness. These relationships reinforced the link between consumption and love as they took place in the context of a great deal of wealth and luxury (Illouz, 1997). They also emphasised the link between beauty and romance as actors would be used in advertisements promoting beauty products which claimed to be able to help women to achieve the new ideal set for those who wished to have romantic relationships like those illustrated in the films and in the lives of the actors. "Because they combined beauty, youth, glamour, wealth, conspicuous consumption, and relentless excitement, these stars embodied the ideal of the perfect couple as constructed by the culture of consumption" (Illouz 1997, p. 33). This illustrates how the media began to influence the way we think about love and romantic relationships which will be covered in more detail in the following section which addresses the socio-economic context in which this research is taking place.

Loving Others

Fromm (1956) provides a critique of love in modern western societies and puts forth an alternate view of love. He sees love as an art which requires the individual to learn the skills and knowledge required in order to be able to love. Rather than focussing on love as a sensation that one has little control over he emphasises the effort involved in loving. His approach is also unique in that it focuses on loving rather than being loved. Many people are more concerned with the latter and so invest their attention and energy in making themselves lovable to others (Fromm, 1956). In order to do this men tend to attempt to make themselves successful, powerful and rich, as this is what modern western influenced societies endorse as attractive qualities and which indicate to others that this person is worthy of love. Women tend to try and make themselves more physically attractive or in line with the dominant image of the ideal woman's appearance. Men and women may also attempt to develop their personality so that they are more likely to appear interesting, well-mannered and helpful.

Fromm deduces that to many people being lovable means being popular and being sexually desirable (Fromm, 1956).

Fromm discusses a number of factors which he sees as necessary if one is to master the art of loving someone else (Fromm, 1956). The first is self-discipline. He proposes that if we are to be able to love another we need to have the self-discipline, to exert the energy necessary to practice loving and to resist the urge to neglect our practice of loving in order to relax. He argues that the way modern life is structured- where people are required to behave in a disciplined manner for most of their day at work as they are under the authority of someone else- leads to people rebelling against discipline outside of the work sphere. As a result we are reluctant to impose more discipline on oursleves even though it may enable us to experience love or fullfilment (Fromm, 1956). Other factors include concentration and patience which is difficult when our lifestyles encourage us to multitask and the industrial system of which we are a part requires ever increasing quickness and immediacy (Fromm, 1956). The last factor Fromm (1956) discusses is the importance of having supreme concern with the art one aims to master. If the art of loving is not especially important to us and we do not allow it a central place in our lives and minds we will not be able to master it.

Fromm points out that it is important to practice these factors in every aspect of our lives and not just in relation to loving if we are to be able to master them. In other words it is important to practice discipline in our daily routines, although not begrudgingly as a rule forced upon us by an external authority but as an expression of our choice to pursue the mastery of the art of love and of a choice we make for ourselves.The same is true for the other factors mentioned. A practical example of how practicing these qualities may be beneficial to mastering the art of loving others is how practicing concentration when interacting with others allows us to really listen, comprehend and remember what they are saying and by doing this making them feel valued and getting to know them more intimately. Concentration concerning oneself allows us to be senstive to our feelings, actions and thoughts and to be able to reflect on them and what they say about us and how they effect others (Fromm, 1956).

Attachment Theory

As well as the social and cultural pressures people experience it has also been argued that childhood relationships have a significant influence on the attachments we form with others later in life. John Bowlby's (1982) Attachment Theory has been used for many years to enable us to conceptualise the effects that the relationships formed in early childhood have on identity formation and on the nature of subsequent relationships through the lifespan (Chen, Boucher, & Kraus, 2011). This theory is based on the assumption that the early attachments which are formed, for example with one's primary caregiver or parent, are the basis for the internal working models which we create of ourselves and of others (Chen, Boucher, & Kraus, 2011). If the carer is nurturing and responsive the child would develop what is termed a secure attachment, which is characterised by a "stable and positive emotional bond," (Coon & Mitterer, 2007, p. 97) the child becomes distressed when the caregiver leaves and wants to be close to him/her when they are together again. This attachment style has certain implications for relating to others throughout the lifespan. The child will develop a model of the self as worthy of care and love and of other people as dependable and caring (Feeney, 2008). If the carer is neglectful or inconsistent in his/her responsiveness, two kinds of insecure attachments can develop from this kind of care. An insecure-avoidant (or avoidant) attachment is one where the emotional bond with the caregiver is characterised by anxiety and the child will avoid affection with the caregiver after they have returned from being away. Insecure-ambivalent (or anxious-ambivalent) attachments are characterised by a desire to be close to the returning caregiver as well as a conflicting resistance to his/her affection. The emotional bond that the child has with the carer is also anxious in nature. In these situations the attachment styles the child develops and carries with it will be influenced by the models or self and of others that are learnt. The insecure attachment styles will form as a result of the working model the child has of the self as unworthy of love and lacking in some way and of others as unreliable and uncaring (Feeney, 2008).

These working models have important implications for the person's relationships throughout their life as they guide the behaviour of individuals and influence the expectations they have of attachment figures (Feeney, 2008). It is suggested that the nature of infant-caregiver attachments where the infant wants to remain close to the carer ("proximity maintenance") and becomes upset when this is not possible ("separation protest") is similar to the nature of adult romantic attachments (Weiss 1982, 1986, 1991 as cited in Feeney, 2008). For example the romantic partners want to be with each other and experience a sense of security and

comfort when they are and protest when one partner is unavailable or threatens to sever the attachment. Hazan and Shaver (1987, 1988; Hazan, Shaver & Bradshaw 1988 as cited in Feeney 2008) suggested that, seeing as though the attachment styles discussed in infant literature prevail as the person grows up, they are applicable to romantic attachments as well. The three attachment styles they discussed included secure attachment, avoidant attachment and anxious-ambivalent attachment. Davis and Levy (1988 as cited in Feeney, 2008) found that having a secure attachment style was correlated with better relationship functioning in terms of commitment, intimacy and passion. These aspects of relationship functioning were negatively related to avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles which were sometimes associated with poorer relationship functioning for example, people with anxious-ambivalent attachment styles tended to respond to conflict in a domineering way.

Traditionally relationships have been conceptualised in intrapersonal and interpersonal terms. This dissertation aims to include social and cultural influences when considering romantic relationships. In order to do this it is important to discuss the context in which these relationships occur. The following section will focus on South African consumer culture and how the present economic and cultural context could have an influence on romantic relationships, gender and intimacy.

Socioeconomic and Cultural Context

Globalisation

Globalization is not merely a geographic phenomenon which is tearing down national barriers to capital. Globalization is also tearing down ethical and ecological limits on commerce. As everything becomes tradable, everything is for sale. . . . Life has lost its sanctity (Vandana Shiva as cited in Callero, 2009, p. 113).

As Apartheid came to an end in 1994 and the ANC came into power, the dream of many South Africans of a home where wealth was distributed more evenly and everyone had access to basic necessities such as food, water, housing and electricity was put on hold as global

demands on the ANC to demonstrate sound macroeconomic policies became necessary to address in order to avoid an economic meltdown (Klein, 2002). For example big mining investors prevented the ANC from diversifying access to South Africa's mineral wealth by threatening to withdraw from the country. South Arica's market economy may be related to an increase in consumption. Modern market economies are characterised by uncertainty regarding employment with jobs no longer being stable and reliable (Callero, 2009; Klein, 2002). There is less company loyalty towards employees and the abundant labour supply makes people easily replaceable. Klein (2002) refers to this new system South Africa has adopted as economic apartheid. This inequality denies many individuals a sense of dignity. Consumerism offers a solution to this by suggesting that certain products can fulfil this need. Becoming part of a global economic system has also meant that marketing strategies have become increasingly sophisticated and influential in South Africa encouraging conspicuous consumption as a means to achieving social status, respect from others and a positive self-concept (Bruce, 2007; HSRC, 2008; Leclerc-Madlala 2003).

Collectivism and solidarity tended to typify South African communities in the past and even during apartheid but the influence of western ideals such as autonomy and freedom have undermined traditional sources of social support and led to the emphasis on individual aspirations, acquisition, competition, private ownership and independence (Stevens & Lockhat, 2003). These are characteristics of the Marketing Society Fromm (1978) refers to, or "Coca-Cola culture" which originated in Western developed countries such as the USA (Stevens & Lockhat, 2003). With regards to this change in society, Richard Sennet (as cited in Callero, 2009) poses:

> How can long-term purposes be pursued in a short-term society? How can durable social relationships be sustained? How can a human being develop a narrative of identity and life history in a society composed of episodes and fragments? The conditions of the new economy feed instead on experience which drifts in time, from place to place, from job to job . . . short-term capitalism threatens to corrode . . . character, particularly those qualities of character which bind human beings to one another and furnishes each with a sense of sustainable self (p. 119).

Individualism and Capitalism

"Capitalism makes possible the participation of everyone in the economic and symbolic sphere of consumption, yet sustains and reproduces itself through the concentration of wealth and the legitimation of social divisions" (Illouz,1997, p. 2).

Callero (2009) defines individualism as,

> a belief system that privileges the individual over the group, private life over public life, and personal expression over social experience; it is a worldview where autonomy, independence, and self-reliance are highly valued and thought to be natural; and it is an ideology based on self-determination, where free actors are assumed to make choices that have direct consequences for their own unique destiny (p. 17).

Fromm (1976) points out the best and worst aspects of individualism: "Individualism," in its positive sense means liberation from social chains but in the negative sense means, "self-ownership, the right-and the duty-to invest one's energy in the success of one's own person." (p. 59). Sociologists seem to agree that individualism as a belief system is linked to the rise of the capitalism as an economic structure. Capitalism relies on the idea of private property, a labour market and the profit motive (Callero, 2009). The profit motive refers to the primary goal of capitalists or business owners to make a profit. This idea by its nature fosters a sense of individualism as it puts the goals of a few- business owners and shareholders- over the needs of the many- such as employees and consumers (Callero, 2009). This idea did not stay in the economic sector but spread throughout society and became a personal belief system. The need for a labour market makes survival the responsibility of the individual and requires the labourer to act in an individualistic way to ensure his survival (Callero, 2009).

Alain de Botton (1993) quotes Sociological Quarterly when considering the role of capitalism in love, which argues that capitalism is one of the driving forces behind love as it serves the purpose of creating nuclear families which maintain current structures of distributing and consuming goods and services. Illouz (1997) argues "Romantic love has become an intimate, indispensable part of the democratic ideal of affluence that has accompanied the emergence of the mass market, thereby offering a collective utopia cutting across and transcending social divisions" (p. 2).

It is important to acknowledge the importance of the rise of capitalism in the widespread acceptance of the idea that happiness and romantic love are important pursuits in most people's lives. Nathaniel Brandon (1985) discusses this in his book *The Psychology of Romantic Love* and points out how as a result of industrialisation, technological development and capitalism in the 19th century, people began to experience a better standard of living than in previous years. Particularly in America, work and economic activities were relatively free of restrictions by the government. This allowed people a greater sense of freedom and fostered an environment in which, "the pursuit of happiness on earth seemed natural and normal and possible," (Brandon, 1985, p. 31). During this time American culture was more secular and individualistic and valued the time they had on earth and so individual happiness became more important. The industrial revolution and capitalism provided new possibilities for employment for women which also allowed them more freedom as they were no longer unavoidably dependent on a man for survival. In this context men and women were seen as more equal socially than in previous years and allowed for marriage relationships to move closer to becoming relationships between equals than before (Brandon, 1985).

> A new civilisation, radically different from any that had been known before, was in the process of being born; and one of its characteristics was that men and women would choose to share their lives, not on the basis of economic necessity, but on the basis of their expectation of finding happiness and emotional fulfilment with one another, (Brandon, 1985, p. 32-33).

Although capitalism has played an important role in facilitating the pursuit of romantic relationships it can be detrimental to the formation of healthy, fulfilling romantic relationships. Fromm (1956) suggests that capitalism's influence on love is also more indirect and concerns the kinds of people capitalist societies hold in high esteem and grant high status and recognition to. These people are usually those with great economic wealth or fame and rarely those with spiritual qualities of significance (Fromm, 1956). As a result those we look up to and attempt to emulate do not teach us how to love and if we have not experienced someone in our personal lives who is loving we may never learn. This would explain why people focus more on making themselves lovable to others rather than on loving others.

Work and Relationships

Capitalist economic systems are inevitably unstable and South Arica in particular has a very high unemployment rate. Although it is important to acknowledge that many other factors play a role in employment stability, globalisation and capitalism have had important impacts on the way businesses are run and wealth inequalities in South Africa. Corporate culture has changed from one where employees could expect to benefit from their companies success to one where loyalty no longer exists and employees are disposable (Callero, 2009). Employment instability has significant effects on relationships, where people who are seen as economically unstable and do not have the assurance of a fairly well-paying job with a regular salary, are less likely to get married. Employment difficulties also impact negatively on existing relationships where job loss increases the likelihood of marital troubles and divorce. Callero (2009) suggests that we cannot sustain predictable, stable relationships in one area of our life when we are experiencing instability and uncertainty in another. Naomi Wolf, in *The Beauty Myth* (2002), also links economic systems and work with romantic relationships when she argues that the economy depends on work being structured in such a way that forces men to deny the family. Men are forbidden by one another to put sexual love and family at the centre of their lives whilst women's perception of the own success depends on their ability to sustain sexually loving relationships (Wolf, 2002). In this way men and women are placed in positions which make it especially difficult to maintain mutually fulfilling relationships as well as a healthy self-concept. Work has also been thought to be connected to interpersonal relationships as work is increasingly necessary not only for survival, but for a lot of people it has become a means to social status and maintaining a certain standard of living. This lifestyle is prescribed by the media and advertising and reinforced through materialism and competitiveness between people. Status and maintaining a certain standard of living is portrayed as important for the attraction of romantic partners however the materialism which is encouraged by the advertisers of this lifestyle and which makes working so important can often be detrimental to the formation of intimate bonds.

Materialism

Materialistic individuals believe owning and acquiring material possessions to be especially important life goals and to be necessary in order to construct their identity and achieve

happiness and satisfaction (Richins & Dawson, 1992 as cited in Xu, 2008). Money and possesions are considered indicators of how successful someone is and so are believed to be important status symbols (Dittmar, Long, & Bond, 2007).

Materialism in South Africa may in part be due to the changing nature of our society. "Rapid economic, social, and cultural change and changes in institutions precipitate uncertainty and status fluidity," (Neuner, Raab, & Reisch, 2005, p. 513). Living in this kind of transitional society is likely to lead to unmet physical and security needs which tends to result in people adopting materialistic values and engaging in buying as a means to status and self-esteem (Neuner, Raab, & Reisch, 2005). South Africa is a society which has undergone immense change in the past few decades and is therefore likely to be experiencing similar problems. Neuner, Raab, & Reisch (2005) suggest that factors such as increased individualism as opposed to collectivism, economic problems and violent crime have led to instability in society which in turn has resulted in increased levels of anxiety and fear in the general population. These unpleasant emotions may result in an increase in materialism as people attempt to ease their insecurity.

