Young men negotiating masculinities and love in a South African township

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Declaration

I, Melusi Andile Charles Dlamini, declare that:

The study reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the Reference section.

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Signature: Mr. M. A. C. Dlamini

As the candidate's supervisor, I, Professor Deevia Bhana, approve this thesis for submission.

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Signature: Prof. D. Bhana

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"And now these three remain: Faith, Hope and Love. But the greatest of these is love."
1 Corinthians 13

Abstract

Young black men's negotiations of love and intimacy, beyond the focus on force and violence, are minimally explored in South African scholarship. While studies have highlighted the ways that heterosexual relationships have functioned as sites through which men maintain their dominance over women, there is limited understanding of the ways that they resist dominant masculinities. Furthermore, recent scholarship has troubled the reductive readings of young black men's lives, and have called for critical yet sympathetic approaches to understanding their lived experiences (Ratele, 2018). Therefore, this study explores how young black men, situated in the townships of Durban, navigate their experiences of romantic love and intimate relationships. Informed by critical feminist approaches to love and masculinities, this study emphasises the multiple and situated ways of being and knowing, and challenges reductive readings of young men's lives. Empirical data were generated through individual interviews and focus group discussions with 34 young men in the INK (Inanda, Ntuzuma, KwaMashu) precinct of townships in Durban, South Africa. The research findings suggest that romantic love and intimate relationships are an important feature of young men's daily lives. For most of the participants, romantic love and intimate relationships extended beyond public performances of (hetero)sexual prowess; instead, love was understood as an essential aspect of their shifting subjectivities – from boyhood to manhood. Key relational practices such as *ukuchecka*, which are often associated with public performances, emerged as important sites through which participants cultivated emotional and physical intimacies. Among the participants, their romantic relationships afforded new ways of expressing love, which enabled them to deemphasise sexual intimacy, which the participants expressed through the concepts of *ukuhloniphana* (mutual respect) and *ukulinda* (waiting). Specifically, romantic relationships were also conceptualised as affective sites that enabled the young men to co-navigate their daily lives with their girlfriends. Therefore, in this study, the critical and situated reading of young men's experiences with love generated new knowledge about their expressions of love and experiences of intimate relationships. Typically thought of as a site of women's vulnerabilities, these findings suggest that the context of romantic love offers progressive possibilities for young men to resist dominant masculinities. This study illustrates the value of exploring the mundane, everyday encounters of love and intimate relationships in young men's lives. These findings have implications for local and international masculinities scholarship interested in the transformative possibilities of love and intimate relationships in young men's lives.

Contents

CHAPTER ONE

Exploring young black men's negotiations of love in a South African township

1.1. Introduction

> Is there any love in men's lives? Is love anything that interests men, and is it in any way an important part of men's lives? (Lorentzen, 2007, p. 190)

This study explores how young black men, situated in the townships of Durban, navigate their experiences of love and intimate relationships in their daily lives. It examines the affective and embodied ways in which romantic love informs their intimate lives and their performance of (hetero)masculine subjectivities. Following Lorentzen (2007), this study problematises the missing discourses of love and intimacy in masculinities scholarship, and further explores young men's entanglements with love. It challenges the enduring silences on men's romantic and intimate lives which otherwise suggest that "love is not at all an important part of heterosexual men's lives" (Lorentzen (2007, p. 190). Although gender and sexualities scholarship has begun to examine (hetero)masculine performances in relation to romantic relationships (Allen, 2007; Forrest, 2010; Korobov, 2009a, 2009b, 2011; Korobov & Thorne, 2006; Nasser El-Dine, 2018; Redman, 2001), this body of literature remains limited. Furthermore, research in this area continues to overlook the *place and significance of love in men's lives* (Javaid, 2019). Therefore, in exploring young black men's entanglements with love, this study focuses on how they negotiate heterosexual intimate relationships as affective, embodied and situated practices. It examines the ways that love and intimate relationships foster alternative, and possibly transgressive, masculinities which otherwise remain hidden by the neglect of love by scholars (Lorentzen, 2007; Javaid, 2019). Thus, this study argues that there is love in young men's lives, that it not only interests them, but is a central and driving force in their daily lives.

Informed by pro-feminist scholarship, this study emphasises the multiple and situated ways of being and knowing that inform young men's lived realities (Ahmed, 2000; Ammann & Staudacher, 2021; Berggren, 2014; Ratele, 2021; Shefer & Hearn, 2022). This scholarship challenges reductive readings of men and masculinities, especially in the global South, and instead argues for understandings of social realities that foreground complexity, nuance and multiplicity (Gottzén et al., 2020). Broadly, this study contributes to two separate but related subfields within gender and sexuality scholarship: critical studies on men and masculinities (CSMM), associated with pro-feminist scholars such as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005),

Pease (2012), and Hearn (2019), and critical scholarship on love which is associated with feminist scholars such as hooks (2000, 2004), Jónasdóttir (2011), Jackson (1993, 1995), Illouz (1997, 2012), and Ferguson and Toye (2017). CSMM, which draws mainly from Connell's (1987) theory of hegemonic masculinity, engages with how power and gender inequalities are produced and maintained within the global gender order, as well as how these might be challenged. Critical scholarship on love examines the "material practices and embodied experiences of love, power and domination in order to move towards liberation" (Ferguson and Jónasdóttir, 2014, p. 1). Both subfields are significant in the respective ways that they have challenged conventional thinking about masculinities and love. CSMM emerged as a direct challenge to the sociobiological understanding of gender, commonly known as sex role theories, based on the male/female binary (Connell, 1987). This scholarship has approached masculinities as socially constructed, multiple, contextual and always in flux (Frosh et al., 2002; Messerschmidt & Messner, 2018; Morrell, 2001). Relatedly, critical scholarship on love has challenged conceptualisations of love as a benevolent and innate force. Overtly underpinned by feminist politics, these researchers have demonstrated that love is gendered and further entangled with the social and cultural processes that shape subjectivities (Bhana, 2018; Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2014; Illouz, 2012; Jackson, 1993; Toye, 2010). Although there is a robust body of masculinities scholarship in South Africa, the same cannot be said for studies that explore love, emotions, intimacy and care in boys' and men's lives (Malinga & Ratele, 2018). There is a need for explorations of boys' and men's intimate lives that go beyond conventional approaches in South African masculinities scholarship. Consequently, this study is interested in how romantic love, in the context of heterosexual intimate relationships, offers young men new possibilities; that is, the productive possibilities of love that enable alternative performances of masculinities which are otherwise are obfuscated by the current absence of love in masculinities scholarship.