Advertisements reinforce materialistic values by validating the belief that the power to spend money makes you lovable whereas being unable to buy things makes you unworthy of acknowledgement (Berger, 1972). Research has shown that materialistic people tend to be more likely to overspend, to be in debt and to make purchases motivated by psychological and identity related reasons (Dittmar, 2005). James (2007) discusses the link between materialism and emotional distress, suggesting that the drive to acquire increasingly more material possessions leads to a host of emotional and psychological problems. He points out that not all materialism has this effect as in the case of people who come from poverty stricken environments, materialism serves as a survival mechanism and is a natural response to the lack of resources necessary for survival. He suggests that materialism is a problem only when it stems from confected wants created by advertising, other forms of media and other people who make the lifestyles of individuals seem inferior. When materialism arises out of genuine human needs it does not seem to have the same negative psychological and emotional consequences. Alain de Botton (2009), rather than differentiating between materialism based on needs and that which is based on wants, suggests that the materialism

we talk about when referring to people who have their basic survival needs met, is inherently different from that which is based on the will to obtain food or shelter. He proposes that materialism based on what is generally accepted as a need is oriented around the acquisition of the object itself whilst materialism based on what could be perceived as wants is not really about obtaining any specific item for its own sake but is instead focused on what the object represents. This could be social status, recognition or love. Consumer goods may also be seen as a necessity when attempting to make oneself attractive to potential romantic partners. People may be more likely to purchase consumer goods in an attempt to seek social acceptance when they have high levels of public self-consciousness. Public self-consciousness refers to, "the individual's awareness of self as a social object," (Fenigstein et al., 1975 as cited in Xu, 2008 p. 40). Those who have high levels of public-self-consciousness tend to be more concerned about their public image and how they can gain approval from others. They also seem to have a greater need for social interaction and affiliation, tend to have high levels of anxiety and lower self-esteem (Xu, 2008). Advertisements target the need to be socially acceptable by promising "happiness as judged from the outside" (Berger, 1972, p. 132) which may explain why people with high levels of public self-consciousness see consumer goods as a means to achieving acceptance and approval from others or in other words, social status.

In a US national survey social status was found to be more important to women than men when asked about their preferences in terms of romantic partner selection. Men on the other hand valued physical attractiveness more highly than did women (Vangelisti & Perlman, 2006). These findings were confirmed in a range of other cultures as well. However these characteristics were not ranked at the top of either gender's lists although we may need to consider the influence of social norms surrounding the undesirability of men and women who are perceived to be "shallow" or overly concerned with material possessions or social standing. Status and romantic relationships has been considered in the south african context among rural populations (Bruce, 2007).

Fromm argues that in a society where the mass media continually entices people to increase their consumption, the means (the object to be consumed) to the end (affection, approval, and

esteem) becomes the end in itself. He conceptualises people in this state of susceptibility to media influences as well-dressed, well-fed robots (Costa, 2005).

Kasser (2003) discusses materialism in relation to relationships and reports that "materialistic values were associated with more conflictual and aggressive behaviours in dating relationships" (p. 63). He also notes that valuing material possessions, wealth, status and the image they portray leads to a decreased interest in and focus on interpersonal relationships and community centred activities.

Consumption and material exchange in relation to romantic attachments was explored in Durban in a study done by Kaufman & Stavrou, (2004) who looked specifically at gift giving and the impact this had on young people's relationships. They found that the giving of natural gifts, such as flowers or stones, among white youth resulted in a feeling of closeness which often led to sex. Tattoos and piercings were also given as gifts which were repaid with sex. Giving or receiving of money in the early stages of a relationship was not acceptable as this was considered to be a form of prostitution but as the relationship matured it could be considered acceptable depending on the situation. If White boys gave a gift and sex were to follow, they would definitely not expect a girl to demand the use of a condom, with some resorting to the "necessity of force" if that was required. Gifts play an important role in shaping the sexual terms of a relationship and may have pernicious effects on the ability of girls—and sometimes boys— to express their preferences in the type of sexual activity, its timing, or in safe practices when engaging in sex. This study emphasises the link between economic status and power in romantic relationships. Young men are rewarded for being financially successful with physical intimacy. In situations where this exchange does not proceed naturally some of these young men feel that in order to get what they deserve, force is an acceptable method of ensuring this.

Advertising

Advertising and the media play a significant role in perpetuating the ideology that our value is determined by what we own and in manufacturing a consumer society (Berger, 1972).

Marketing has changed from selling products to selling ideas. Companies develop brands which become synonymous with certain lifestyles and certain identities which the consumer is encouraged to adopt (Klein, 2000). Advertisements cultivate dissatisfaction with the present- they insist that what you currently own and who you currently are is insufficient and intolerable but that you could be better, have better friends, a better life and more love if you bought something more (Berger, 1972). The more unattainable the ideals in the advertisements are the more insecure they make you feel and the more purchases you will believe you need to make. For example research has shown that the, "idealized images in advertising raise comparison standards for attractiveness and lower women's satisfaction with their own attractiveness," (Elliot & Elliot, 2005, p. 3). Consumer culture therefore depends on advertising to encourage people to keep buying. These advertisements however, have a number of other psychological and social effects besides just increasing consumption. People are manipulated into internalising the responsibility for happiness; they believe that they need to be proactive by buying more things rather than relying on others-families and communities to satisfy their needs for meaning, undermining collectivist communities. At the same time sources of meaning are believed to be outside of the self and available only through becoming someone others deem to be worthy. The appearance rather than the experience of happiness and success becomes the goal (Berger, 1972). Advertisements also reiterate, reinforce and even play a role in constructing many common gender stereotypes and expectations. For example stereotypes such as women being domesticated, nurturing and sensitive, but also seductive, are often used in advertisements. The volume of these images and their persistence has the effect of normalising these stereotypes so that they are not questioned and are assumed to be natural and normal.

The media and romantic relationships

One very significant socialising agent in many individuals' lives today is the media. Because of the widespread availability of media images, movies, television and advertising most people are exposed to the ideas the media portrays almost constantly (Berger, 1972; Klein, 2000), so much so that we often introject these ideas and experience them as our own truths. The media often portrays romantic relationships in ways that are unrealistic or idealistic and if these ideas become individual expectations for romantic relationships it can lead to

relationships that are dysfunctional and unhappy (Galician & Merskin, 2007). People become dissatisfied with their relationships because they do not match up to what they have been taught to expect. Advertising offers a solution to the dissatisfaction people experience by implying that the products they are attempting to sell will provide the missing piece in the relationship or will lead to the transformation of real partners into the idealised, romanticised versions of themselves that they feel they ought to be (Berger, 1972).

Objectification

Advertising also reduces the complexity of people through generalisations and simplifications and can result in people feeling objectified or tending to objectify others.

Objectification refers to the attitude that regards a person as an object or commodity to be used or owned and disregards that person's feelings, point of view or humanity (Saigda & S., 2011). Kasser (2003) argues that the values people hold tend to have a broad influence on their behaviour. Therefore, if people value possessions and money they will spend time on material pursuits. "When people place a strong emphasis on consuming and buying, earning and spending, thinking of the monetary worth of things, and thinking of things a great deal of the time, they may also become more likely to treat people like things" (Kasser 2003, p. 67). James (2007) discusses Marketing Characters who experience themselves as commodities (James 2007). Their self-worth depends on external approval or validation. Marketing characters objectify themselves and attempt to become desirable to others by collecting the attributes deemed attractive by whoever they wish to sell themselves to, in this way increasing their supposed value in the eyes of others. Other people also become commodities to be possessed for a specific purpose for example to achieve recognition by others for being able to 'have' an attractive or successful romantic partner.

The process of objectification is thought to involve a form of, "instrumental fragmentation in social perception, the splitting of a whole person into parts which serve specific goals and functions for the observer," (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008). Marx argues that workers in capitalist systems come to be valued in terms of what they produce, their productivity and their skills as these aspects of the person serve the needs of the system, which is driven towards the creation of wealth. This leads to workers viewing and valuing

themselves in this way too and by doing this objectifying themselves (Gruenfeld et al., 2008). In more recent times and especially among workers who are not necessarily involved in manufacturing products the self-objectification of men has shifted and now centres around their ability to acquire wealth. The pursuit of money among men was initially a means to time for leisure activities or comfort but wealth was increasingly pursued for wealth's sake and became defensive proof among aggressive competitors of manhood (Wolf 2002). Similarly beauty was originally seen as a means to intimacy, sex, love and self-expression however it is now also proof of one's womanliness and thereby establishing a positive gendered self.

Fromm (1956) also draws attention to the influence on the social and economic structure of society on the relationships. He suggests that in the context of consumer culture people look at others in a similar manner to the way they look at products which are available for purchase. These whole cultures are based on, "the appetite for buying, on the idea of a mutually favourable exchange," (Fromm, 1956, p. 3). People in these cultures are seen by Fromm as looking for a bargain and that they "fall in love" when they feel that they have found the best available object whilst taking onto account their own market value. The available objects are evaluated according to the particular social standards of the time and place. What is seen as attractive is usually a collection of characteristics which are considered to be socially desirable and sought after on the personality market (Fromm, 1956).

Sexual objectification involves treating a person as nothing more than an object or commodity whose purpose is the fulfilment of sexual pleasure (Saigda & S., 2011). Lury (2011) argues that women are sexually objectified by men which helps maintain inequality and domination between men and women, in general and within sexual relationships. The unequal relationship between men and women where women are the object and men the subject is evident in images and the art-culture system for example in oil paintings where women are often the subject and men the painter and the one who enjoys and owns the painting. Berger (1972) suggests that this relationship is embedded in our culture in high art, pornography, advertising and everyday life. This makes it possible to discuss a male gaze. Men and women tend to be depicted differently with men usually the spectator and women usually the object on which the male gaze is focussed. The woman's purpose is to be pleasing to the male spectator and she is judged based on her appearance and not on her actions as

men are. Her subjective experiences are therefore different to men's- she continually watches herself being looked at, and has learnt from childhood to treat herself as an object that needs to be evaluated in terms of her worth in the eyes of others. Men are the spectators who watch women, they are active and they are the subject. Women are often sexually objectified in visual media by the depiction of models wearing revealing or seductive outfits and positioned in sexually alluring ways. Studies have shown that women are sexually objectified much more frequently than men in advertisements (Saigda & S., 2011). Advertisements generate the idea that any woman can be beautiful as long as she buys the correct products. This constructs women as consumers of themselves as commodities. Women are both the product being desired and the target market. Objectification reduces the complexity of the person to the specific function of an object which is usually focussed on satisfying the needs or desires of someone else and not the internal needs or desires people have. Successful advertisements convince the viewer that fulfilling these external needs will in fact fulfil their own needs, as satisfying a man's sexual desires is promoted as necessary in order for him to love her. "Consumer culture is best supported by markets made up of sexual clones, men who want objects and women who want to be objects, and the object desired ever-changing, disposable, and dictated by the market" (Wolf, 2002, p. 144).

Women are also objectified in other ways through advertisements, for example as objects whose function is cooking and cleaning or objects which are used to fulfil the emotional requirements of others- their husbands or children. By including women in media that's function is to sell products, the women are themselves transformed into commodities. In advertisements for household cleaning products the object which is really being sold is the women as successful homemaker. The product in the advertisements is merely an accessory to facilitate the achievement of this identity.

Objectification is usually conceptualised in terms of the negative impacts on the targets because of how they come to objectify themselves in the way others do and how this leads to a sense of alienation (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008)- an experience of feeling dehumanised, isolated, disempowered and dissatisfied (Reiss, 1997). Objectification can also lead to psychological and performance consequences. There has been less research on the

psychology of objectification by an observer of someone else and the factors at play during this process.

Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee & Galinsky (2008) explore the hypothesis that heightened power increases the likelihood of engaging in the objectification of others whilst Naomi Wolf (2002) conceptualises objectification as a defence mechanism which results more indirectly from unrealistic images of attractive people in the media. She states that both men and women need to feel beautiful- desired, welcome, treasured- to be open to sexual communication. If they are deprived of that they will protect themselves by objectifying themselves or the other.

Eric Fromm (1976) discusses "the having mode" and "the being mode" in his book *To Have Or To Be?*. "In the having mode of existence my relationship to the world is one of possessing and owning, one in which I want to make everybody and everything, including myself, my property," (Fromm, 1976, p. 33). The being mode of existence involves being alive and authentic in relation to the world. He argues that rather than the subject being empowered through objectifying another "the having mode" makes things of both the object and subject. The object becomes a thing because the subject possesses it, but the subject too becomes a thing as its identity depends on owning the object. This implies that both the subject and object are subjugated and disempowered in the process of objectification. He discusses the having mode and the being mode in relation to the progression of romantic relationships. He suggests that during courtship or in the early stages of a relationship each person is trying to attract the other. They are alive and interesting as they are making an effort to be so. Their attention is directed at giving to the other person and stimulating them. They are in the "being mode". Neither person can be sure that they "have" the other yet. Once they have been together for a long time and there is a certain level of commitment by both parties to staying in the relationship, the most obvious and binding commitment being marriage, they are comfortable that they "have" one another. They have exclusive possession of the other. Love has changed from an action to a property which each person possesses. Committed relationships and marriage are not the problem but rather the way society teaches its citizens to be possessive. Advocates of things like group marriage, changing partners, group sex, etc. may just be avoiding the problem by requiring ever new stimuli to relieve their boredom.

These people want to *have* more lovers rather than being able to love one. In these kinds of societies, "Persons are transformed into things; their relations to each other assume the character of ownership," (Fromm, 1978, p. 59).

There is less research on the objectification of men in terms of the pressure on them to be economic providers although this is considered among rural populations in relation to crime by Bruce (2007) and the HSRC (2008) which was discussed earlier. When considering objectification in relation to romantic attachments it is important to take into account the possible effects objectification may have on intimacy.

Objectification and Intimacy

The need to possess people and the tendency to dismantle them into their composite characteristics in order to effectively evaluate their worth destroys intimacy with others and cultivates a sense of detachment from oneself (James 2007). By viewing people in the same way as we view commodities there is always the possibility of having a better partner who will better serve your needs as well as the possibility of being easily replaced by a commodity more highly valued. This makes contentment elusive and anxiety and loneliness more pervasive.

Being unable to satisfy the need for authentic, intimate human connection results in the attempt to fill that space with other commodities which are advertised in a way that promises to relieve dissatisfaction with ourselves and remedy a host of psychological problems from boredom to anxiety. By confirming the idea that commodities are what one needs to feel better and to be better advertisements directly and indirectly reinforce the practice of consuming in order to be. Who we are becomes dependent on what and who we own and who we can sell ourselves to (James 2007).

Consumerism, Identity and Romantic Relationships

Conspicuous consumption

Veblen (2000) describes how peoples' consumption is not always based on physiological needs but can be in some cases a ceremonial indication of their high status. By consuming items which are clearly expensive or by consuming excessively a person can demonstrate the degree of their wealth and therefore their status in society. In our society this is notable in the purchase of expensive cars. If we see someone driving an expensive car we assume that he/she is wealthy and therefore holds a high status. In this way consumption becomes a social signal indicating to people your worth as a person and therefore the treatment you should receive. In our society it is assumed that accumulating wealth warrants respect and therefore by making it clear to others that they are wealthy, people who purchase obviously expensive products are informing others that they deserve their respect and admiration. Conspicuous consumption can also take the form of buying others expensive gifts or arranging and holding expensive functions for the purpose of entertaining others (Veblen, 2000). In this way even kind gestures can have additional or alternate motives although it would be inaccurate to suggest that all acts of this nature arise out of selfish motives.

If we accept the idea that in consumer societies people can become commodified we may also consider how they may be used as items of conspicuous consumption. We see this happening in romantic relationships when people want to have physically attractive partners, partly because when others see that they were able to attract such a beautiful person they may treat them with respect. People may also be used as a means to enable conspicuous consumption, for example in cases where people enter into relationships with wealthy people so that they may purchase expensive items and so that other will assume that their status in society is high and therefore treat them accordingly. Veblen (2000) refers to such people as vicarious consumers. Having vicarious consumers also bestows more status onto the wealthy person as it is seen that their wealth is so great that they can afford to consume on behalf of others. In modern western cultures it is less common to see the man in the middle class household conspicuously consuming or taking part in expensive leisure activities, often due

to the time demands of his job. In these situations it is often the middle class wife who vicariously consumes in order to maintain the good name of the household and the husband.

Consumption and identity

Another perspective on the function of consumption in contemporary culture suggests that people construct identities through consuming certain products.

Consumerist culture is characterised by the promise that a positive identity can be achieved through the purchase of commodities. In a culture influenced by these promises individuals are required to display their commodities in order to be valued and respected. Recognition is no longer endowed upon those who exhibit integrity and contribute to the development of society (Beder, 2000) and shame is no longer cast upon those who flaunt their wealth (de Botton, 2004). With these conditions placed on their value as human beings South African citizens who cannot afford to buy the status symbols necessary to be acknowledged as important in terms of consumer values experience a tremendous amount of anxiety relating to their identity (James, 2007). They may be unable to integrate their economic reality characterised by limited resources and disposable income and the identity they are encouraged to adopt by their consumerist environment characterised by acquisition and conspicuous consumption. This may result in role confusion and the inability to establish a positive, stable identity (Stevens & Lockhat, 2003).