Globally, researchers have convincingly demonstrated that love and intimate relationships are central aspects of contemporary life that profoundly shape social worlds and individual experiences (Giddens, 1992; Illouz, 1997, 2007; Kreil, 2016). These studies suggest that conceptualisations of love, shaped by ever-shifting cultural and cultural discourses, have changed over time. Moreover, this growth in scholarship on love has progressively unsettled long-standing assumptions about love as a universal and pre-social phenomenon (Jackson, 1993). Because of these enquiries, love and intimate relationships have come to be understood as socially, culturally and economically mediated by the same structures that shape public life.

Yet, the significance of love in men's lives has continued to receive limited attention. Although this is slowly starting to change in recent scholarship, as demonstrated by the recent literature which explores the implications of affect and emotions for men and masculinities (de Boise, 2018; de Boise & Hearn, 2017; Holmes, 2015; Keddie, 2020, 2021; Keddie & Bartel, 2020; Reeser, 2020; Reeser & Gottzén, 2018; Stahl & Keddie, 2020). However, even within this body of work, men's everyday experiences and expressions of love in their intimate relationships, outside of physical and emotional violence, remain marginal. Therefore, this study explores how 34 young black men, between the ages of 16 and 21, negotiate love in the context of heterosexual intimate relationships. In exploring young men's negotiations of love, this study examines how romantic love informs relational subjectivities and alternative performances of masculinities in daily life.

1.2. Why a focus on love in South Africa?

In their seminal text, *Love in Africa*, Cole and Thomas (2009, p. 4) problematised the absence of research that focuses on love in Africa, and further called for "greater attention to how contemporary discourses, sentiments, and practices of love [are implicated in] complex historical processes and intersections". Their argument emphasised the dearth of literature on love in the African context and further highlighted how the absence of such knowledge severely limits understandings of the complexities inherent in the formation of subjectivities. Furthermore, this oversight is particularly challenging when considering the intimate nature of some scholarly enquiries. For instance, Cole and Thomas (2009) have noted that in the context of HIV and AIDS pandemic, explorations of intimate sexual relationships have mainly been through a public health lens, and thus focused mainly on the social and sexual dynamics of incidence. Yet, very little consideration has been given to how 'risky behaviours' intersect with or are situated within local emotional frameworks. In light of this, they warned that gender dynamics and (hetero)sexualities cannot be meaningfully unpacked without fully "understanding ideologies of emotional attachment" (Cole & Thomas 2009, p. 4). However, despite these scholarly critiques of the limited representations of love in Africa, scholarship on love and intimacy remains marginal, particularly in contexts where structural inequalities have given way to HIV, gender violence and poverty (Hunter, 2010). Nowhere else is this more apparent than in South Africa, where these intersecting epidemics frame daily life.

Due to the endemic challenges of poverty, HIV and AIDS, and gender violence in South Africa, love and matters of intimacy continue to be "placed among the lesser order of priorities against

more important issues" (Haysom, 2013, p. 1). Echoing Cole and Thomas (2009), Bhana (2013a, p. 4) contends that love, when approached as an analytical problem, has the profound potential to open up understanding of the ways that it is used as a "resource and strategy in negotiating and reproducing gender inequalities". This means paying attention to the meanings, emotions and feelings that animate intimate relationships, which may offer new insights into understanding how gender, sexuality and power intermingle in the South African context. Although Bhana (2013a, p. 10) acknowledges the structural inequalities that marginalise many in South Africa, she argues for more productive framings of love that might offer new insights into the social production of inequalities. Similarly, Cole and Thomas (2009) suggest that only focusing on sexual behaviour or socioeconomic economic status not only gives an extremely reductive account of vulnerability, but further reinforces the marginalisation that researchers mean to counteract. Therefore, if public health interventions focusing on matters related to gender and sexuality aim to achieve long-term impact, it is imperative that they expand their scope of focus to include the discourses and practices of love and its related modes of attachment. They must grapple with how gendered and (hetero)sexual subjectivities, which are often the main focus, are relationally produced with desires, intimacies, emotions and feelings, which have just as much impact on the circulations of power in daily life. As Bhana (2013a, p. 7) further opines, "without understanding the micro-level processes through which intimate relations are constructed, we may not have a good understanding of how" gender inequitable discourses and practices are produced, resisted or transformed over time. The love analytic adds much-needed nuance to our understanding of how gender and sexuality become entangled within relations of power.

Although there has been a growing number of studies on love in South Africa over the last decade (Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Hunter, 2010; Mathe, 2013; Oxlund, 2012; Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013), the number of studies which have focused on young men and love remains considerably limited (Langa, 2020; Malinga & Ratele, 2012, 2016). Of course, this limitation mimics the broader concern Lorentzen (2007) seeks to address in his own work. In this study, I explore the social worlds of young men and their experiences and expressions of love through sustained fieldwork interactions that acknowledged them as "authorities about their lives" (Mayeza, 2015, p. 1). Thus, taking my lead from these broad subfields, this study aimed to explore how love shaped young men's experiences as they navigated daily life, which included but was not limited to home, school, friends and their love relationships. In the same way that contemporary feminist research recasts love as more than a site of women's collective

submission to men (Bhana, 2013b), this study seeks to recast love for young men as more than a site within which to wield power and dominance.

1.3. Putting love back into masculinities studies

Bhana (2013a, p. 10) contends that "putting love back into" explorations of the gendered subjectivities, sexualities and desires of young people "might lead to different understandings" of their intimate lives. For Bhana (2018), such explorations of love not only give nuanced insights into young men's lived realities, but also reveal how they navigate the structural inequalities which inform their daily experiences. As such, this study seeks to put love back into explorations of young black masculinities, to generate situated understandings of the ways love 'surfaces' individual and collective subjectivities (Ahmed, 2004a). In South Africa, there is growing consensus among researchers about the significance of romantic love in the lives of young men (Bhana, 2018; Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Singh, 2013; Willan et al., 2019). However, much of this research has conceptualised love against the backdrop of gendered and endemic epidemics: HIV, poverty, and gender-based violence (Manyaapelo et al., 2019; Mgwaba & Maharaj, 2018). This has served to identify love primarily as a site of vulnerability, especially for young women. However, the intimate realities of young people (Bhana, 2014, 2017; Firmin, 2013), outside of the violence, and the continued marginalisation suffered by young women (Ngabaza, 2011; Wood & Jewkes, 1997; Zembe et al., 2015), have received limited attention.

Understandably, much of the focus on young women is due to the disproportionate vulnerabilities they encounter because of multiple structural inequalities in South Africa (Shefer & Foster, 2001). However, the adverse effect of this has been that the subjective realities and possible vulnerabilities of young men in relation to intimate relationships and love have not been explored (Shefer et al., 2015; Varga, 2001). Although research has made a case for how young women negotiate and resist men's power in intimate relationships (Bhana, 2008; Bhana & Anderson, 2013; Firmin, 2013; Willan et al., 2019), instances in which young black men resist hegemonic love practices in their relationships remain relatively muted. This implies that only pathologised masculinities are emphasised and documented in research. While scholars have demonstrated how contemporary romantic relationships reveal the complex processes that shape the lives of young people (Harrison, 2008; Hunter, 2007, 2015), literature which explores the generative and transformational possibilities of love in young people's lives remains limited. This paucity is even more pronounced among young black men in South Africa (Malinga & Ratele, 2012, 2016, 2018).

South African literature has shown love and intimate relationships among young people to be complex and shaped by gender discourses and social and economic contexts (Mgwaba & Maharaj, 2018; Sofika & van der Riet, 2017; Wood et al., 2007). Further studies have demonstrated that gender, sexuality, race, class and geographical location produce distinct experiences of love (Bhana 2018; Gibbs et al. 2022 Hunter 2010; Manyaapelo et al. 2019; Willan et al. 2019). These studies have provided more situated understandings of how embodied practices within heterosexual romantic relationships may materialise in multidimensional and often contradictory ways, thus further revealing the daily circulations of power within those relationships. However, because of the broad context of political economic vulnerability for young women, epidemics of gender violence, poverty and HIV, research has had to focus on and highlight how love relationships facilitate these vulnerabilities (Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013; Shefer et al., 2012; Watt et al., 2012). One of the developments in recent research has been focused on the operation of hegemonic masculinities in South Africa and the ways in which they subordinate women and other men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Morrell, Bhana, et al., 2012; Morrell, et al., 2013).

The recent emergence of love scholarship in Africa (Cole & Thomas, 2009), and South Africa in particular (Bhana, 2013a; Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Harrison, 2008; Hunter, 2010), has largely focused on the love experiences of young women (Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013; Willan et al., 2019). Even when such studies try to paint a more vibrant picture of empowered and loving young men who place great value on love, relationships and equitable perspectives, the spectre of "love-as-force" is foregrounded (Bhana, 2018, p. 109). While there is no doubt that love relationships present significant vulnerabilities for young women in South Africa (Gibbs, Dunkle, Mhlongo, et al., 2020; Gibbs, Dunkle, Washington, et al., 2020; Shamu et al., 2016; Zembe et al., 2015), a more nuanced exploration of love and of other positive capacities as they relate to young black men is needed (Gibbs et al., 2015; Langa, 2016; Stahl & Keddie, 2020). This is especially vital in the global context of studies that increasingly demonstrate the value of creating safe, effectively affirming spaces for interventions geared towards gender equity (Stahl & Keddie, 2020).

In understanding that, in South Africa, young men negotiate love "in a social and cultural world ordered by gendered arrangements and heterosexual presumptions of male power" (Bhana, 2018, p. 109), there is an urgent need to explore how this power expands and constricts in the context of love, including consideration of the reality that young black men are not a monolith and do not have have equal access to this power at all times (Langa, 2010, 2020). Furthermore,

in the face of more pronounced discourses on power, it cannot be assumed that alternative love practices are non-existent. Therefore, it is increasingly important to establish how young men in South African townships navigate gender discourses and the social and cultural contexts from which love practices emerge. Importantly, this includes exploring how love produces alternative possibilities for young black men that go beyond the deployment of force, violence and coercion.

This study aimed to examine the ways in which young black men negotiate love in a South African township. There is relative silence on the subjective experiences of young black men in intimate relationships in South Africa (Langa, 2010; Malinga & Ratele, 2012) and limited research on the subjectivities produced in the township context (Langa, 2010). To date, a substantial body of work highlights the ways in which young women negotiate and demonstrate agency in romantic relationships, which are conventionally subversive spaces for young women. (Bhana, 2008, 2018; Bhana & Anderson, 2013; Firmin, 2013; Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013) However, most research focuses on the instances of young men's compliance with dominant gender discourses (Singh, 2013), with very little focus on instances where young men are resisting dominant discourses and renegotiating their masculine identities (Forrest, 2010). There is a need for research which helps us understand how young men navigate becoming romantic partners, as well as the values and emotions that inform these negotiations (Korobov & Thorne, 2006; Vogels, 2020a). Recently, Manyaapelo et al. (2019) demonstrated the critical role that love plays in the lives of young black men in KwaZulu-Natal, and how it profoundly shapes their gendered performance as they negotiate intimate and sexual connections. In line with this, Malinga and Ratele (2012) also suggested that love is a significant factor in how young black men construct their masculinities. This study aims to add to this growing body of work by focusing on the experiences and narratives of young black men located in a township in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal.

1.4. Research questions

This study examined young men's lived experiences as they negotiated their masculinities and heterosexuality within their love relationships. In this regard, the study was underpinned by three overarching research questions:

- First, how do young black men located in the township define and understand love?
- Second, how are young black (hetero)masculinities associated with the performance of love?

- Finally, how do young black men conceptualise romantic relationships?

The aim of these questions was to gain a nuanced understanding of young men's lived experiences, with reference to their relationships; their lives are characterised by many individual and collective changes, which tie them to their peers, families, communities and intimate partners. Thus, this study sought to understand how, in the process of navigating these changes, romantic love and intimate relationships were featured in their lives.