In young South Africans in general an identity based on consumer values is highly susceptible to the effects of advertising on the self-concept. Alain de Botton (2004) compares our self-concept to a leaking balloon constantly requiring helium in the form of external love to stay inflated and even the smallest amount of neglect can act as a pin prick to our vulnerable sense of worth. As mentioned, advertisements undermine the self-concept of individuals on the basis of a lack of possessions.

Becoming part of the global economy and adopting western, consumerist cultural values has made the identities of young South Africans unstable (Stevens & Lockhat, 2003). This has led to many young people's lives lacking meaning and results in them engaging in destructive, antisocial behaviours such as crime (Bruce, 2007) and transactional sex (Leclerc Madlala, 2004) in an attempt to achieve some form of short-lived fulfilment.

In order to understand how romantic relationships, gender and intimacy are affected by the social conditions in which they take place, it is necessary to consider these concepts from a perspective which takes into account these different influencing factors. Social Constructionism provides a framework through which we can better make sense of the connections between interpersonal relationships and the cultural, social and economic environment in which we are situated. Feminist Theory also facilitates a critical approach towards the present social structure and pays special attention to the social construction of gender.

Theoretical framework

Social Constructionism

In this dissertation romantic relationships and gender identities will be conceptualised using a social constructionist theoretical framework. This perspective allows us to better understand the link between how people see themselves and others, how they interact in the world and broader societal. A Social Constructionist approach involves a critical stance towards knowledge and assumptions which are taken for granted. It rejects the idea that what can be observed in the world reflects reality the way it inherently is and instead suggests that we question the categories we use to organize our experiences, acknowledging the possibility of other ways of grouping things (Burr 1995). Social Constructionism also draws attention to the historical and cultural specificity of our ways of interpreting, experiencing and making sense of the world. Our concepts, categories and ways of understanding are seen to be specific to particular places and times and are products thereof and of the way social and economic systems are structured in those contexts (Burr, 1995). Social Constructionists believe that knowledge and our ideas about what qualifies as truth arise out of the social interactions

between people in a specific cultural and historical context and not from the essential nature of our world (Burr, 1995). The knowledge and assumptions about the world that are constructed in these interactions lead to certain behaviours. We act in certain ways based on how we make sense of our world and our experiences. In this way, according to Social Constructionism, social action is sustained or excluded depending on our descriptions and constructions of reality (Burr, 1995). Social Constructionism pays special attention to the role of language in the way people create and experience themselves and their reality. Language is viewed not as a means of expressing ideas but as providing us with concepts and structure through which we come to understand ourselves and our world (Burr 1995).

Social Constructionism rejects the idea of an innate personality but instead argues that our patterns of behaviour and our ways of thinking come about through our interaction with others and with discourses present in our societies (Burr 1995). Gender is also understood as being socially constructed during the interactions between people. Pattman (2005) argues that young men and women do not have an innate sense of masculinity or femininity that dictates behaviour nor are they purely the product of socialising influences but that gender identities are performed and that the way young people discuss themselves and gender in general and the language they use plays a role in how these gendered identities are expressed and experienced.

Judith Butler discusses performativity in relation to how gender is constructed, acted out and experienced in the world (Salih, 2002). Performativity differs from performance in that performance assumes that there is a subject who behaves, feels or thinks in a way that reflects or conceals an inner, essential, authentic self. Performativity assumes the existence of no such subject. Judith Butler suggests that what we do is who we are and that these behaviours, emotions and thoughts occur as a result of the discourses within our society. She understands gender as a sequence of behaviours and not a description of characteristics related to biological sex, which she also sees as socially constructed (Salih, 2002).

Social Constructionism offers an approach to understanding emotions. Emotions are seen as socially constructed and although there may be a biological basis to them the social and

cultural context in which they occur play an essential role in how they are identified and experienced (Strongman, 2003). This approach also draws attention to the importance of language in our understanding and experience of emotion. Gergen (1994, as cited in Strongman, 2003) argues that emotions are performed and that these acts occur in specific relational, historical and cultural contexts which direct the experience. Alain de Botton (1993) illustrates this in his novel through the narrator, when reflecting on his feelings for his romantic partner,

> Society, like a good stationary shop has equipped me with a set of labels to affix to the flutters of the heart. The sickness, nausea and longing I had at times felt at the thought of Chloe, my society filed under 'L', but across oceans or centuries, the filing cabinet might have had another index. Could my symptoms not easily have been identified as signs of a religious visitation, a viral infection or even a non-metaphoric coronary attack? (p. 108-109).

From a social constructionist perspective the word love would not just be considered a label which we attach to an objectively present and universally experienced emotional or physical state but that the word itself structures and shapes our experience. The word love is suggestive of certain behaviours and thoughts and when we use the word love to describe our state of being we also adopt those ways of thinking feeling and behaving. hooks (2000) suggests that it is confusion around what these thoughts, feelings and behaviours should be, in other words what the word love actually means, which is a source of conflict in relationships and which impedes healthy, intimate and enjoyable romantic relationships. If two people differ in their perception of the meaning of the word love and its implications, then their experiences of being loved and of loving may be incompatible.

Harre, 1986, Potter and Wetherell, 1987, Gergen, 1990 and Shotter, 1993 (as cited in Wetherell 1995) emphasise how social constructionist and discourse analytic approaches make sense of emotional experience as constituted through language and the process of forming representations of that emotion. This is different from more traditional psychological

approaches which view emotions as internal, subjective reactions to situations in the outside world.

Feminism

Feminism has an important role to play in conceptualising the construction of gender and relationships in particular social and political contexts. Contemporary feminism calls for the total restructuring of our society in order to create nations and communities which are fundamentally antisexist and to replace old paradigms with models of mutuality and equality (hooks, 2000). hooks (2000) suggests that feminism can play a transformative role in relationships by replacing competition, alienation and dehumanisation with mutuality, intimacy and camaraderie. Love in patriarchal societies is linked to possession and control. Women are seen as the gender with caring emotions and love which they give to men but which are not in turn expressed or necessarily felt. Men are understood as the powerful ones in relationships who will provide and protect (hooks, 2000). These stereotypical constructions open women up to the possibility of domination and deny men the privilege of feeling and openly expressing love. bell hooks (2004) argues that, "men are longing for love," (p. 4) but that patriarchal structures prevent them from loving, from knowing themselves and their feelings. She proposes that men need to move past the desire to dominate others if they are to be able to love. It is important to acknowledge and explore men's experiences of romantic relationships as their despair when relationships end or their unhappiness in relationships is often ignored. According to hooks (2004) this is because patriarchal societies do not care about the happiness of men. Masculinity has been constructed in such a way that it is not manly for men to express their emotions or to show their suffering to others. "The masculine pretence is that real men feel no pain," (hooks 2004, p. 6). Patriarchal societies sustain gender inequalities in interpersonal relationships as well as in the work place and the political arena which are detrimental to both genders. According to Warren Ferrel (as cited in Day, 2008), a men's rights author, men's power to earn more money than women is not something to be envied when they are denied a balanced work-life ratio and someone else spends the money they sacrifice themselves to earn, only for them to be more likely to suffer from a range of lifestyle and chronic diseases and to die sooner than women. hooks (1984) also points out the damaging effects of rigid gender stereotypes and role expectations which patriarchal capitalist societies place on men. Men are expected to be powerful- in the sense of being able

to dominate others- successful- in the sense of being able to acquire wealth- in order to earn the right to retain their male identities. As a result of these societal pressures significant social and psychological effects can be observed.

Feminism emphasises the value of relationships characterised by mutual partnership, growth and self-actualisation. Relationships where both partners' needs are met, both are respected and free to grow and neither fear domination or abuse are envisioned. It is suggested that this would enhance the emotional wellbeing of both men and women (hooks, 2000). Philipose (2010) argues that the common theme running through feminist projects is the aim to play a role in the transformation of societies in order to overcome inequality.

Discourse and identity

"A sense of identity is always an invention, a construction, a melding and meeting point of discourses" (Wetherell, 1995, p. 135).

Bamberg, De Fina and Schiffrin (2011) discuss discursive approaches to identity construction. Approaching identity as a construction redirects the questions we ask about identity. Rather than asking about what identity is and how this effects human behaviour, the focus shifts to how what we perceive as identity comes to be created through the processes of interaction between people in certain historical, cultural and discursive contexts, and how this is experienced as subjectivity (Bamberg, Fina, & Schiffrin, 2011). These authors suggest that identity work is done daily in the mundane activities and situations people find themselves in. Although not always a conscious process, identity construction is an active one and people can be thought of as *doing* their identities.

Different discourses offer people different subject positions which they can adopt (Willig, 2008). This opens them up to a different set of choices regarding how to think about and interact with the environment and indeed, what to think about and interact with in the first place. It may be suggested then that offering someone the discourse of identity as a construction opens them up to considerably more options regarding who they can be and the

role they can play in their own identity. The traditional idea of identity as fixed, with biological roots rejects the possibility of change and suppresses an active involvement in who we can become. The notion that our identity is constructed because of and in reaction to (but always within) the discourses we encounter can still be empowering when the discourses we encounter are themselves empowering. Therefore although our options of the identities we can construct will always be limited by the discourses we come across and their emphasis, and we can never assume total control over what our identities look like or how they are experienced, if we assume an active role in identity construction we can move around more easily within those discourses than we could if it was assumed that identity could not be changed.

3. Methodology

This study will be conducted using a qualitative approach. This is appropriate as I aim to get a rich detailed description of participants' experiences and thoughts (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). I am also concerned with how meaning is constructed and how people experience romantic relationships and gender relations. This concern is compatible with a qualitative approach (Willig, 2008). This research will also be structured using a social constructionist theoretical framework which is also more compatible with qualitative research. I aim to focus on the language used by participants when discussing gender and romantic relationships and a qualitative, social constructionist methodology will allow me to pay attention to this.

Social constructionism sees knowledge as specific to a certain context. This means that what we perceive is not a pure reflection of what is true in the world around us, but one possible understanding of it which is shaped by all the social and environmental factors which make us who we are. This means that there is no single objective truth to be discovered through research but many truths which are context specific. Social constructionist research enables us to look at this process where people construct their perceptions and understandings of the world through language and the factors that may have influenced this particular perception and the possible implications of it (Willig, 2008). It allows us to consider what constructions are available in certain cultures and to identify which conditions they are used in. Social constructionist research pays special attention to the language used when explaining this understanding. It is also important to remember that the researcher too is always constructing her own reality and so her proposals and conclusions are also contextually situated. Social constructionist research can therefore not be treated as objective fact but one possible interpretation of the data. This does not make this interpretation, or any other, wrong. Willig (2008) uses the example of describing a glass as half-full or half-empty. These are both accurate descriptions of the state of the glass but present different ways of looking at it. The two interpretations have different implications. One implies an optimistic view and the other suggests a focus on the negative rather than positive aspects of the glass.

3.1 Research problems and objectives

The aim of this study is to address and explore the role of emerging consumer culture in the construction of gender identities and intimate relationships of young adult, middle class South Africans. The research questions which I hope to be able to answer after completing this study are:

1. How does living in South Africa, in the context of an emerging consumer culture, influence the way young adult, middle class South African women construct and enact gender identities?

2. What effect does consumer culture have on the discourses used to describe men, women and relationships?

3. How do dominant discourses influence young women's perceptions and experiences of romantic relationships?

4. How do discourses play a role in the power dynamics and inequalities within these relationships?

Through answering these questions I hope to better understand how culture and discourse have an effect on identity and interpersonal relationships. By doing this, alternative discourses can be explored with the possibility of enabling the construction of healthier and more positive ways of conceptualizing the self and interacting with others. Special attention will be paid to the language usage of participants in their descriptions of their experiences and beliefs. These questions have not been answered in other studies in South Africa, among this section of the population that I am aware of and so this study will provide fresh insight into this area. Goodwin and Pillay (2006) point out the importance of a cultural analysis of romantic and personal relationships and how this is an aspect often neglected in relationship

research where the approaches most often taken can tend to exclude the cultural context in which the study is taking place.

3.2 Sampling Procedure and Participants

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants. This method of sampling involves identifying participants with the desired characteristics- which, in this case, were young women between the ages of 18 and 25, from a middle class background, who have had some experiences with intimate, romantic relationships. This study aims to explore discursive constructions of romantic relationships among middle class South Africans as this has not been previously addressed. Focussing on the middle class as opposed to marginalised or economically oppressed groups enables us to better understand those which dominant ideologies are meant to serve. These groups are often the ones invested in maintaining the current power structures as they keep them in positions of relative privilege and so understanding their experiences is necessary if we aim to challenge these structures. This study will also focus more explicitly on the constructions of gender in romantic relationships and experiences of intimacy. Participants from middle class backgrounds can be identified based on occupation (Rivero, du Toit, & Kotzé, 2003). It is generally accepted that managers, clerks and professionals belong to what is known as the "new middle class". People with occupations that can be classified as "self-employed-propertied" and who earn a similar amount to those in the new middle class fall into what is known as the "old middle class" (Rivero, du Toit, & Kotzé, 2003). Participants were asked about their parents' occupation. The individuals who were selected were considered to be from a middle class background, because all the occupations fitted into either the "old" or "new" middle class, and therefore they were suitable participants for the study. A purposive method of sampling is recommended when using focus groups (Welman, Kruger, & Mitchell, 2006) which was one of the methods of data collection. Participants were recruited by approaching university students, as I was able to access them conveniently and they are usually within the age range I have specified as well as members of groups which I am a part of such as my church and exercise groups. These students were asked if they can refer me to other young women who may or may not be students, who fit the selection criteria and who would be willing to be a part of a focus group and possibly an individual interview as well. This is known as snowball sampling.

Race	Number of Participants	Religion	Number of Participants
Indian	2	Hindu	1
Coloured	2	Muslim	1
White	5	Agnostic	1
Black African	1	Christian	7

Nine women were asked to participate in two focus groups with four participants in the first group and five in the second. Five participants were interviewed individually. Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest a small sample size when conducting a discourse analytic study due to the labour intensive nature of the analytic process. Two of the participants were Indian, two were coloured, five were white and one was African. One participant was Hindu, one was a Muslim, one was agnostic and seven were Christian. All of the participants were heterosexual. Therefore, when discussing the romantic interests of the participants the pronoun him or he may be used. The participants who were interviewed individually were chosen based on the issues they bring up in the group discussion. If I believed that these issues could be explored in more depth in a more private setting in order to answer the research questions, the participant was asked to participate in the individual interview.

3.3 Data Collection

Data was collected using focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Semi structured interviews are compatible with discourse analysis which is the approach which was used to analyse the data collected (Willig, 2008). Parker (2005) refers to interview research as providing, "an opportunity to question the separation between individuals and contexts, to ground accounts of experience in social relations," (p. 53). The aim of this study to consider societal and cultural influences on identity and intimacy makes interviewing an appropriate method of data collection. Semi-structured interviews were selected as they would allow the participants to freely express their thoughts and feelings but at the same time allow me to direct the interview in a way that would enable me to answer the research questions. Semi-structured interviews also allowed me to probe deeper into issues that came up unexpectedly which I thought would be relevant to the research questions and allowed participants to

elaborate further on the questions which were in my interview schedule as from their responses I could ask follow-up questions (Berg, 2001).

Focus groups involve recruiting small groups of participants in order to express their opinions on certain open ended questions in a group setting (Welman, Kruger, & Mitchell, 2006). This method of data collection allows participants to respond to each other's comments and shows how participants justify and explain their position to others and in which conditions certain views are voiced. This is compatible with social constructionism and discourse analysis which explore how meaning is constructed and in which contexts (Willig, 2008). It also provides a rich source of verbal talk which is considered, from a social constructionist perspective, to structure the way people think and feel and is what will be analysed. Because of the social constructionist approach to this study all contributions in the focus group are important to the analysis and not just those which are deemed to be more reflective of the truth. The way participants may alter the way they explain their views or present themselves depending on the responses or views of others is important for understanding the conditions in which people construct meaning (Willig, 2008).

The focus groups were held at UKZN in the psychology department as many of the participants were students. I recorded the interviews using a dictaphone and a cell-phone voice recorder. I provided snacks and tea and coffee for the participants before the focus groups began. The first focus group contained four participants who fit the selection criteria and lasted just over an hour. Seven young women had agreed to participate but unfortunately three dropped out on the day of the focus group and I was unable to find replacements for them in time. I was concerned that four participants would be too few to ensure an in-depth discussion of the issues along with the interaction between participants which I had hoped for. I considered conducting three focus groups to compensate for this but after the focus group came to an end I felt confident that it had been successful despite it being fairly small. Five young women participated in the second focus group and it lasted for just less than two hours. The focus groups were used to explore some of the more general, socially acceptable ideas around gender relations and intimacy as well as opinions regarding the effects of the media and consumption on young men and women. These groups enabled me to address the research questions and identify participants who were able to provide more in depth

information necessary for the understanding of these issues, who were suitable to participate in the individual interviews. The individual interviews were used to consider the more personal experiences, emotions and attitudes of some of the individuals from the focus groups in relation to these issues.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data was analysed using Discourse Analysis. The underlying assumption of the discourse analytic approach is the social constructionist view that the way we speak and use language does not reflect an objective reality but that it actively creates and changes our identities, our social relations and our experiences of our world (Burr, 1995; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Wetherell (1995) suggests that together feminism and discourse analysis provide, "a radical and liberating scepticism," (p. 135). Using a discourse analytic approach means that the interview transcripts to be analysed are seen as a, "manifestation of available discursive resources that the interviewee is drawing upon to construct a particular version of events," (Willig, 2008, p. 10).

The version of discourse analysis discussed by Burr (1995) concerns, "construction of accounts, the performance of social acts through language, and the identification of the discourses and interpretative repertoires which we draw upon in our interactions and which also may have identity implications" (p. 113). Discourse analysis involves critically analysing spoken or written text, identifying the prevailing discourses operating in these texts and the identity and power implications these discourses have (Burr, 1995). This is largely an intuitive process where the texts being studied are interpreted by the researcher. The first step involves reading through the text thoroughly a few times looking for themes, metaphors and words which appear to be especially meaningful or significant. Looking for similarities and contradictions in the text also forms an important part of this first stage as does considering which ways of thinking are being denied or repressed. Once this is done it is useful to come up with a list of themes which can be used to suggest the operation of certain discourses. A discussion of the discourses which have been identified should include the possible implications of these ways of thinking and experiencing the world for identity, power relations and society more broadly (Burr, 1995).

I will be adopting Carla Willig's (2008) approach to discourse analysis. This approach will enable me to answer the research questions of this study .This is the first time I have attempted a discourse analytic approach and Willig's 6 steps are designed to provide a, "way in to Foucauldian discourse analysis," (Willig, 2008, p. 123).

Willig's (2008) approach consists of 6 stages:

Stage 1: Discursive Constructions

During the first stage of analysis I went back to my research questions in order to identify the discursive object to focus on (Willig, 2008). For example my research question asking how consumerism influences the formation of romantic relationships and experiences of intimacy, *romantic relationships* were my discursive object. Therefore I identified all the instances in the interview transcripts which directly or indirectly addressed the subject of romantic relationships and I looked at how romantic relationships were constructed by the participants through their speech. I also paid attention to the instances where participants did not explicitly mention relationships as this can also provide useful information on how participants perceive and make sense of the discursive object.

Stage 2: Discourses

The instances in the transcripts where participants addressed the discursive objects were considered in terms of how the constructions of them differ both within the same text by the same participant and by different participants. For example when considering the discursive object *gender roles* in the first focus group one of the participants mentioned how she preferred her romantic partners to be men who took on more traditionally masculine roles such as being the economic provider. One of the other participants disagreed with this construction and explained how she preferred a romantic partner who was a man who would adopt some of the traditionally feminine roles such as housework and child care. In this stage the discursive constructions were also contextualised within wider discourses. For example the discourse of men as economic providers could be contextualised within the wider discourse that men and women should be different.

Stage 3: Action Orientation

In the third stage of analysis I looked for the contexts in which different constructions of the discursive object were used and the functions the constructions served in those instances. For example most participants constructed the ideal romantic partner as someone with certain character traits (accepting, sensitive, honest). Using these kinds of constructions allowed participants to seem as though they cared more about what kind of person someone was as opposed to their looks or job. This allowed them to ensure that others would not perceive them to be shallow or superficial. The conditions that trigger certain constructions as well as the perceived benefits of the constructions in different circumstances were noted.

Stage 4: Positioning

Different discourses offer different subject positions for the speaker. In stage four I examined the discourses the participants used and the subject positions these specific discourses allowed them to take up. For example the discourse *Love as a risk* allows participants to take up the position of rational social actor. This position is one in which the participant makes reasoned decisions based on what is most beneficial to them by weighing up the advantages and disadvantages. In this case participants are allowed to take up the position rational decision makers in relation to whether or not they enter into a romantic relationship. Seeing as though loving someone else and entering into a relationship is appraised as risky they can logically make the decision that it is not worth getting involved in.

Stage 5: Practice

I then considered the implications of the discursive constructions the participants made use of in terms of the possible behaviours which would be available to them (Willig, 2008). The way the participants were positioned within the discourses gave them certain options for speaking and acting and these were explored in the fifth stage of analysis. For example using the discourse of men as economic providers allows women to pursue activities which they enjoy such as hobbies or jobs which they choose based on their interests rather than economic necessity.

Stage 6: Subjectivity

In stage 6 of the analysis I considered what could possibly be thought, felt or experienced from within the discourses identified. These thoughts, feelings and experiences are not necessarily how the participants actually were experiencing and thinking or feeling but are suggestions of the kinds of experiences which could result from positioning oneself in a certain way through the use of discourse. For example from within the discourse of Love as a Risk participants may experience a considerable degree of anxiety when entering into a romantic relationship or about expressing their love for someone else. This is because this discourse implies that there is the possibility that the relationship could end leaving them feeling sad and hurt.

Institutions, Ideology and Power

Willig's (2008) 6 stages do not focus on how discourses used have ideological and power implications, therefore to draw attention to these aspects of discourses and to better answer my research questions I will also include the last 6 steps Parker (1992) puts forth in his book *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology.* These 6 steps include:

1. Identifying institutions which are reinforced when discourses are employed.
2. Identifying institutions that are attacked or subverted when this or that discourse appears.
3. Looking at which categories of person gain and lose from the employment of the discourse.
4. Looking at who would want to promote and who would want to dissolve the discourse.
5. Showing how a discourse connects with other discourses which sanction oppression.
6. Showing how the discourses allow dominant groups to tell their narratives about the past in order to justify the present, and prevent those who use subjugated discourses from making history.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

All participants were given informed consent forms which were explained to them. They were made aware of the purpose of the study, what information would be used, how much time it would require should they choose to participate and how the information they provided would be stored and disposed of. The participants were also informed about who would have access to the transcriptions of the interviews. I obtained consent to audio-record all focus groups and individual interviews from the participants before the interviews and focus groups commenced. Participants were kept anonymous and their names were changed, as well as the names of others they refer to, in the study. It was made clear that participants were free to withdraw from the study at any stage. I attempted to avoid any emotional distress on the part of participants by phrasing the questions asked in ways that were not too intrusive or insensitive and was available for participants to contact should they have any concerns or problems with the study. It was not compulsory for participants to answer all the questions and so if they felt uncomfortable disclosing certain information they were not pressured to. Any distress that participants may have felt as a result of participating in the study would have been taken very seriously and counselling would have been provided for them at the clinic at UKZN at no cost to them, should they have required it.

In order to enable participants to be a part of the research process and to be co-researchers in a sense, they were encouraged to ask questions of their own and discuss issues which they felt to be important. In focus groups I allowed co- participants to ask each other questions about things they were interested in or to raise and discuss issues which they wanted to talk about that were not specified in my interview schedule. I felt that this gave participants more control over how they presented themselves. I also encouraged participants to ask me about anything they were curious about and some participants took this opportunity to find out about my experiences, as a researcher of the research process and specifically the effect my project had on my personal life due to the nature of the topic. Although I attempted to shift the balance of power in the interviews, which is usually heavily in favour of the researcher, it is important to note that the very nature of the interview is asymmetrical (Henning et al., 2004) and allows the researcher a certain amount of power in the interviews. For example I did direct the interviews and focus groups in order to address the issues I was interested in, the questions I asked required the participants to discuss certain issues which I felt were

necessary to answer my research questions (Henning et al, 2004). In this way my motives and intentions for the interviews were more important than the interviewees. It is also important to remember that although the participants could choose to share only the events and opinions they felt comfortable to and to speak in whichever way they wanted to, they were not actively involved in the analysis process. This means they did not have a lot of control over how they were presented in this final project.

In this research dissertation I do not attempt to uncover an objective truth about the nature of people in general or the individuals who participated in this research specifically. The ideas presented here are located within the conditions in which the research took place and cannot be seen as independent of this context. They are also bound up with the position from which I approached the research process (Parker, 1992). Being a 22 year old, university educated female from a middle-class, Christian background means that I approached this research project in a particular way. It is important for me to be constantly aware of my position in relation to my participants during the data collection process and to the transcripts of their speech in the analysis stage. This does not however make the findings of this study unusable beyond this specific context but, as the reader too is aware of my position, allows us to make sense of how certain contexts can have an influence in the construction of certain truths and the possible implications of these truths. This approach addresses the diversity and the similarity of people in differing and similar contexts and rejects the idea that people are innately a certain way.

It is also important to acknowledge my role in legitimating certain discourses in my interactions with the participants. I too am working from within the current way of structuring and classifying the world. Therefore I can critique these structures but I cannot completely extract myself from them and do not have a new language which I can use when relating to others which would allow me to avoid reinforcing dominant discourses in my speech. For example in the interviews and focus groups I made use of the categories Men and Women in my questions and during the discussions. By using these categories I was acting as if they are legitimate and thereby reinforcing their acceptability. Perhaps in some way I was also encouraging the participants to use them and unintentionally suggesting that they structure their thinking according to the difference between and separation of these

categories. In the writing up of this study I have also made use of these categories as if they are real and legitimate and in so doing have participated in the very thing I am critiquing.

Personal Reflection

During my first interview I felt that I was in a position of power which I hadn't really considered before because I found that during our conversation Joanna would respond to some of my questions by talking about her boyfriend in quite a negative way and would discuss some of their problems and things that she was unhappy about in her relationship with her boyfriend. I felt a bit uncomfortable about this because it was not my intention to encourage her to think of her boyfriend and her relationship in a negative light and I worried that that way of thinking would persist after the interview was over and cause her to be more dissatisfied with her relationship than she had been before the interview. I hadn't considered the possibility that interviewing her about these issues would leave much of a lasting impact on her life or her relationship, and it may not have but I will be more aware of the possible implications discussions around this topic could have in some circumstances in the future. I experienced the reality of the idea that as researchers we are not neutral and we do not just observe phenomena without changing anything but that we become a part of our participants' environments, even if for a very short while and how we can have an influence on how they think and experience their lives. This will make me more sensitive to how I phrase my questions in the future and how I direct the interviews.

I also found it difficult to know what to say when Joanna told me about her boyfriend's suicide attempt. I hadn't expected her to disclose something so personal and I wasn't sure how to respond. I think that I had not prepared myself for circumstances like this because I had assumed my research topic was relatively light hearted and I realise that this assumption was incorrect because it can involve an in depth discussion of people's emotions which could definitely be upsetting at times. In this situation I sensed that she did not want to dwell too much on this incident as she continued talking and then quickly directed the conversation to a less sensitive issue and so I decided not to engage with her further about it. I am not sure if this was the right decision or whether I should have encouraged her to discuss it further but I am not qualified to deal with situations like that or to give advice to someone who has

experienced something like that and so at the risk of seeming insensitive or cold I allowed the conversation to continue in a different direction.

Despite the challenging aspects of the research process I thoroughly enjoyed completing this project. I feel very privileged to have met such interesting, wonderful people and to have had the opportunity to work on a project which I found so interesting and fun.

The following section will present the results of the data analysis and a discussion of these results.

4. Results and Discussion

The following discourses were identified during the data analysis process. These are not the only discourses which were evident in the participants' speech but were ones which were either used frequently by the participants or were deemed important with regards to answering the research questions. If the participants used a particular discourse frequently it may suggest that the discourse played a significant role in structuring the way participants thought about or spoke about romantic relationships. The importance of a particular discourse was evaluated in terms of relevance to the research questions.

One of the prominent discourses that was identified during data analysis, *men and women should be different*, will be discussed. This discourse was readily referred to by many of the participants and was particularly evident during the focus group discussions. It provides insight into the ways in which participants view men and women and their respective roles in relationships.

4.1 Men and women should be different

The idea that men and women are different, have different roles and expectations in relationships and different experiences of and motivations for getting into romantic relationships structured many of the comments and expressions of the participants. The differences between men and women were assumed, to a large extent, to be normal and natural and often desirable by many of the participants.

4.1.1 Men as economic providers/ Women as responsible for housework

Views about the roles and expectations of men and women in relationships tended to be quite stereotypical and traditional especially concerning the economic responsibilities of the partners. The men in the heterosexual relationships were understood by most of the young women as the partner who was expected to be the bread winner and to provide economically.

This was despite the fact that the majority of the participants were currently pursuing or had already obtained some form of tertiary education. The desire for a man who occupies the stereotypical gender roles expected of men is illustrated by the following quote which was in response to the question asking what the ideal romantic partner was like.

> Claire:…*I do like the alpha male very very strong alpha male someone who I think like if you were to get married to this person he is head of the home and he's got to take that role he's got to be the bread winner and he's got to understand that that would be his role you know?*

One of the differences between men and women addressed in this quote is that men are the ones that need to have the economic resources to support his wife and family. Later the same participant said:

> Claire: *I think he must be able to afford to hire me a maid (laughing) to you know be able to clean my house*

These expectations on men place them in positions where they have to take responsibility for women's wellbeing and security and this puts a lot of pressure on them to obtain jobs which are well paying and to keep these jobs. In the current economic context which is especially unstable, employment is difficult to secure and often impossible to maintain (Callero, 2009). The work place can often be demanding and alienating for individuals and causes people a great deal of stress and anxiety (Marx as cited in Reiss, 1997). Placing these expectations on men can be psychologically harmful especially in instances where men are retrenched or unemployed and cannot find jobs. They may experience identity insecurity and may feel that they will not receive or are not deserving of acceptance and love from society and from romantic partners (Bruce, 2007; hooks, 1984). Positioning men as economic providers may also put them in a position of dominance over the women who are financially dependent on them. It is these situations of unequal power relations which have historically been an environment in which abuse, disrespect and mistrust can occur (Herman, 1992). In response

to a question about what men do which attracts potential partners, participants suggested things like, "*wining and dining"* and gift giving. This is another example of the participants expecting men to have money and to spend it on women in order to impress them.

It was not just the women who imposed these gender role expectations on the men but one participant also talked about how her romantic partner reinforced these ideas of economic control even in instances where she attempted to resist them. This was her response to a question asking who pays when she and her boyfriend go out anywhere.

> Joanna: *Ya so he's paying so he looks like the man he's paying 'cause it's very embarrassing, he sees it's very embarrassing if the woman's paying and not him so he says: Let me have the money when I'll offer and say ok take it ok, 'cause even when I have paid by myself he walks away 'cause he's so embarrassed 'cause that's not how he thinks things should be even though we are equal now and we can and I don't mind paying for myself he won't let me*

During the second focus group the participants began discussing how men were expected to initiate romantic relationships. This will be discussed later but from this conversation I asked the participants about whether they thought there were other expectations that were different for men and women in relationships. In response to this question other participants also brought up the issue of men paying for dates.