1.5. Brief overview of chapters

This dissertation is organised into eight chapters, which address how young men negotiate romantic love and intimate relationships. In this chapter, I have introduced and provided background to the key issues that underpin the rationale for this study. I have also outlined the scholarly context, to which this study aims to contribute. Lastly, I have outlined the research questions which frame this study and have determined the overall structure of this dissertation.

In Chapter 2, I explore the nexus of romantic love, gender and sexualities in literature, as it relates to the current study. Before exploring young men's negotiations of love, I discuss key texts which continue to frame how love is conceptualised in many studies in the social sciences of love, and how this has changed over the last few decades. I then consider contemporary feminist conceptualisations of love, which frame how love is conceptualised in this study. I do this with the aim of expanding the current epistemological approaches towards love in South African literature and conceptualise love as productive.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the theoretical frameworks that informed this study. Using Connell's (1995) masculinities framework as a starting point, I explore literature on masculinities to illustrate key debates and shifts within CSMM. Through engaging this literature, I discuss how young men are conceptualised in masculinities literature, as well as in this study. I draw on local masculinities scholarship to argue for situated conceptualisations of young men's lives that give due consideration to the contradictions and complexities of everyday experiences.

In Chapter 4, I outline the methodological approach employed in this study to explore young men's negotiations of love. Throughout this chapter I reflect on the implications of working within a critical feminist paradigm, which was influenced by my ambivalent positionality as an insider and researcher. I outline the procedures undertaken in accessing the field and recruiting participants, and the qualitative research methods used to generate data. Linked to all the above, I also reflect on the study's ethical considerations and the process of data analysis, which were informed by the study's pro-feminist ethics.

The following three chapters are analysis chapters, which thematically address the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. Chapter 5 examines how young men define and understand love. The findings presented in this chapter detail the participants' notions of love as informed by their daily practices and expressions of love, intimacy and care. In the chapter, I focus on the significance of romantic love and intimate relationships in facilitating the participants' capacities to resist dominant masculinities among participants. In Chapter 6 I investigate young men's performances of love, as informed by a situated pro-feminist approach. The findings suggest that romantic love facilitates reflexivity for some young men, which has the productive potential to disrupt their investment in dominant performances love and intimacy. Chapter 7 examines the participants' conceptualisations of romantic relationships. The findings suggest that young men negotiate love and intimate relationships amid competing and contested discourses on gender, sexuality and intimacy. However, a significant number of young men negotiate equitable and caring relations within their intimate relationships.

In the final chapter, I present the conclusions and implications of the study in relation to young men's negotiations of love. I argue for situated pro-feminist approaches to exploring the lives of young men which will critically explore their lives beyond reductive characterisations. I conclude with reflections on the study's contributions and implications.

CHAPTER TWO

Locating love and young black masculinities: A literature review

2.1. Introduction

As argued in Chapter 1, young black men have mainly been pathologised in South African masculinities literature, with the mundane everyday experiences of love and intimate relationships mainly identified as sites of these pathologies (Gottzén et al., 2022; Graham, 2014; Shefer, 2014; Wood & Jewkes, 1997, 2001). In this chapter, I explore a broad and transdisciplinary archive of scholarship within the social sciences to further locate the study in the broader context of literature. To make sense of love in the lives of young black men, it is vital to explore how literature has engaged with the varying intersections of culture, race, geographic location, class, age and gender discourses that inform contemporary practices and feelings of love. South Africa's enduring histories of colonialism and apartheid, which regulated the lives and intimate relationships of black bodies (Foucault, 1979), are still implicated in profound ways in the subjectivities and love-worlds of young black men. I am informed by a conceptualisation of masculinities as fluid, multiple, contingent and, at times, internally contradictory (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), noting that in the South African context masculinities are further attenuated by historically specific discourses of race, class, age, geographies and culture (Morrell, 2001; Morrell et al., 2013). Furthermore, this study conceptualises love as deeply and profoundly entangled with masculinities (Javaid, 2019; Lorentzen, 2007; Nasser El-Dine, 2018; Malinga & Ratele, 2016). Love, gender and sexualities are thus inextricably linked, are socially constructed, relational, refer to bodies, directly and indirectly, and are not determined by biology (Connell, 2000). This is supported by a relatively small body of literature which advocates for the utility and promise of exploring the social and gendered nature of love (Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2014; Gunnarsson, 2016; Gunnarsson et al., 2018; Illouz, 1997; Jackson, 1993; Johnson, 2005). Thus, I undertake a pro-feminist reading of love and masculinities with the aim of revealing the social and gendered parameters of the discourses that shape daily life, and to also trouble these parameters and move towards social justice.

2.2. Approaching love

Despite the recognition of love's significance in social and cultural life, it remains relatively undertheorised in the social sciences, and scholars have attributed this disparity to the perceived obscurity of love as an area of academic inquiry (Johnson, 2005; Rusu, 2018). This obscurity

seems to have been further exacerbated by the various disciplinary approaches that have framed approaches to love. In this regard, Jankowiak and Nelson (2021) have identified three epistemological approaches which have underpinned how contemporary scholarship has explored love; these can be broadly categorised as structuralist, biological and critical. Of these three approaches the biological approach conceptualises love an individual psychological function, and seeks to uncover cognitive patterns which point to the universality of love (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2002; Sternberg, 1996). The other two approaches frame love as socially and culturally constructed, although they are further differentiated by their structuralist and poststructuralist leanings. Within the structuralist approach, love is conceptualised as a product of social structures, and as facilitating the functions of social institutions such as marriage, family and reproduction. Unlike psychological approaches, this approach challenges claims of romantic love's universality and, instead, focuses on uncovering the social functions of "romantic love related behaviours" across different cultures (Jankowiak & Nelson, 2021, p. 25). In the South African context, structural approaches were mainly associated with the works of early anthropologists who were more interested in love as a form of kinship relation, as opposed to a meaningful relation of attachment, intimacy and care (Cole & Thomas, 2009). Specifically, among *amaZulu*, these approaches were limited by their focus on social structures and social roles, especially in noting the fluid and contested ways that everyday intimacies were performed (Hunter, 2004, 2010). The focus on social patterns overlooked the complexities at the individual and intersubjective levels. Therefore, these approaches have been unable to further explicate the significance of love and intimate relationships in shaping gendered subjectivities, which is what the third approach attempted to do.