> Trisha: *There's the whole thing about guys paying for dinner a lot of girls I know expect the guy to pay the bill um but there's this one guy friend I know who likes to split the bill. And so… (laughing).*

> Faye*: Well she doesn't agree with that! (Talking about Cynthia who had made an unimpressed facial expression) (More laughing)*

Trisha: *She was like why does she have to pay for it why can't he pay? Because she expected him to do that…*

Cynthia: *No but on the first few dates I mean the guy has to- into or at the end of the relationship it's ok but at the beginning…*

Faye: *I think it's often nice to, if the bill comes to like reach for your handbag*

These comments show how men are constructed as being responsible for their romantic partner's entertainment as well as her more basic needs. If they do not fulfil this responsibility they are labelled '*stingy*' and can be the object of derision. In this way women are constructed as deserving to be spoilt and looked after. In the situations where men pay for the date they are making a financial sacrifice for them. This may make women feel special and worthy of love and attention. They may also feel in control because they are in a position where men have to impress them by showing that they have the economic resources to ensure that they are entertained. Faye, in her comment illustrates how although it is accepted that the men should pay for dates, it is polite to seem as if you are willing to contribute even if this is definitely not your intention. By voicing her fairly strong belief that it was the man's responsibility to pay, Cynthia allowed others in the focus group to feel comfortable enough to voice similar opinions, which did not come through nearly as strongly in the individual interviews. Other examples of *Men as economic providers* mentioned in the focus group are illustrated below.

Grace: *I know my friend will say, she's from Joburg, Durban guys are so stingy (laughing)*

Faye: *No I've realised you don't date students that's the thing guys who are students are like 'hey…. So we're going to split the bill' but like guys who are working or who are like really rich…*

Trisha: *But you do get stingy guys as well 'cause like I know guys who are rich but they still want to split the bill (laughing)*

Faye: *Then you go no no no you pay and this is the last time you're seeing me (laughing) and we're having desert and coffee! And I'm not giving you money for a tip!*

In these comments men are constructed as undeserving of a romantic partner if they do not pay for dates especially if they have the financial resources to do so. Men can therefore not choose to split the bill because both parties are equal, working adults. In these situations, within this discourse, there is no room for relationships to form based on mutuality and equality as this is actively resisted. Making use of this discourse allows women to counteract the idea that they may be being overly expectant when they assume that the man should pay as they are shifting the focus from whether they deserve to be paid for to how generous the man is. By concentrating on the qualities of the man the women can continue to be taken out on dates that men pay for, which may make them feel special, taken care of and allow them to keep their own money, as they do not have to think about whether it is really fair for men to always pay.

The negative impacts of stereotypical gender roles have been well documented and the effects can be harmful for both men and women (hooks, 2000) as even though the men are considered to be the ones in a position of power, evidence of the functionality of this discourse for women is found in the following quote. This was said by a young woman who was also describing the role expectations for men and women in relationships:

Justine*: …I also have quite traditional views of um men and women um where like the man can happily be the bread winner I will not feel competition in that sense whatsoever um it's kind of a relief to not have the pressure*

This shows how employing the discourse of men and women having different responsibilities in relationships places women in a position of freedom in the sense of being allowed to pursue occupations based on enjoyment rather than expected financial gains or to be unemployed and avoid the stress and responsibility of providing for someone else in a context which is unstable and alienating. By phrasing her opinion in this way this participant is placing herself in the position of giving the man what he really wants as opposed to expecting or insisting that he support her. This allows her to avoid the pressure of having to work to support herself and a family without seeming demanding or unreasonably expectant. This is not to discount the realities of abusive power relations in some relationships where the one partner is financially dependent on the other but it does enable a better understanding of the possible reasons for young women reinforcing these ideals when they may not always be in their best interests. This discourse can also result in negative emotions such as guilt or inadequacy. Another participant mentioned how she felt guilty when men can cook better than her. When I asked her why she felt guilty and if she felt that she should be responsible for the cooking she responded in the following way:

Lizzy: *Because I mean my mom's the one that cooks, my sister, she's learning how to cook and then I obviously want to cook I don't want him to be the one that's cooking…*

In the individual interview this participant mentioned how she felt that her boyfriend would expect her to be responsible for cooking and cleaning were they to ever get married or live together.

Lizzy: *He expects me to do the cooking, the ironing, the washing that sort of thing.*

Me*: And are you ok with that?*

Lizzy: *Ya I'm fine with that 'cause I feel that that is my role. I'm not saying I'm going with the traditional view where the woman has to do all the chores at home but I'm saying that I can be independent, I will have my own job but I feel better if I had to do those chores. So at the end of the day I can say 'I worked and I came home and had to cook your food' and it would be nice to give that speech (laughs).*

This comment shows a conflict between more traditional, stereotypical discourses of gender roles and more modern discourses of female empowerment and independence. This is seen when the participant denies "*going with the traditional view*" and explaining how she would be independent and have a job, just after saying that she felt taking care of household responsibilities to be her role. In order to construct a form of congruence between these conflicting ideas she takes ownership of the decision to do the cooking and cleaning and rationalises it by implying that doing those things would give her a certain degree of moral power over her partner as he would have to appreciate all her hard work.

Not all of the participants expressed these stereotypical views and some participants argued for more equal division of responsibilities within relationships, for example Rita expressed an appreciation for a man who would be willing to adopt some of the traditionally feminine roles in order to distribute household responsibilities more equally

Rita: *I would like a man who isn't afraid to take on domestic responsibilities I think a man that can cook that is like a bonus for me (laughing) that is awesome also a man that is not afraid to do child- like looking after children and helping out around the house I'd like that a lot…*

One of the responses to this comment expressed the opinion that rather than seeing men taking on domestic responsibilities as helpful it was extremely undesirable.

Claire: *I had a guy who said 'cause when I used to live alone I lived on cereal you know and um he's like oh when you move in I'm cooking every night and- no we're cooking every night I'm making sure you're eating every night and I don't know but my stomach just sank!*

Later the same participant expressed a similar view as did a participant in an individual interview.

Claire*: I do not ever want to see him holding a broom (laughing) or washing the dishes you know…*

Lizzy: *If he had to clean the house it would just be too, I won't say gay, but it doesn't seem very manly to me. I would be like oh look at my husband cleaning the floor (laughs).*

These comments show how a man taking on traditionally feminine responsibilities is viewed as emasculating and men who do not seem manly or reinforce their masculinity by pursuing manly activities are undesirable. It may also be that these women feel pressured into taking on these domestic responsibilities by societal norms or even by the men they have been in relationships with and as a way of avoiding feeling aggrieved or resentful towards their partners, they incorporate the same belief in a way that serves them and becomes their own preference. However, the first participant contradicted herself when she talked about how a woman being able to financially support herself would shift the balance of power in the relationship more in her favour.

Claire: *But it seems to be that if a guy knows that a women can support herself he won't take advantage of the situation and the relationship is more likely to work*

because he puts in the effort 'cause he knows if things aren't going so well and he
wants to you know do whatever he wants to we can walk you know?

The discourse that men and women are and should be different and the specific expressions of this discourse mentioned above place restrictions on the kind of behaviour that is experienced as socially acceptable for men and women. Questioning the validity, fairness and usefulness of this discourse and considering less restrictive alternatives may allow for a greater amount of freedom in the possible behaviours and experiences men and women can participate in.

Ideas about gender roles come from a number of different influences for example family socialisation and religious norms however they are also present and reinforced in the media and advertising (Galician & Merskin, 2007). For example advertising for domestic products is often targeted at women whilst those for more expensive products such as cars, watches and even jewellery for women are targeted at men. This is seen in the American Swiss billboard with the slogan: *Don't Steal Her Heart. Buy It.* and another one by the same company: *Wise Men Buy Gold.* This reinforces the idea that men need to be able to earn a certain amount of money and be able to buy certain things if they are to earn their masculinity and to be worthy of love from women. It also employs and affirms the discourse of women finding wealthy men desirable. Being surrounded by these images which at the same time promote consumption as a means to identity and reiterate that identity should be stereotypical and restrictive, encourages people to think in these ways and reuse these discourses when thinking and speaking about themselves and their relationships.

By employing the men as economic providers discourse certain institutions are reinforced such as capitalism which is based on private property, a labour market and the creation of products and services for profit (Callero, 2009). By making the self-worth of men dependent on their financial status they are required to work in order to make money and to therefore be able to construct a positive self-image. This means that they need to become part of the labour market and therefore support the institution of capitalism. Or they need to become capitalist business owners who aim to make a profit off of the goods and services that their

business produces and are essential to the maintenance of the system of capitalism. This discourse also makes owning things, especially things considered to be status symbols such as cars and houses, very important. Money and materialistic pursuits are constructed as a means to a certain male identity "*hero*", "*provider*", "*strong man*" and as this is the role men desire to fulfil in romantic relationships and is the role women sometimes expect or are attracted to, these materialistic pursuits are legitimated. In order for capitalism to sustain itself it is necessary for there to be consumers (Beder, 2000) and by constructing men as valuable only if they can afford to financially support a woman this discourse supports consumerism and capitalism. Beder (2000) suggested that consumerism has been one of the most effective motivators for getting people to work.

This discourse also reinforces the institution of marriage as it positions women as dependent on men for economic support. In this case women need to get married to a man in order to survive. It also reinforces heterosexism which assumes that heterosexuality is natural and normal and homosexuality is therefore deviant (Hook, 2004). By expecting the man in the romantic relationship to be the economic provider who is responsible for meeting the needs of the woman, there is the assumption that the romantic relationship will involve one man and one woman. If it is not important for women to work, two women would not be able to support themselves financially were they to enter into a romantic relationship with one another. By constructing a model of relationships where there is a separation between the roles expected of each partner based on their gender there is no consideration of the possibility that romantic relationships could occur between two people from the same gender classification. This idea is oppressive and discriminatory (Hook, 2004).

This discourse can also be linked to, and may reinforce, patriarchal discourses within which men are the head of the home, have access to better paying employment opportunities and are in a position which enables them to adopt a position of dominance over the women who are dependent on them (Hook, 2004).

4.1.2 Women as emotional/ Men as Physical

Another way in which men and women were seen to be different was with regards to their behaviour in relationships and their motives for entering into them. For example a number of participants made use of the discourse that men are especially concerned with sex and that they are inclined to be unfaithful because a sexual relationship is more important to them compared to women who are more interested in an emotional bond. These ideas are highlighted in the quote presented below.

> Lizzy: *But you know the first time that him and I…It was recent. Not recent as in to this date but from when we started going out and I was never like that so that was like a first off for me and I always regret and I told him that and I still do regret it 'cause I feel like it would be so much better if we waited and he doesn't feel that way he feels that it was just something good and that's it you know…*

The participants in one focus group were discussing how "*especially girls*" got into romantic relationships to feel accepted and valued by someone else, making use of the *Women as emotional* discourse. When I asked what motivated men to enter into romantic relationships two of the participants used the *Men as physical* discourse.

> Claire: *(laughs) Well, they're think with the other head I suppose (laughing)*

> Justine: *I think some of them a lot of them are!*

The focus on sexual intimacy in the discourse *Men as physical* links it to the *Physical attractiveness as necessary for romantic relationships* discourse.

Some participants rejected the idea that men are generally shallow and enter into relationships for sexual reasons. These participants argued that men's motives for entering into romantic relationships were similar to women's and that they wanted an emotional connection and acceptance from another person.

> Justine: *I think a lot of guys just like girls want to be accepted for who they are and I've found in the past when you're younger and when you're a teenager and everything that when I'd given attention just just to be a friend to some guys who don't get reinforcement from their friends or things like that those are the guys who would be attracted to me. Um the ones who were shy and not confident in who they were because they were getting acceptance and you know I think sometimes we think guys are just so tough and a lot of them are um a lot of them are but a lot of them aren't.*

> Rita: *I think men want to be loved as well they just express it differently like you were saying not all of them are like these tough macho guys but I mean when you get into the intimate relationship you find out he's just like you they want to be loved and that feeling of sharing their life with someone you know it doesn't work all the time but um ya they just express it differently so it might not be like a womanly thing like outwardly expressing it*

The second quote, although challenging the idea that men are not emotional, still constructs outward expressions of emotions as '*womanly'.* In this case men would need to find alternate ways of expressing their emotions so as to differentiate themselves from seeming feminine.

Voicing these opinions, which view men as caring and vulnerable, allows these participants to adopt subject positions in which they are understanding and sensitive to men's needs, this position reinforces the idea that they are good people and are deserving of their own acceptance and that of others. The idea that people desire acceptance and love from others is discussed in Alain de Botton's (2004) book *Status Anxiety.* He argues that if we are loved, in

other words if we feel that others notice us, are concerned about us and tend to our needs, if we feel listened to and respected then we will flourish. This refers to love from romantic partners as well love from the world in general. He argues that attaining status in society is tremendously important to us because it grants us love from the world. In the context of this study it seemed that status would also be granted to those who were a part of a couple as opposed to those who were single. This links to the discourse *Romantic relationships as important for social inclusion and positive self-esteem.* People in romantic relationships were seen to be treated more favourably than those who were not. This is especially the case as the young adults get older, nearing the age of 28-30 and less so among the adults in the 21-23 age bracket. This means that young adults are drawn to romantic relationships for the acceptance and love they will receive from a romantic partner as well as for the status they will receive from society. This idea may be more relevant to women than men however, as women seemed to be expected to be involved in monogamous relationships however other South African studies have suggested that men gain status from being in relationships with a number of different women (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003). The religious persuasion of some of the participants may also play a role in the way they valued monogamous romantic relationships showing how religious institutions play a role in shaping the values of its members as well as of society more generally as these ideas are passed on through socialisation.

Some of the participants also brought up how men could not have conversations about their emotions. It was argued that this was because they were less in touch with their emotions than women and because they were not allowed to discuss their emotions as it was perceived to be *unmanly*. If men did discuss their emotions it was understood that they needed to be simultaneously doing something which would reinforce their masculinity almost as if to counteract the supposedly feminine activity they were engaging in.

> Faye*: That's what I find guys; they can't have an emotional conversation like this with each other. But then they go to gym and they're like 'ah ya boet there's this chick I like!' (laughing)*

Grace: *But most of the time even when they talk about emotional stuff it doesn't really get emotional*

Faye: *No no no there's no crying and nonsense like us ya.*

One participant disagreed with this and mentioned how in her experience men she knew could talk about their feelings and what she termed "*deep*" issues with her. Another participant responded to this by pointing out that it was different for a man to have an emotional conversation with a woman than to have a conversation like that with another man.

Faye: *Ya but heaven forbid we put the two guys together, then they're like: I never said that! (laughing)*

Another participant mentioned how she had noticed her brother's friends undermining his emotions when he expressed his feelings about his girlfriend.

Grace: *… I know with my brother he's been with his girlfriend I think for five years now and… he loves her and he it's so obvious when he talks about her and whatever and they [his friends] will laugh at him… I've seen it amongst a lot of guys.*

This suggests that it is considered humiliating for men to have intimate conversations with each other and that this would be unmanly and rather than men being innately incapable of emotional expression, they are actively discouraged from learning this skill. This denies men the opportunity for closeness and intimacy with their friends and to receive and experience acceptance and understanding. It also means that they are provided with limited opportunities to learn how to interact with others sensitively and learning skills like listening and showing empathy as well as identifying emotions and vocalising them (hooks, 2004). These are skills

which can often be very helpful in relationships when attempting to communicate with a romantic partner.

4.1.3 Men as initiators/ decision makers

Another discourse used by many of the participants was the *men as initiators / decision makers* discourse. This discourse positioned men in the role of making many of the decisions in the romantic relationships for example whether they would initiate a romantic relationship and the kinds of things the romantic partners would do together. In the quote

> Joanna: *…he will not watch musicals with me he said no musicals no ways romantic comedies every now and then he'll say ok well why don't you go watch it but majority of it he watches his movies which really angers me (laughs) it just it just gets tiring after a while I'm just like ok we'll go watch this movie and even though the movies are good it's just I'd rather I'd like to have my choice but then I feel bad…*

> Claire: *…whilst I would like to be informed about certain decisions or at least to be asked my opinion I expect him to make the final decision.*

In this quote men are constructed as the decision makers and women are expected to accept this and listen to their partners. This reinforces patriarchal discourses and unequal gender relations. When viewing the man as the decision maker, the woman is positioned as less important and is given a subordinate role in how her life is structured.

The young women in the focus groups and in individual interviews would talk about men asking women to be their girlfriend and men phoning women to invite them on a date. The young women were rarely the ones who would initiate the romantic relationships or who would phone up the men and arrange dates.

Joanna: *…when I first met him and this girl just said to me "he gave me his number to give to you"…*

Grace: *…and we just we started talking and he started talking with me and he asked me out and then we went out and then from there it just*

Faye: *Also the smsing thing… there's that excitement 'oh I wonder if he's going to sms and then he does and it's like aah! (happy sound)*

One participant mentioned how her pastor had told her that in his experience, the young women initiating a relationship was a bad idea and was unlikely to result in a successful relationship. Below is the conversation that centred around this issue in one of the focus groups.

Charlotte: *He was just saying of all the times he's seen a girl go after a guy it's mostly ended up bad because like the guy because of the stereotype like if a girl goes after him he gets like really arrogant and he doesn't like appreciate the fact like he just relaxes then because he doesn't feel like he needs to do anything in the relationship because like the girl pursued him so now he's chilled like he doesn't have to work for anything so he was just saying they like fizzle out because ya it just doesn't work*

Trisha: *Ya I agree with that-*

Faye: *Mmmm, ya*

Trisha: *Guys like chasing*

> *Faye: They do they like the challenge*

> *Grace: And I think that's why most girls wouldn't approach a guy 'cause they're scared like if something happens or they fight then the guy will be like remember you came after me I didn't ask you out*

One of the participants in the other focus group made a similar comment.

> Justine: *I think some of them also like it's not like they want a damsel in distress but I think they do want to be the hero and that they have that desire to be that strong man who can come and sweep you off your feet*

These responses illustrate how these young women rationalised the legitimacy of this discourse. This performs the function of ensuring that they continue to live within the current way things are structured as opposed to questioning or challenging the discourse. By pointing out the possible negative consequences of going against the social norms which only allow men to initiate romantic relationships, the young women are not required to put themselves in situations where they are vulnerable to rejection. Nor are they required to admit that the current way of doing things is functional for them in some ways. This is also achieved, as is seen in the last quote, by framing their speech in a way that emphasises that they are acting in accordance with men's desires rather than showing that they are also behaving in a way that is in line with their own preferences.

It is also important to consider the social norms around men and women and their roles in romantic relationships. The young women in the study may have felt it necessary to retell their experiences in a way that fitted in with these norms. For example describing how the man asked them out may have achieved the identity work of making them seem naturally

attractive to the opposite sex. They appear to have not needed to do anything to make themselves appealing to potential partners and it implies that the man was more interested in being in a relationship with them than they were with him. This would provide the young women with a sense of power in the relationship, the power to say yes or no to the man asking them out. It also protects them from making themselves vulnerable to someone else and from risking being rejected. However, it also places women in a position where they can only enter into romantic relationships with men who ask them out as they do not have the power to initiate relationships with people they may find themselves attracted to, but who do not ask them out. This denies women a certain amount of control over their lives and their relationships. This may be experienced as quite frustrating and women who do not get asked out may feel that they are unattractive or unlovable. This discourse places women in a passive position where they have to wait for men to initiate a relationship with them before they receive the acknowledgement that they are a suitable potential partner or that they are attractive to men.

This discourse may also have negative implications for men. One participant mentioned how men that she knew felt about always having to be the initiators.

> Grace:…*with my friends I've heard them say things like you know the girl expects you to call all the time but she never calls or expects you to take her out but she never offers lets go out and chill*

This could possibly lead to men feeling unloved and under-appreciated or even to men feeling resentful towards women for putting them in a position where they have to always make an effort to see their girlfriend when she seems unwilling to make the same effort. One participant mentioned this when she talked about how men must feel always having to be the ones who initiate relationships.

> Grace: *I don't think guys are as cruel as we'd like them to be. It's just that, I think, you know when you grow up and you have your first girlfriend the guys have to do the*

> *chasing right? And you can imagine how many rejections they get before they get to*
> *find a girl so I'm thinking if I was a guy and I had to be rejected that much by the time*
> *I got a girlfriend I'd probably be like (sighs) whatever I so don't care and act up to*
> *that stereotype.*

Questioning why there have to be these restrictive gender roles and considering some of the negative consequences of constructing gender in a way that highlights difference, enables us to expose the gender inequalities this discourse of difference legitimates. Approaching gender as fluid and open to negotiation rather than rigid and fixed allows more freedom in the roles people can take up. Butler (as cited in Salih, 2002) argues the sex and gender are socially constructed. In other words the differences between men and women, which may seem so evident, have been constructed by people through their language. From this view people can be understood as *doing* their gender. By behaving and speaking in ways consistent with gendered norm people are actively, although not necessarily consciously, constructing for themselves gendered identities. This view allows us to rethink the way we understand gender and to consider the possibility that the restrictive gender roles which are assumed to be biologically based or natural and normal are really reinforced by our compliance to them. Engaging with these kinds of ideas may enable people to consider new possibilities for the kinds of behaviours which could be constructed as acceptable in the future for different people.

4.5 Relationships as a requirement for social inclusion and a positive self-esteem

A number of the participants mentioned how they felt pressured from others in their social group to be in a romantic relationship. In this way romantic relationships become a means to social acceptance. Social acceptance is important to us for a lot of reasons. de Botton (2005) discusses how people are concerned about what others think of them because their opinion determines how much love we will be offered from the world. He also argues that our self-concept is heavily dependent on how others view us and so if we feel loved by others we are

more likely to believe that we are acceptable, worthy human beings. This means that if society is convinced that being in a romantic relationship is what makes people acceptable, it is likely that this will be something we decide to pursue in order to gain approval from others so that we may like ourselves. One participant addressed this point when she talked about how if all of a person's friends had a romantic partner it sometimes made it more likely that they would feel that they should be in a relationship too.

> Faye: *I think it has a lot to do with your social group. Um if all your friends have a boyfriend it it's not necessarily that you feel out but you feel that like I don't know... you do feel like you still miss that I don't know that somebody.*

Another participant talked about her friends criticising her for not being romantically involved with anyone. This is suggestive of society's disapproval of people who do not attempt to attain the things that are commonly accepted to be symbols of status and worth.

> Grace: *...with my friends it's like what's wrong with you-that you don't have a boyfriend?-that I don't have a boyfriend and I usually get comments like girl you're hiding behind god that you don't have a relationship*

If relationships are constructed as a means to social inclusion and acceptance, they become little more than status symbols and the relationship itself becomes more important than the person you are in it with. This denies people the opportunity of taking the time to get to know someone they truly want to love as they may feel anxious to enter into a romantic relationship with anyone who is willing for the sake of their appearance to others. Although there was this pressure on her from her social group, Grace said that she did not feel that she now needed to find a boyfriend and maintained the view that she would wait until she met someone she really liked. This may be because she gained approval from others through other status symbols. This participant was also particularly expressive of her religious beliefs and it is possible that this provides her with a positive sense of self.

 It was noted by another participant that age played a significant role in how people were treated when it came to their relationship status.

> Charlotte*: I think it's like an age thing as well. I was talking to some people they sort of late 20s and they say just all the time they get people saying like what's wrong with you? (laughing) Why aren't you with somebody yet you're getting to your 30s!*

This suggests that there is a time period in people's lives when it is expected that they become part of a couple and commit to staying together. When asked, the participants generally agreed that between the ages of 26 and 29 was an ideal time to get married. The closer people get to the end of this time period, the more anxious they become about being single and the more important it is to enter into a romantic relationship. This may have to do with the socially constructed ideas about what constitutes attractiveness. Youth is often considered to be a prerequisite for beauty which is regarded by many as an important factor when attracting a potential partner. It therefore makes sense that younger people fear becoming less attractive as they get older and therefore less likely to find someone who is attracted to them and who wants to be in a romantic relationship with them. Another reason may have to do with the very idea that there is this time period that most people agree should be the time when you find a partner. If most other people are adhering to this social practice then if you miss the "deadline" many of the suitable potential partners may no longer be available as they may have already found a romantic partner.

Another participant suggested that the social ideas which influence you may vary depending on the geographical location you find yourself in when she mentioned how she had observed a difference between the cultural ideas in Durban from those in Johannesburg.

> Claire: *I also find a lot of people, I mean I come from Johannesburg and it's something that I've noticed in Durban is everyone has a boyfriend, right I must have a*

> *boyfriend! That's why they do it, there seems to be this big pressure. Oh, you are not*
> *a whole human being on your own unless you have another person with you…*

This comment suggests that, in certain social groups, it is necessary to be in a romantic relationship in order to fit in and not feel left out but also that romantic relationships are needed to make you feel complete as a person. The same participants expressed a similar idea when talking about a friend of hers who had entered into a romantic relationship which, in the participant's opinion was unlikely to last.

> Claire: *… I've got a friend of mine, true example I mean she's 21 /22, moved in with*
> *her boyfriend ,you can see that, I just feel like things are not going to work but she*
> *must have a boyfriend you know they define her as a human being.*

This participant was critical of this idea of needing a boyfriend because without one you are incomplete. This may be because this discourse, which suggests that people need other people in order to feel whole, contradicts other prominent discourses such as the ideas promoted by capitalism which emphasises competition and independence. Feminist discourses also reject the idea of women needing men and so the idea of needing a romantic partner may seem old fashioned or weak which may be viewed as undesirable and so the participant may wish to distance herself from this. The idea of needing to be with someone else in order to feel complete places people in a position of being incomplete when they are not in a romantic relationship. This could facilitate feelings of insecurity and a lack of self-esteem. It may also result in people focussing on feeling loved in order to feel complete and this is likely to influence their relationships. Fromm (1976) suggests that rather than focussing on being loved, people should concentrate their attention on loving others. This is not likely to occur if people are entering into romantic relationships to make themselves feel that they are worthwhile people. Another participant spoke about the feeling of acceptance that could be gained from being in a romantic relationship. Feeling accepted for who you are is likely to improve your self-esteem and make you feel that you have worth as a person.

Rita: *I think one of the greatest feelings you could ever get out a relationship is that pure acceptance from someone 'cause like your family accepts you no matter what you do everyone still be there for you but that takes time it's one of the most amazing feelings ever.*

Another participant talked about how if you felt confident and had a generally positive self-esteem, a romantic relationship would not be something that you needed.

Trisha: *And then there are people who like myself who are single right now who are like dying to be in a relationship so it depends I mean like unless you're like really happy with who you are then its fine. But I mean I was single for like over a year. At first I was totally happy being on my own and then now I'm at a point that I just want someone.*

Another participant in the focus group, when discussing why people enter into relationships, responded in the following way:

Justine: *They like attention! (laughing) I think for some people they do like attention and they'll take it where it comes... because you think then what's the difference between having a best friend and having a boyfriend you know what's the difference between having a brother or sister with you who can be that person but it's not because I think we all want to feel like we're really special like we are so special that someone would choose to spend all of their time with us and not with anyone else if they had to because we are that special to them and they would do anything or close to... but ya that feeling of importance in someone's life and knowing that you're actually worth it.*

This also shows the discourse that romantic relationships can improve one's self-esteem being used by participants when discussing people's motives for entering into romantic

relationships. The use of this discourse may also serve the function of justifying these young women's interest in romantic relationships with fairly innocent and seemingly natural motives- those of feeling loved and accepted. Other motives such as those of feeling desired or of wanting to *have* someone else who is only yours are in this way hidden. In this way participants are again maintaining their view of themselves and their appearance to others of being a good person.

This discourse may reinforce the institution of marriage as if people are understood as incomplete unless they have a romantic partner; it makes sense for them to wish to ensure the continuation of their romantic relationships through a long term commitment to their partner. The media often depicts fairy-tale romances whether they are in romantic movies, television shows or advertisements which promise that their products will ensure that the perfect romantic partner will soon become infatuated with you. These types of media are reinforced by the use of this discourse which may make people more susceptible to the hope these fantasies provide. For example someone feeling incomplete and longing for the romantic partner who will fill the void in themselves is more likely to be attracted to stories which affirm the likelihood of such an occurrence.

A variety of factors influence how people feel about themselves and whether they have a positive or negative self-esteem but a prominent cultural influence, advertising, often intentionally attacks the self-esteem of its observers. Berger (1972) discusses how advertising steals the self-concept of the observer and offers it back to him or her at the price of whichever good it is selling. One of the most common areas advertisements focus on is physical attractiveness. This links this discourse to the *Physical attractiveness as necessary for romantic relationships* discourse. By using very attractive actors and models attractiveness is presented in a certain way, a way which is often very unrealistic for most people. Once the advertisements have created this standard of attractiveness which most people do not measure up to, they offer a solution to the viewer's anxiety about being unattractive. This solution is to purchase some sort of product which promises to transform the viewer into their desired, happy self. This perpetuates and reinforces the idea that a positive self-esteem comes from external sources and that people as they are, are not good

enough. They constantly need to adorn themselves with symbols of what society agrees represent successful, lovable people.

4.2 Love as a risk

The discourse of *Love as a Risk* was used to frame a number of the participants' speech around their attitudes towards romantic relationships. The discourse of love as a risk has certain implications for what love means. Within this discourse loving someone else is constructed as having the potential to cause great pain. This is because the person who is beloved may not feel similarly or may in some way betray the trust of the one who loves him. From within the discourse of love as a risk, love also becomes something which implies a desire for some sort of reciprocation for that love. Loving someone then also means that you want them to love you back. You cannot love someone romantically and expect nothing from them because then it would not be risky to love them. What makes loving someone risky is the hope that comes with loving them, that they will feel the same and then that some sort of romantic relationship will form in which there is mutual trust, commitment and affection. Fromm (1956) views love in the following way: "Love means to commit oneself without guarantee, to give oneself completely in the hope that our love will produce love in the loved person. Love is an act of faith, and whoever is of little faith is also of little love" (p. 127-128). If this hope is not realised then the person in love experiences significant emotional distress, so much so that loving is sometimes considered to be too risky and so one should avoid it if possible. Claire describes the pain of loving someone who does not love you anymore.

> Claire*: I feel like I've had my heart removed out of me from my backside (lots of laughing). You don't want to get out of bed for like a week and then like 3 months later you you still like to get up and move hurts but you get through 6 months later the black pain finally stops you know, but two years later you're still trying to get over it you know*

In this quote it can be seen how through the use of this discourse, the participant is allowed to take up the subject position of someone who is very passionate and feels very strongly. Being emotional and being in touch with these emotions was also constructed by these participants as feminine. In this way the participant's speech serves the function of reinforcing her feminine identity. The use of this discourse also constructs the emotion of love as so powerful that it can render its victims virtually incapacitated when it is not returned. This is in-line with the romantic discourse which views love as uncontrollable and overpowering.

Using the discourse *Love as a risk* enables participants to protect themselves from the negative aspects of relationships for example a relative decrease in independence, "*having to 'answer' to someone*" and having to work hard to work out problems, try to see things from another's point of view and to be accepting of someone else and their flaws. Constructing love as a risk allows them to avoid entering into something which would require a certain amount of sacrifice in terms of time, attention and affection. This discourse could also serve to protect participants who feel that they are not desirable to potential romantic partners. By brushing off love as too much of a risk to be bothered with, participants can avoid possible rejection from loving someone who may not feel the same way.

The discourse love as a risk makes available certain subject positions. Within this discourse subjects are positioned as rational decision makers who consider the advantages and disadvantages of romantic relationships intellectually and then decide that loving someone comes with a number of potential problems and may not be worth pursuing. It also makes available the position of the subject as an investor. The subject invests time, money and emotional attachment into the relationship and in return expects commitment, fulfilment and acceptance. The investment is a risk because the relationship may not be successful or the partner may be untrustworthy or the emotional rewards may not be as satisfying as was expected. A number of participants discussed relationships in this way, using the metaphor of love as a risky investment; the women's discussion is presented below.