In the rest of this section I discuss the critical approach to love, outlining some of the earlier attempts to theorise love which have informed and continue to influence contemporary scholarship on love, desire and intimacy. In doing so, I engage with some of these arguments and perspectives, to contend that love should not be assumed to be a universal human capacity (Jackson, 1993; Johnson, 2005; Lindholm, 2006). Rather, as will be further explored here and throughout this study, love should be conceptualised as relational and contingent on multiple intersecting discourses, materialities, subjectivities and spaces within which it emerges (Byrne & Schleicher, 2021; Morrison et al., 2012). Therefore, love cannot be reductively conceptualised as commonly experienced by all in the same manner. However, the process of rethinking and reconceptualising love in this way presents its own definitional challenges. In light of this, I aim to demonstrate that love is borne out of social and embodied interactions,

and is thus contingent on the material and discursive factors that shape experiences of love and intimate relationships. I provide a brief overview of key texts and their cultural formulations of love, which further inform my analysis of love in this study.

I explore earlier works on love which focused mainly on tracing the contours of a rapidly shifting social, cultural and political landscape and the implications these had for experiences and expressions of love. I argue that these earlier attempts assisted in establishing love and intimacy as legitimate objects of scholarly exploration by highlighting the structural and cultural contingency of love. However, as helpful as this corpus has been, uncritical formulation and theorisation of some significant concepts that emerged from this work have limited their applicability. To advance this argument, I draw on central scholars whose conceptualisations remain in much of the current literature on love (Giddens, 1992; Illouz, 1997; Jackson, 1993; Johnson, 2005). As I will outline below, these earlier works are not only overwhelmingly concerned with love in the global North, but there is a limited critical engagement with what the global shifts of late modernity mean for the global South, particularly as it relates to love. Although it is widely accepted that the development of love scholarship is due to the dynamics of late modernity, critical explorations of how these dynamics interplay with love are especially limited in Africa (Bhana, 2013b; Cole & Thomas, 2009). This limitation increases when considering love and masculinities globally, and it gets even more dire when pondering the interplay of love and masculinities in Africa.

2.2.1. Postmodernity and the shifting meanings of love

The global shifts ushered in by the social and political conditions of late modernity resulted in also resulted in fundamental shifts in how romantic love was conceptualised. There was renewed clarity about love being more than just an innate, individual emotion that is enacted in private. Thus, as Illouz (1997, p. 2) contends, love came to be understood by scholars as "a collective arena within which social divisions and cultural contradictions of capitalism are played out". Consequently, as capitalism cemented itself globally, scholars increasingly noted the concomitant shifts, not only in the political economy and gender politics but also in the economies of emotions, affect and intimacy (Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b; Illouz, 1997). Increasingly, there was growing consensus among scholars that love is a significant site through which (hetero)sexual and gendered subjectivities are mobilised and negotiated. This led to the recognition of the need for studies that took the "subjective experience of love" seriously (Jackson, 1993, p. 202) as "life-political issue[s]" (Giddens, 1992, p. 202). Love,

namely romantic love, could no longer be assumed to be a creation of the West or to be an innate individual experience that was beyond structural influence. Not only did scholarship demonstrate that love and associated emotions were socially constructed, but love was also found to be informed by the very structures that shaped daily life (Jackson, 1993; Lindholm, 2006). While scholars have reached a consensus on the contingent and relational nature of love, there are divergences in the conceptualisations of love.

Key texts on love emerged in this period which profoundly shaped notions of love, intimacy, gender and sexuality (Berlant, 1998; Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Giddens, 1992; Illouz, 1997). Drawing on more textured understandings of social life, in line with the impact of poststructural thought, this scholarship added more complexity and nuance to how love was to be understood and thus explored in academia. According to Jankowiak and Nelson (2021, p. 29), in addition to conceptualising love as socially constructed, critical studies of love focus on "social problems surrounding romantic relationships". Much of this scholarship concerned itself with the ways that romantic relationships, previously considered to be a domain separate from public life, were now shaped by, and thus reflective of, structural inequalities. Therefore, social inequalities were understood as linked to the problems many, mainly women as well as gender and sexual minorities, had experienced in romantic relationships (Jankowiak & Nelson, 2021).

Anthony Giddens' (1992) *The Transformation of Intimacy* is one of the seminal texts that has profoundly influenced contemporary scholarly notions of love and intimacy. He sustains the argument that experiences and expressions of love have changed with the social, political, and economic structures of modernity (Giddens, 1992). This argument was informed by observations of how the discourses which scripted and regulated (hetero)sexual relationships, as sites of intimacy, had shifted over time. These "transmutation[s] of love", as Giddens (1992, p. 34) argued, were due to the democratisation and growth of the market in the global North, which further reconfigured social and gender relations. Most salient in Giddens' (1992) argument is his identification of the emergence of what he terms confluent love and the pure relationship, both of which are conceptualised in opposition to the normative discourses of romantic love (Giddens, 1992, p. 61). Romantic love, he contended, arranged physical attraction, emotional reflexivity and sexual intimacy between a heterosexual couple around the goals of marriage, reproduction and establishing a family (Giddens, 1992, p. 42). This made romantic love a life-long project which required monogamy, with the woman engaged in the physical and emotional labour within the home, and the man the physical and economic labour

in public institutions outside the home. However, the emergence of confluent love demonstrates a challenge to these conventional notions of gender and sexuality.

Confluent love destabilises notions about the love object being 'the one' that the subject will be with 'forever'. Instead, confluent love fosters the creation of an ethical framework which promotes non-destructive emotion and has the capacity to revitalise sexual and emotional relations (Giddens, 1992, p. 202). Critical to Giddens' theorisation of love is the link he establishes between the gender order, the emotional order and the various love configurations. He describes confluent love as an "opening [of] oneself out to the other", with love and sexuality no longer tethered through marriage as in the romantic love complex (Giddens, 1992, p. 61). In this iteration, both partners actively engage in the establishment and maintenance of a pure relationship. Unlike the romantic relationship, the pure relationship allows for a "decentred sexuality [which] is freed from expectations of reproduction… moulded as a trait of personality and intrinsically bound up with the self" (Giddens, 1992, p. 2). In this way confluent love challenges conventional gendered positions in relationships and positions partners as equals. Through the cataloguing of love as either passionate, romantic or confluent, Giddens signals a corresponding shift in social relations shaped by the gender order. Although other scholars seemed to be pessimistic about the impact of neoliberal individualisation love and intimate relationships (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Illouz, 1997), Giddens (1992) maintained an optimism about the future eventualities of love and intimacy in a human rights-centred world. For example, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, p. 3) maintained the love had been disrupted and disordered the increasingly individualising social relations of capitalism. Giddens (1992) conceptualises the romantic relationship as a long-term, heterosexual, emotional, sexual and monogamous partnership officiated through marriage. Alternatively, for Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) love becomes increasingly impossible, resulting in numerous configurations of love and living arrangements, as well as frequent couplings and separations. These texts seem to gesture towards disrupting the illusion of love as pure, innate, and separate from the 'evils' of public life. Although approached differently, they clearly aimed to demonstrate that love, especially romantic love, should be understood to be a sociocultural phenomenon which shapes intersubjective experiences.