> Rita:*… yes it is a risk because if it goes horribly wrong it goes horribly wrong and you feel like you've lost out on time and trust that you put in this person and I think*

that's the risk that you take in order to experience that feeling to experience and share that with someone else. Um ya and it's scary as well 'cause sometimes like for me I'm at a stage in my relationship where I've given so much in my relationship it's almost like I've given someone so much power that they could abuse right and um same thing goes in the reverse. I could abuse the power that someone has given to me and shared a part of their life with me and that is scary but you know that's the risk you've got to take you know.

Lizzy: *It's like investing in a new business. (laughing) you have that risk where it can go, you know, go awfully wrong but having it be so successful it makes you feel so good.*

Claire*: Ya, but the difference is the capital you're paying. Like money I can earn again. I can never get that- once your trust is broken once you're hurt that way you can never get that back. You will always hurt in some way, you will always have reservations. No thank you, you can keep that.*

This conversation shows the different things participants see themselves as risking when entering into a romantic relationship. In the first and second quote the participants mention that they are risking their time. If the relationship ends they may feel that they have wasted their time with their romantic partner. In the first quote the participant talks about how she feels that she is risking the feeling of control over her own life as she feels she has allowed someone else a certain amount of power over her and her emotions. The third participant sees herself as risking her trust and her emotional well-being. If the relationship ends badly she will feel sad and hurt and reluctant to trust people in the future. In societies where an emerging consumer culture is promoted people may tend to treat most things in their life as exchanges. In order for something to be worthwhile it needs to offer a good return in exchange for what is put in or given (Fromm, 1956). The discussions around relationships with the participants reflected this tendency for example in the quote above the emotional fulfilment of a successful relationship, which looks different depending on individual

preferences and expectations, is seen as a worthwhile return in exchange for taking the risk of the relationship ending badly.

From within the discourse of *Love as a Risk* participants may experience a considerable degree of anxiety when entering into a romantic relationship or about expressing their love for someone else. This is because this discourse implies that there is the possibility that the relationship could end leaving them feeling sad and hurt.

> Rita: *It's a little scary as well because like, especially now that I've been in a long relationship if something happens, because you share so much of your life with that person and you're almost like well that's kind of that's a scary thought you know? You would lose all, like it feels like you would lose a lot and you won't experience that if you weren't in a relationship. Like I feel like 'cause I've shared so much of my life with his family and his friends and he's done the same with mine and um you know uh we share stuff together and all of a sudden like if something had to happen like I feel that I would be losing a large part of my life which is a little scary.*

This idea is evident in media representations of relationship breakups where the one partner experiences significant emotional anguish, often requiring the support of close friends, being unable to get dressed or go out, staying in bed, crying or binge eating (usually ice-cream) in an attempt to relieve some of their pain. These images warn of the risk of entering into romantic relationships. The way the media often portrays love and the negative consequences the participants mentioned which occur as a result of the end of a loving relationship again constructs love in a way that emphasises the intensity with which love is felt. This links to both the *Women as emotional* and the romantic discourse often evident in the media. These constructions may seem to contradict with the constructions mentioned earlier of the participants as rational decision makers. However in another way they also reaffirm one another as by being rational and logical before entering into romantic relationships participants are allowing themselves a comparatively safe environment in which to experience their strong emotions while lessening the likelihood that these emotions will result in them getting hurt.

Media suggestions of how to "keep" a romantic partner or ensure that they do not leave you also imply that the end of a romantic relationship is highly undesirable. These ideas and the discussions of the participants illustrate how romantic relationships are constructed as successful if they are long lasting. It is understood that it is ideal if the relationship continues and does not end. In all of the participants' comments about this the risk they were concerned about (for example lost time) was only problematic if the relationship ended. When discussing this with two of the participants in individual interviews, they explained how they felt that the preferred relationship was one that had the possibility of leading to some form of long term commitment and that she would enter into a romantic relationship with this intention.

Claire: *...having spoken to older women about this (relationships) I think that at our age that's what you do that's where you should be getting your advice from not from your friend who's your age who's like 'oh this is how I did it' oh great you're not married yet nothing's worked in your life yet...*

Lizzy: *We were relaxing together (the participant and her boyfriend) and we said something about marriage and usually we'll just laugh we'll just make it a joke but then we were just quiet and I said it felt so weird because usually we were joking about it but now it seems so much different and he said ya because it feels like it's actually a possibility 'cause we that close so and ya that was nice I felt like we're actually going somewhere.*

Justine: *...we (the participant and her boyfriend) spoke about purpose, the purpose of dating and the fact that we want to date to find the person we want to marry and before entering into a dating relationship kind of have an idea that so far you seem that you could be the person I could marry...*

Rita: *I mean you're investing time and energy and stuff I just don't see the point in doing all of that well obviously it means different things to different people I mean for*

some people relationships they're not looking for a long term relationship or a serious relationship but I think you know it is about trust and respect so it has to be meaningful for me. Like I'm not just going to do anything like do something or get into something without it holding some form of meaning to me and I don't see if I don't see the worth or you know see something valuable coming out of it…

In the first quote the participant constructs young women who are unmarried as poor sources of advice as she considers them to have failed in their romantic relationships because they are not married. This again shows how a long term commitment is the desirable outcome of romantic relationships. The second and third comment also make this clear as does the last which constructs a long term commitment as something valuable to come out of a relationship and as something which is a worthwhile exchange for the time and energy into working on a relationship.

A number of participants mention the hard work they put into relationships and how this is what they are investing in the hope of gaining a fulfilling, long term, committed relationship. This links to the following discourse which will be discussed: *Love as hard work.*

Situating romantic relationships within this discourse of love as a risk, to a certain extent, objectifies these relationships as it makes sense of them as possessions which need to be held on to in order to avoid emotional distress. Within this discourse emotions (such as love) are also objectified as they are seen as resources which should not be wasted or used carelessly as they will not be left in-tact after a romantic relationship ends badly.

4.4 Love as hard work

This refers to the idea that in order to make a romantic relationship work the partners need to work on the relationship. This involves communicating about differences of opinions and making an effort to resolve conflicts. It also involves being willing to make compromises and trying to make the other partner happy. This idea was brought up by many of the participants

> Rita: *...you love someone, you work hard at it. You work hard if you want to make it work, that's what it's about.*

Rita also talked about how she felt that this was an idea that was undermined by the media which portrays unrealistic, idealised images of how romantic relationships should be.

> Rita: *We're getting all these images from the media and the environment that there is one perfect man and he's going to sweep you off your feet (laughing) I mean it doesn't work like that it's not all roses and fairy-tales all the time you have to work at it and I think that's what men want. I think they want someone who knows, you know, it's not always going to be perfect all the time but you're going to work together at it.*

> Faye: *They [the media] don't like portray the heart ache and the sleepless nights and the stuff it takes to grow a relationship and like a relationship doesn't just happen you have to work on it all the time and (sighs) I don't know, it's just they don't show that sometimes when you live with somebody you actually have to go home and cook for them every night you have to do the washing and all that stuff takes a toll on a relationship and they don't ever expose the crappy bits (laughing).*

A number of participants also talked about having to work hard in relationships where there were religious differences or where their families did not approve or get along with their romantic partner. The following excerpt from a conversation in the focus group discusses some of the challenges in relationships which they find difficult to overcome.

Trisha: *I actually was in a relationship with a guy that's Christian and for me that doesn't really matter but for them [her family] that was a huge thing 'cause my dad wants me to continue with our tradition and uh so I had to end the relationship... It's also really the fact that if your parents are not happy with the relationship with the guy you're with I I at one point I was fighting so hard to be with this guy I was like it doesn't matter what they think as long as I'm happy but in the end I became really unhappy because my parents were not happy with that so I have to take that into consideration what they think.*

Faye: *Was it going to be worth the struggle.*

Trisha: *In the end I think it wasn't really.*

This shows how other influencing factors besides the two people in the relationship working hard to make each other happy can provide challenges to overcome in a relationship. These factors also contribute to the idea that relationships require *hard work* and include environmental influences such as the approval of families or communities and cultural or religious differences. This also links to the discourse relationships as a requirement for a positive self-esteem and social inclusion. In this example being accepted by others has an influence on how long a relationship can last and how happy the romantic partners will be in the relationship. An example of religion being an important factor in how romantic relationships are seen as hard or challenging is seen in the exchange below between two participants in one of the focus groups.

Justine: *...for me I'm Christian my boyfriend is Christian and for both of us at the top of our list for the person we would marry is they need to be a Christian because we need to agree on those religious factors and beliefs so if you go back to your question you asked about what's your ideal man or woman you know, that's the first thing that came into my head...um and I look at other people and almost admire and I won't say pity but when I see marriages with two people who believe such different things I don't know how they do it because that must be the most difficult challenge to ever face is to be married to someone who doesn't believe what you do in your heart*

Claire: *But then comes the question what happens when you fall for that person I'm Christian as well and I was involved with a Muslim guy and he actually ended it because of relationship because of religion...I mean the butterflies and all that you know ...the feeling of being in love it just happens you know what happens then we've got all these ideals and we've got like ok I want him to be like this x,y and z and then it hits you*

Justine: *I think again a difficult thing hey because the feelings of that in love or that crush or infatuation all of those sorts of feelings you don't control them...then I think of people who are married and what if they meet someone and now they're married and then they get those feelings for someone you don't control that but you decide what to do with it and so then it comes back to what you believe would be right in that situation which must be soo difficult so I don't envy people who fall in love with someone thy don't think it can work out with for any reason*

In this dialogue it is seen that relationships are constructed as challenging when there are differences of opinions between the partners or different belief systems. This implies that it is preferable for participants to be similar as this would make it easier for the partners to maintain the relationship. This links to what was discussed around the discourse *Love as a risk* about relationships being constructed as successful if they are long lasting. In the participants speech it is suggested that they work hard at their relationships in order to ensure that they continue and do not end.

The above conversation also shows a contradiction to the discourse *Love as hard work* as although ensuring the continuation of the relationship is constructed as hard work, the loving is constructed as easy, as something that just happens without the partners having to do anything. The feeling of love is constructed as uncontrollable and overwhelming. This idea is situated within a discourse of romance in which two partners can enjoy an experience like no other when they meet each other and fall in love. This feeling, *'just hits you'* and is, *'the best feeling in the world'.* This discourse is commonly seen in media representations of love. This romantic discourse, to a certain extent contradicts the *Love as hard work discourse* as it places the responsibility for the feeling of love outside of the control of the individual partners whereas the *Love as hard work* discourse makes loving the responsibility of the individual. Fromm (1956) critiques the view of love as an emotion which is beyond the control of people and suggests that not enough acknowledgement is given to the involvement of will in loving, to the decision to commit to someone. He argues that if love is viewed only as a feeling it does not make sense to speak of loving someone for your whole life as feelings come and go. Fromm (1956) emphasises the effort involved in loving when he says, "it requires knowledge and effort. Love is not a spontaneous feeling, a thing that you fall into, but is something that requires thought, knowledge, care, giving, and respect," (p. 1) he describes it as a practice as opposed to a feeling.

The *Love as hard work* discourse places subjects in a position where they are realistic and hard-working. They are not fooled by media representations of happiness forever and easy relationships where everything is perfect. These subjects are prepared to work hard in order for their relationship to be a success. They do not just expect or feel entitled to a happy romantic relationship. These subjects are honourable and so they can be liked and accepted by themselves and others. In this way they are also able to protect themselves from disappointment as because they do not expect the relationship to be magical or perfect, they are not disappointed when problems arise. It also allows them to portray a positive image to others as they do not expect more than they deserve. Capitalism reinforces the idea that everyone can achieve success if they put in the effort (de Botton, 2004; James, 2007) and this discourse fits in with this message. This discourse also has potentially harmful implications if considered with regards to relationships that end. It puts the responsibility for the success of

the relationship on the individual as it suggests that if you work hard enough at it the relationship should be fulfilling and long lasting. Therefore if the relationship ends it could be assumed that the partners simply were not prepared to put in the work required to make the relationship work. This may bring with it feelings of guilt and shame.

Conversely, this discourse could also be viewed as empowering as it may make the individual feel that he or she has a degree of control over the future of the romantic relationship they are in as opposed to discourses which leave the future of relationships up to destiny or fate. This allows people to play an active role in their relationships and to consider ways in which they can improve their situation in order to make the relationship more fulfilling and healthy for both partners.

4.3 Physical attractiveness as necessary for romantic relationships

A number of the participants mentioned how physical attractiveness was important in a romantic partner. When asked about what the ideal romantic partner was like the participants used phrases like:

Claire: *Cute.*

Lizzy: *Must be cute.*

Grace: *...not big not too skinny just right and not too light not to dark.*

> Claire: *I like very tall. I like black hair, hazel eyes and like masculine features you know? Like I like that chiselled look (agreement and laughing).*

When talking about what first attracted her to her boyfriend, Lizzy discussed her partner's appearance.

> Lizzy: *He had everything that I am attracted to, I mean the whole wild hair and he has lovely eyes and he doesn't wear those gangster clothes you know or those hectic shoes and grasshoppers and stuff that I don't like so that also attracted me to him when I said he dresses differently to other guys um ya and of course he's built so that was nice*

This focus on physical attractiveness is reinforced constantly through media images such as advertisements using attractive models and attractive actors and actresses in movies and in television shows. The message these forms of media give viewers is that in order to be lovable, you need to look a specific way. For women this usually involves being, "tall, white, and thin, with a tubular body, and blonde hair," (Dittmar & Howard, 2004; Lin & Kulik, 2002; Polivy & Herman, 2004; Sands & Wardle, 2003; Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2004; Tiggemann & Slater, 2003 as cited in Serdar, 2005), and for men it means being muscular, tanned and, increasingly in recent times, well groomed. These images are unrealistic and unrepresentative of how most people really look. This discourse may make individuals feel insecure about their appearance and their ability to attract a romantic partner. It may also lead them to question their worth as a person.

From within this discourse a person's value is dependent to some extent on their physical appearance and people come to be thought of as physical beings. This was mentioned by one of the participants when explaining the importance of a person's physical appearance in romantic relationships.

Faye: *I think we very physical people, like beings. I think we are. Obviously you don't know, you don't meet somebody for the first time and get straight into their brain and their heart you see what they look like.*

Other participants also commented on how physical appearance was important in romantic relationships.

Rita: *You have to like be neat and have your hair neat and stuff like that and in the beginning ya you know I would dress up and go out on a date…*

Justine: *…I'd love to be beautiful and I'd love for guys to fall all over me (laughing)…*

Joanna: *…he wanted to see my picture first before on mxit … and he said to me like and he was like "hey hey gorgeous" so he first initially saw my looks 'cause it was a picture of my face not of my body I'm very conscious about my body so it was just my face…*

When asked what she thought it was about her that her boyfriend first liked Lizzy responded:

Lizzy: *Oh that I was hot…'cause I was wearing this short top this one day and I had my belly pierced so he was like oh ya she's hot so that was the first thing.*

The use of this discourse may cause people to feel insecure about their appearance as is shown in the quote by Joanna. This illustrates that the employment of this discourse can be implicated in peoples' feelings of dissatisfaction or inadequacy with regards to their physical appearance and their perception of their own attractiveness to others. This discourse allows people to think about themselves and others in physical and aesthetic terms. This can be

objectifying to people where they become reduced to only a body or face. This practice undervalues the complexity of people and disregards their other qualities. Traditionally this has been something which affects women. The woman's purpose is to be pleasing to the male spectator and she is judged based on her appearance and not on her actions. This has implications for her subjective experiences as she continually watches herself being looked at, and has learnt from childhood to treat herself as an object that needs to be evaluated in terms of her worth in the eyes of others (Lury, 2011). One of the participants touched on this idea of being observed and behaving in certain ways for possible spectators. This was said in a discussion which occurred in response to a question about what young men and women do to impress potential partners.

> Faye: *If we weren't worried about if somebody was looking or not we wouldn't do our make-up perfectly every morning or blow-dry our hair or- clearly I didn't do that today (laughs) but I don't know ya it's the little things like not going in like tracksuit pants and a hoody or something. To be like 'oh I wonder if he's going to be looking, is he going to be looking at me' you try, you make an effort.*

This response shows again how physical appearance is thought to be something which is important when attracting potential romantic partners. It is also an example of how women can experience themselves as physical bodies to be observed and evaluated by men and the resulting behaviours associated with this experience. These behaviours involve appearance improving actions such as dressing well and altering the appearance of her face and hair.

In recent times men have increasingly become the victims of this kind of objectification as the media has begun to show images of men as sexual objects with bodies which are unattainable for most men (Elliot & Elliot, 2005). This discourse may result in people feeling insecure and anxious about how they look and their self-worth may be negatively influenced. People also become concerned with improving their physical appearance in order to become lovable to others. This may involve them doing things like exercising, going on diets or buying body products or make-up to bring the way they look closer to the ideal image the

media portrays. One participant noted how men seem to be increasingly concerned with their appearance.

> Trisha: *Also I've noticed a lot of guys have been gyming a lot-*
>
> Faye: *Oh ya totally!*
>
> Trisha: *...I don't know I know 'cause a lot of guys also have insecurities. I know a friend of mine who feels he's not buff enough and he's going to gym*

Physical intimacy was also thought about in relation to physical attractiveness, for example in order for a partner to be considered sexually desirable, they would need to be physically attractive.

> Faye: *But you have to, I think, in a romantic relationship or in- ya a romantic relationship you have to be physically attracted to someone. You can't look at them and be like oooh (laughing). You have to like want to kiss them even if that's it you still got to want to do it you know you can't not, you know?*

Another participant mentioned how her boyfriend's physical appearance had become a problem for her in their relationship because of how she felt her and her boyfriend looked to other people.

> Grace: *I was like please like give me a break like take it slow and then for some reason I started getting bothered by his weight. He wasn't big he was just chubby and I'm tiny and I started being conscious of I'm walking with him in town and I'm so tiny and he looks like my big brother. And I look at him like this (looks up) and for some reason I don't know why it just with the distance and everything I was like I'm better being single.*

This participant admitted how although she had thought that physical attractiveness was unimportant, in her most recent romantic relationship she found that it was in fact quite important to her. She says this when describing how her boyfriend's physical appearance had become a problem for her.

> Grace: *Ya its strange 'cause like I was always telling my sister he doesn't have to be a perfect looking guy just as long as you love him but when it came to me after three years there was a guy who was sweet and loving and but it's like there's just something missing ya.*

This quote illustrates again how romantic relationships have been constructed in a way where physical attraction is necessary and how it is important to find your partner physically attractive. Physical attractiveness leads to the desire for physical intimacy and *"something is missing"* without that. In this way we see how social forces such as media images not only influence the way people think about themselves and others but also plays a role in structuring their emotional responses. In this case ideals of beauty and the suggestion in movies, television shows and advertisements that being physically attractive is a prerequisite for being sexually desirable have led to people being unable to feel physical desire for someone they may like very much but who is not necessarily physically attractive in the sense that they mimic, to a certain extent, media images of beauty.

These quotes also show how physical intimacy is understood as a defining feature of romantic relationships. This discourse situates people in position where they need to be attractive if they are to receive love and physical affection. If they do not comply with the standards of beauty which have been culturally and historically constructed, they may feel insecure about their value in the world. They may feel that other people are unlikely to find them lovable or that they are unworthy of love. Naomi Wolf (2002) in her book *The beauty myth: How images of beauty are used against women,* explains how if women feel insecure about their physical attractiveness they are likely to avoid physical intimacy. This shows how

once this discourse is internalised it may prevent people from enjoying physical intimacy even if they are in loving romantic relationships and how it is likely to make people feel generally anxious about how they look and how others evaluate them. This is also problematic as Wolf (2002) suggests that many women's idea of being successful depends on them being able to sustain sexually loving relationships. If they have been made to feel that they are too unattractive to feel comfortable engaging in sexual relationships, they are also unlikely to feel that they are successful. She also argues that both men and women need to feel beautiful- desired, welcome, treasured- to be open to sexual communication. If they are deprived of that they will protect themselves by objectifying themselves or the other (Wolf, 2002).

One of the participants mentioned how although being physically attractive might seem important it was not really what men wanted.

> Rita: *…but I think that I read this article where they did this survey about what men really want in a woman right and a lot of them said they didn't want women who were super attractive yes 'cause that's not the woman they wanted to end up with… Um they would rather have someone who's not as attractive as their partner and future wife 'cause a lot of them said that they would feel intimidated that other men would want to go out with um their partner if they were like too like model attractive.*

> Faye: *I think there's a difference between the girls guys go out to meet at clubs and the ones they actually want to have a relationship with and I think girls can fall quite easily into the trap of thinking it's all about how you look and your body and I don't know other stuff you do behind closed doors but um guys don't necessarily want to date that girl she's fun for one night…*

These quotes are putting forth the idea that it is not that important to be physically attractive because men interested in serious relationships are not concerned about that and that only men who are looking for *"one night stands"* are concerned about physical appearance. This

allows the women to resist the discourse that *Physical attractiveness is necessary for romantic relationships* enough to ease possible feelings of anxiety or insecurity about not living up to media ideals of beauty.

One participant also disagreed with the idea that a man needs to be physically attractive in order for there to be a desire for physical intimacy. In an individual interview she mentioned how she did not think of her romantic partner as physically attractive, however she still wanted to be physically intimate with him. When asked if she thought it was important to find someone physically attractive in order to want to be physically intimate with them she explained why she did not think this was the case.

> Rita: *I think that you can have a strong emotional connection to someone um and ya and it doesn't matter what they look like um you can have that emotional attraction to the person that they are and not the way they look.*

However later on the same participant, when talking about how physical attractiveness was not as important as some people and the media made it out to be, admitted that it was important to a degree.

> Rita: *I mean you want to see that person and feel something um but it doesn't necessarily have to be the case you don't have to look like a lifeguard to feel attracted to that person.*

In this case it is suggested that although it is not necessary to look as attractive as the people in movies, advertisements or on TV, it is still preferable for people to find each other physically attractive if they are to be in a romantic relationship. This vacillation between denying the importance of physical attractiveness and then acknowledging it may illustrate the contradictory nature of the many discourses structuring the way people make sense of themselves and others. Consumer culture is not the only influence on people's lives and a

number of other influences structure the way we think and feel. In this case the desire to be a good, decent person who is not shallow or superficial and who is interested in who the person 'really is' as opposed to their appearance may be conflicting with the influences of advertising and the media and how they have constructed intimacy and attraction.

Two of the participants, one Indian and one African, mentioned how race played a role in who they found attractive. This is illustrated by the women's exchange that follows.

> Grace: *I would love to date a white guy… I went through a stage where I was obsessed with Indians but then I found out they're not that great also. And coloured guys, I don't like how they age (laughing)*

> Faye: *Now what's the appeal about white guys?*

> Grace*: (Sighs) They're just so beautiful… I went to a church in- I know this is wrong please don't judge me (laughing) me and my roommate were invited by a guy to this church… and you know when you go into a candy shop? (laughing) There were all kinds of beautiful white guys! And you could just stand there and watch them go by…*

This illustrates how certain physical traits are constructed as more desirable than others. In this case being classified as white was seen by this participant to indicate a physically attractive potential partner. She also mentioned how she felt that it was unlikely that the white males she found attractive would be interested in her.

> Grace: *In my mind I go with this thing of like they don't even see me. You know how you like go around with a, you have a scale of this is what I define as attractive and for me it never crosses my mind that a white guy would like me.*

This suggests that being black is constructed as being less physically attractive than being white. This construction places young black people in a position where they feel less desirable to members of the same race as them as well as those of other races. This may be linked to our country's history of racial oppression and to how beauty is depicted in the media. This discourse may result in feelings of inferiority or insecurity about whether they will be evaluated as attractive and therefore a suitable romantic partner. It may also facilitate feelings of resentment towards young white people who are constructed as more physically desirable than other races and who consider themselves too good to enter into relationships with young people of other races as they are thought to not even pay attention to them or consider them when considering potential romantic partners. This may encourage racial separation and may reinforce racial inequality and hostility between races. An Indian participant agreed with Grace and mentioned how also felt ignored by white young men

> Trisha: *I agree with you… I am attracted to white guys… but I feel they don't really look at us though.*

These participants also mentioned how they thought young Indian and African men found white women attractive.

> Grace: *With the black guys they will look at white girls but also it's the same thing they also think that the girl won't be attracted to them… They think the girl's attractive but would never look at them.*

Another physical trait that was considered undesirable by some participants was red hair. One participant, talking about men in England, said that some English men were *"orange"* and therefore unattractive. Another participant strongly agreed with this:

      Faye: *I know! Who would date a ranga!*

By constructing certain physical traits as undesirable, the people who happen to have these particular features are placed in a position where they are less likely to be of interest to potential romantic partners. These people therefor have smaller chance of being given the approval that is deemed so important in our society: that you are physically attractive, and therefore worthy of romantic love. By marginalising people with certain physical features, the people who make use of this discourse are placing themselves in a position where they are more worthy of love than some others. This may make them feel more secure about their value as a person in the eyes of others and may make them feel that they are more likely to have opportunities to enter into romantic relationships.

The use of this discourse is beneficial to a number of organisations especially the beauty industry and companies selling self-improvement products such as those which focus on losing weight, achieving a better complexion, improving the appearance of the body through clothing or gyms or the face through make-up. All of these products are popular because people feel that they need them to attain a certain level of acceptance from one's self and from others. They feel that without them this will be less likely (Wolf, 2002). Advertising and the media often reinforce the message that physical attractiveness is necessary for receiving love and acceptance from others and for being deemed a suitable potential romantic partner. This is illustrated in billboards advertising a gym membership with the slogan: *Fit in or fat off,* make up advertisements with slogans like *Wanted* and the Wonderbra advertisement with the tagline: *Look me in the eyes and tell me that you love me.*   These types of messages and images of impossibly attractive people in sexually intimate positions or romantic movie and television roles are likely to influence the way people think about relationships and the criteria they believe they need to fill in order to be worthy of love.

5. Conclusion

"This focus on money and power may do wonders in the marketplace, but it creates a tremendous crisis in our society. People who have spent all day learning how to sell themselves and to manipulate others are in no position to form lasting friendships or intimate relationships... Many [individuals] hunger for a different kind of society -- one based on principles of caring, ethical and spiritual sensitivity, and communal solidarity. Their need for meaning is just as intense as their need for economic security" (Lerner, 1987, p. 133).

This study aimed to explore the way in which young, middle class South African women construct gender and romantic relationships within the context of an emerging consumer culture. This was approached from a Social Constructionist perspective and so special attention was paid to the language use of participants. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and focus groups and analysed using Discourse Analysis.

In the previous section I discussed five discourses which were identified from the responses of the participants in the individual interviews and focus groups. These discourses included: *Men and women should be different, Physical attraction as necessary for romantic relationships, Love as hard work, Love as a risk and Romantic relationships as important for social inclusion and a positive self-esteem.*

The discourse *Men and women should be different* addressed the tendency of the participants to think about men and women as having different roles and responsibilities in relationships based on their gender. There were certain things men and women should and should not do in relationships and they were generally understood as being innately different in their approach to and motives for entering into romantic relationships. There were three subsections in this discourse. The first one was *Men as economic providers/ women as responsible for housework*. This reflected how the young women constructed men as being responsible for earning money and providing for their well-being and entertainment while many of them constructed women as obliged to take responsibility for more domestic activities. The second

subtheme, Men as physical/women as emotional was about how the participants, through their speech, constructed the image of men as being motivated by sexual desire when entering into romantic relationships and how they were unable to express their emotions. Women on the other hand were constructed as being motivated by a need for love and acceptance when entering into romantic relationships and were more skilled at identifying and conveying their emotions. The last subsection of the discourse, *Men and women should be different* was *Men as initiators/ decision makers.* This was concerned with the expectation that men would be the ones to initiate romantic relationships and make many of the decisions in the relationship such as what the romantic partners would do together.

The discourse *Physical attraction as necessary for romantic* relationships focussed on how the participants emphasised that they needed to feel physically attracted to their partner if they were to continue in the relationship with them. Attractiveness was also seen as a necessity for physical intimacy and the participants identified certain specific physical traits which were deemed unattractive.

The *Love as hard work* discourse refers to the idea that sustaining a romantic relationship requires a significant amount of effort from the partners and that they are responsible for trying to make each other happy and successfully resolve conflicts. The discourse *Love as a risk* was used by participants when discussing how the end of romantic relationships resulted in some form of loss, for example a loss of time and energy and a great deal of emotional distress. This suggested that entering into a romantic relationship should be considered very carefully and rationally as it was desirable for the relationship to continue.

The *Romantic relationships as important for social inclusion and a positive self-esteem* discourse addressed the functional aspects of romantic relationships in their implications for a person's sense of worth. Being in a romantic relationship was constructed as socially desirable and some young women felt pressured to be part of a couple in order to feel accepted and complete.

Possible directions for future research could involve considering similar research questions with young men, older or younger age groups or married participants since this study focussed only on single women and had a relatively small range of ages. Constructions of gender and romantic relationships could also be explored among homosexual participants as all of the participants in this study identified themselves as heterosexual.

The discourses identified from the data were discussed in terms of their possible implications and functions as well as the societal influences which facilitate the use and reinforcement of certain discourses. This enables us to better understand how young women construct different gender roles and expectations particularly within romantic relationships. This understanding allows us to explore alternate discourses which may facilitate healthier, more fulfilling relationships.

Emerging South African consumer culture is associated with a proliferation of advertising and media images. This context facilitates the constructions of gender and romantic relationships which were identified in the speech of the participants. This project considers the language young middle class South African women used when discussing men, women and their roles in romantic relationships as well as the underlying discourses structuring their speech. This allows a better understanding of the link between the social and ideological context in which these young women are situated and their personal experiences of gender and intimate relationships.

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Appendices

Informed Consent Form

My name is Michelle Tofts and I am a masters student in Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Howard College Campus. As a part of my masters I am required to conduct a research study which will be supervised by Dr. Anthony Collins, a lecturer at the Howard College Campus.

The study is entitled: *Discourses of Love and Money: Exploring Constructions of Gender and Intimacy in Romantic Relationships* and aims to explore the construction of gender identities and intimate relationships of young adult, middle class women in the context of South African consumer culture. I will be conducting focus groups and semi structured interviews which will require you to answer questions about relationships in general, media depictions of men, women and relationships and your experiences with relationships.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and should you wish to withdraw at any time, you may without any negative consequences.

All the information you give me during the research process will be kept confidential and your anonymity will be ensured by changing all identifying information such as your name and those of others mentioned as well as places and institutions.

If you would like to obtain more information on your rights as a participant as well as the details of the study please feel free to contact Dr. Anthony Collins by emailing collinsa@ukzn.ac.za or Prof Steven Collings who is on the Research Ethics Committee, on 031-2602381 or email collings@ukzn.ac.za. If you would like to contact me personally my email address is michelletofts@gmail.com.

I hereby confirm that I…………………………………………………………………………. (full name) understand fully the nature and purpose of the research project and voluntarily agree to be a participant in this study.

…………………………………..   ……………………
Signature of Participant   Signature of Researcher
                                                         Michelle Tofts

……………………..   ……   …………………………...
Date   Date

Interview Schedule

<u>Focus Groups</u>

1. How do you think women/men are portrayed in the media? Discuss movies, adverts perhaps bring example of advert and discuss it. Is this an accurate representation? Are all men/women like this? What does it mean if someone is not like this?
2. What is the ideal romantic partner like?
3. Why do people enter into romantic relationships?

<u>Individual Interviews</u>

1. Think about a relationship you have been in/ are in currently.

    What can you tell me about your partner?

    What can you tell me about your relationship?

    What are some of the things you like or do not like about being in a relationship?

    What caused the relationship to come to an end/ what would cause you to end the relationship?