For Jackson (1993), love is shaped by social and cultural forces that help us learn and understand what love is over time, and the 'superficial elements' lie beyond the reach of discourse. Therefore, how we understand, experience and practice love is determined by how we are positioned in relation to subjective social and cultural discourses (Jackson, 1993). She

argued that love is "deeply embedded in our subjectivities" and an exploration of love had to engage with the same processes that she understood as shaping subjectivity (Jackson, 1993, p. 209). In understanding how love entangles us with the existing social and gender hierarchies in both obvious and subtle ways, she highlighted the importance of exploring love as linked to the subjectivities of those who were experiencing it and making meaning of it (Jackson, 1993). As such, she suggested an approach to love which gives emotion and culture equal attention and takes the subjective experience of love seriously (Jackson, 1993, p. 202). This relates to how gender and sexuality are constructed in a given society and how these determine the parameters of male and female subjectivities. Love therefore must be conceptualised as a set of socially and culturally bounded discourses through which individuals make subjectivity, experienced emotion and personal relationships meaningful (Jackson, 1993). In making the case for the subjective experience of love, Jackson (1993, p. 207) contends that the best way to explore love is through "the ways in which it is talked and written about", citing the interlinkages between culture, discourse and emotions.

Eva Illouz, another central author in the exploration of love in postmodernity, asserts that experiences and expressions of love have been and continue to be transformed by the forces of capitalism and modernity. Like Jackson (1993), in her monograph, *Why Love Hurts*, Illouz advocates for the adjusting of the analytical lens when exploring contemporary relationships, shifting focus from the individual to exploring "the set of social and cultural tensions and contradictions" that structure the daily experiences of contemporary life (Illouz, 2012, p. 4). For Illouz (2012, p. 6), a fundamental shift in "our romantic will" has occurred and has thus shifted the ways in which people understand, express and experience love. This is not only limited to idealised practices and experiences associated with love, such as 'falling in love' or 'making love', but also extends to the host of emotions, feelings and actions produced within and throughout the length of the relationship. However, unlike Jackson (1993), she does not consider love to be beyond the reach of romantic conventions and material goods. For Illouz (1997), it is not productive to think of the cultural and economic spheres as separate; instead, she asks how love, culture and economy are connected, and how understandings and experiences of love reflect these connections. Drawing on empirical data, unlike Jackson and Giddens who offer conceptual appraisals of love, she asserts that the exchange of material goods or commercially mediated experiences have become central to aspects of how people make sense of their intimate relationships in postmodernity (Illouz, 1997, 2012). Diverging slightly from the arguments advanced by Giddens and Jackson, Illouz (1997, p. 2) asserts that

"romantic love is a collective arena within which the social divisions and the cultural contradictions of capitalism are played out". For her, capitalism shapes social and cultural discourses through which love is understood and experienced. Thus, love is understood and experienced through the "duality of consumer capitalism"; that is, in its ideal form romantic love is premised on contemporary ideals of equal and fair exchange between counterparts, while, at its worst, it facilitates disparities and domination (Illouz 1997, p. 3). She coins the term "emotional capitalism" to describe "a culture in which emotional and economic discourses and practices mutually shape each other", thus making emotional life and economic relations inextricably linked (Illouz, 2007, p. 8). Love is not only shaped by social and cultural discourses, but it is also shaped by and, and relationally shapes, the capitalist forces of postmodernity.

These explorations have been central in highlighting the inextricable link between love, gender and sexuality, and have further demonstrated the epistemological significance of love as an area of study. Significantly, arguments advanced by these scholars like Giddens (1992) and Illouz (1997, 2007, 2012) highlight the ways that love could be understood as a life-political issue in postmodernity. Because of this, love may be theorised as a complex amalgamation of emotions, actions, processes, subjectivities and intersubjectivities. The nature of intimate relationships, which are the key sites of love, has continued to change over time as global political landscape has continued to shift with the onset of the 21st century. Furthermore, these arguments were instrumental in demonstrating the importance of love as a site for the (de)construction and negotiation of (hetero)sexualities, gender, power and politics (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Jackson, 1993, 1995; Johnson, 2005). Love cannot be considered in isolation: gender, sexuality and other social markers must be factored in. Indeed, as other scholars have argued, love is neither universal nor uniquely Western; it appears as it does within specific social milieux (Jackson, 1993; Lindholm, 2006). Yet, despite gesturing towards issues of gender and sexuality inequalities, and how these profoundly shaped heterosexual love and intimacy, these texts are distinctly focused on love as it is encountered by Western, white, middle-class adults – realities which are far removed from the phenomenon under investigation in my study. Although these texts advanced important arguments about the nature and significance of love, they were severely limited by their lack of consideration of diverse gendered, racial, and even Southern subjectivities. The emphasis placed on the processes of postmodernity has resulted in an overemphasis on love as only being experienced and thus

changing in the global North. This, perhaps unwittingly, reinscribes reductionist notions of the global North as central and the global South as marginal.

Collectively, the above explorations approach love as socially constructed and have linked different love practices to cultural discourses on love, aligned with the shifting temperaments of postmodernity. However, recent feminist explorations of love have critiqued these attempts for reductive readings of love as ideology or discourse (Gunnarsson et al., 2018). Furthermore, critical feminist scholars have critiqued the limited availability of phenomenological explorations of love (Jackson, 2014), which has limited the extent to which these studies of love could offer nuanced insights based on lived or daily experiences. While there certainly is value to the representations they offer, love, from this perspective, can only ever be explored as "an arena of struggle", but with limited engagement with the underlying political dynamics of these struggles (Jónasdóttir, 2014, p. 22). In the next section, I explore the emergence of critical feminist love studies, which have sought to "take different routes into… love and its relation to power" (Gunnarsson et al., 2018, p. 4). In addition to asking about the meaning and significance of love, critical feminists consider its political implications, how it relates to configurations of power which oppress and how these may be challenged or transformed (Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2014; Gunnarsson et al., 2018; hooks, 2000; Lanas & Zembylas, 2015; Morrison et al., 2012).

2.2.2. Towards critical feminist studies of love

In *All About Love*, feminist scholar hooks (2000) deliberates on the meaning and significance of love in a world that is increasingly cynical about love. She interrogates society's collective confusion about love and the ineffective (academic and other) attempts to define it. hooks (2000, p. 14) suggests that defining 'love' is vital when establishing what we mean when we speak of, and practice, love. As her starting point, she focuses on Peck's (1978) attempt to define love. According to Peck (1978, as cited in hooks, 2000, p. 4 – 5), "Love is as love does. Love is an act of will – namely, both an intention and an action. Will implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love". For hooks, this definition challenges conventional thinking about love, namely the assumptions about the innateness of love. This is significant in establishing a different understanding of love and its role in our lives. hooks (2000) suggests that to truly love, one must *learn how to* incorporate the various ingredients that constitute love [my emphasis]. Drawing from Peck (1978, cited in hooks, 2000) facilitates hooks' thinking about love as a combination of actions and as a set of feelings. Her characterisation of love is

that of actions that are informed and driven by individual will and intention, of feelings that are also driven by individual will and intention. Concerned with the role and practice of love in our daily lives, hooks (2000, p. 5) identifies love as a verb, as opposed to a noun, that describes something that is practised. Love is thus conceptualised as what the subject discriminately *actions* rather than just an autonomous feeling that takes control, such as a proverbial love experienced as blinding or sweeping [my emphasis]. With this conceptualisation, hooks further invokes the matters of accountability and responsibility to the object of this love. For hooks (2000, p. 14) it is more helpful to think of actions shaping feelings, thus to love is to "openly express care, affection, responsibility, respect, commitment and trust". hooks' work emerges within the context of the feminist project which holds up a critical lens to the operationalisation of love in society, that engages with the workings of power and the inequalities that often underly the ambiguous and disembodied definitions.

Although mainly focused on the plight of women, de Beauvoir's (1956) seminal text, *The Second Sex*, clearly establishes that "love has by no means the same sense" for men and women. She postulates that men and women hold different notions and experiences of love, mainly distinguished by the different subject positions they occupy in society. Love emboldens the social dominance of men, rendering them powerful while condemning women to social positions of servitude and subservience (de Beauvoir, 1956). Unlike women, she contends, men not only have no need for the unconditional and devoted love they demand, but patriarchal norms make it acceptable for them not to reciprocate these expressions of love (de Beauvoir, 1956). In the scathing inditement of love's partiality to men, de Beauvoir (1956, p. 632) defiantly imagines a "day when it will be possible for a woman to love not in her weakness but in her strength", signalling the possibilities of a gender equitable love. This reimagined love becomes about the woman finding and asserting herself, and for both man and woman such a love will be "a source of life and not of mortal danger" (de Beauvoir, 1956, p. 632). These dangers, she argues, are the fate of women because of their positions in society in relation to men and patriarchy. From this feminist perspective, sexual or romantic love came to be perceived and experienced as a construct which stripped women of their power and limited their autonomy. From this perspective, love has never been a utopian pre-social emotion, rather it had material and political implications for women that warranted a gendered view of intimacy. There was, therefore, a growing rejection of the feminisation of love, with feminist thinkers calling for gender equality through the destabilisation of the male-female binary which entrenched emotional and economic imbalances in intimate relationships (Cancian, 1986).

Increasingly, feminist critiques focused on the constructions and workings of love within heterosexual relationships, and thus actively laid the groundwork for love to be apprehended as a social and cultural construct (Jackson, 1993, 2014). This gave rise to a growing body of work from feminist scholars on love who were progressively framing and theorising love as a subjective experience worthy of inquiry, particularly in the context of the global political economy (Bachen & Illouz, 1996; Cancian, 1986; Illouz, 1997; Jackson, 1993).

According to Jónasdóttir (2014, p. 22), love in postmodernity is mainly conceptualised as "a surface representation of something else", which reduces love to a product of deeper, more complex social and political forces. However, Jackson (2014, p. 43) has observed that there remains an experiential "gulf between men's and women's expectations of loving relationships" which is manifest in and through their "everyday understandings of love". For Jackson, these 'asymmetries' are reflective of the inequalities inherent within heterosexual relations, which are shaped by structures that, in turn, determine the meanings and embodied practices of love (Jackson, 1995, 2018). Considering these developments, feminist theorists added complexity to the understanding of love by further delineating between the several forms of love women were having to provide in their lives. Beyond the cultural discourse of romantic love, women were also having to provide and practice sexual love, maternal love and care work (Cantillon & Lynch, 2017; Ferguson, 2012), thus highlighting the significance, extent and multiple combinations of physical, emotional and affective labour provided by women and exploited by men (Jónasdóttir, 2011). Overall, the persistent earlier feminist critique has been that these discursive constructions of love have left men's heteropatriarchal power intact, thus further exacerbating women's oppression. However, although contemporary feminist scholarship acknowledges the significance of these inquiries on love, there has been a growing insistence on the need for an "empirically orientated, theoretically elaborative" and feminist politics-inflected scholarship (Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2014, p. 2; see also Cantillon & Lynch, 2017; Ferguson & Toye, 2017). Considering this, Jackson (2014, p. 34) contends that critical feminist explorations must produce nuanced accounts of heterosexual love that recognise that it is also "implicated in the reproduction of heterosexual privilege and gender inequality". The nuance helps avoid reductionist assumptions of the salient relations within heterosexual love relationships. In this way, we avoid essentialist notions of men as sexually active and emotionally stunted consumers of women's affective energies; and of women as sexually passive and emotionally adept producers of love and care (Cantillon & Lynch, 2017; Ferguson, 2012; Jackson, 1995; Jónasdóttir, 2011).

Noting the increasing significance of how love is being addressed, especially by feminist scholars in varying disciplines, Anna Jónasdóttir and other associated scholars have argued that a new, critical feminist, field of love studies has emerged (Cantillon & Lynch, 2017; Ferguson and Jónasdóttir, 2014; Ferguson & Toye, 2017; Jónasdóttir, 2011; Strid and Jónasdóttir, 2011). As (Ferguson and Toye (2017, p. 5) contend, there is a need for "a distinctive *feminist* [sic] love studies [that] questions the continual tendency within traditional examinations of love" and contemporary explorations of love to leave "male, patriarchal and heterosexist assumptions and models" unquestioned. Furthermore, love studies "stresses the importance of developing [or articulating] alternate models" of love (Ferguson & Toye, 2017, p. 5). A distinctive quality of this perspective, Ferguson and Jónasdóttir (2014) aver is that while it focuses on challenging cultural discourses that facilitate men's dominance and power, it does this by also emphasising the significance of material bodies and the embodied practices in relations of love. This aligns with the recent imperative of materialist feminist scholarship, which highlighted alternative modes or understandings of the production of subjectivities in relation to power, capacities, and agency of affect (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012; Hickey-Moody, 2020; Søndergaard, 2016; Thorpe, et al., 2020). Therefore, this study extended its focus beyond the "ideologies of romantic love" (Bhana, 2018, p. 1) or discourses love and related markers of difference, but it also affords equal consideration to how material bodies and embodied practices are implicated, and are mutually constitutive, with discourses of love (Ferguson and Jónasdóttir, 2014). In this study, love is thus approached and understood as directly implicated in the discursive and material arrangements that determine subjective power and positioning in society, reflected mainly through their lived experiences and practices.

Critical feminist explorations must thoughtfully consider the co-constitutional nature of social discourses and material practices of love while questioning/problematising existing regimes of power and marginalisation (Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2014). While gender, racial and class discourses may construct particular cultures and practices of love, these are still very much produced and modified through embodied practices, which are rooted in contextual arrangements of power. Moreover, as Ferguson (2014, p. 260) poignantly postulates, critical feminist approaches to love must "analyse and challenge oppressive types of love". These oppressive types of love are often produced, and in turn produce, within and through particular "hierarchies of power" that map on to marginalised and subordinated subjectivities (Ferguson, 2014, p. 261; see also Cantillon & Lynch, 2017; Wynn, 2018). These hierarchies of power, which often trace to heteropatriarchal and colonial regimes that privilege (white, heterosexual,

middle-class) men, can inform forms of love that facilitate the subordination of women and the marginalisation of 'other' forms of love (Ferguson & Toye, 2017; Wilkinson, 2017). Therefore, critical feminist explorations of love are charged with the ethical and political imperative of challenging and transforming power dynamics within heterosexual love relations (Ferguson, 2014). In addition to theorising the conflicts and contradictions of "personal and political love relations", a feminist politics of love must also pay attention to the possibilities for developing and applying alternative practices of love (Ferguson, 2014, p. 260; see also Toye, 2010). One such alternative perspective is that of approaching love as a creative and productive force, with not only social, but ethical and political implications (Ahmed, 2014; Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2014; Ferguson & Toye, 2017).

2.2.3. The power and politics of love

In this study, I take a different route "into the theme of love and its relation to power" (Gunnarsson et al., 2018, p. 4). I follow critical feminist scholarship that conceptualises love as multidimensional and thus needs to be traced in more than one way. This means that in exploring love in the lives of young black men, the aim was not to establish one form or meaning of love that applied to all my participants or generalised to similar social contexts. Rather, exploring negotiations of love required an openness as a researcher to learn from my participants' lives and collaboratively make sense of the love that emerged in their lives. Therefore, expanding on the contours of love, meant finding nuance and meaning in the supposedly mundane, daily lived experiences and expressions of love. As Gunnarsson and colleagues (2018, p. 4) contend, feminist love studies should go beyond limited "scholarly understandings of love" and further "reflect the multifaceted everyday" happenings of love. From this perspective, the emphasis on multifaced everyday circulations of love requires that we not take for granted what is understood and considered love, as "how, where and [whom] one loves is deeply political" (Morrison et al., 2012, p. 506). Importantly, this means that love cannot be reduced to (hetero)sexuality, nor can the link between love and (hetero)sexuality be assumed to be configured in particular ways (Cole & Thomas, 2009; Bhana, 2013b; Ferguson and Jónasdóttir, 2014; Gunnarsson, et al., 2018). As such, this requires that in addition to considering 'what love is' or 'what love means', we must also give due consideration to what love 'does' (Ahmed, 2004a, 2014; Nash, 2013; Morrison et al., 2012). Viewed this way, love may be approached, understood, expressed and experienced in multiple configurations that defy the current overdetermined notions of love and the forms it takes in contemporary South Africa.

In my explorations of young black men's daily negotiations of love, I was interested in the ways that love provided opportunities or activated capacities for progressive subjectivities. As such, Jónasdóttir's (2014, p. 21) conceptualisation of love as a productive and empirically significant force which can "bring about change or something new", held an appeal for my approach to love in the participants' lives. By focusing on the positive and productive possibilities, critical feminist scholars have recast love as more than a derivative of postmodern discursive arrangements, but as an "important ethical, social and political force" (Ferguson & Toye, 2017, p. 5; see also Berlant, 2011; Lanas & Zembylas, 2015; Wilkinson, 2017). As Jónasdóttir (2014, p. 22) contends, "Love is not conceptualised as an epiphenomenon but is itself seen as one of the moving forces". Unlike earlier explorations of love that revealed how love was transforming over time, critical feminist approaches foreground the transformational potential of love (Ferguson & Toye, 2017; hooks, 2000). Thus, instead of love being transformed or reconfigured, it is itself a creative component with the potential to transform or reconfigure relations. So, the political concept of love helps imagine the new possibilities of the social (Berlant & Hardt, 2011). Thus, a critical feminist reading of love is to expand the workings of power that render love so compelling yet despite its many challenges (Gunnarsson et al., 2018). It is precisely because of this the potency and pull of love that Jónasdóttir (2014, p. 21) calls for pragmatic feminist engagement with concepts and experiences of love, through approaching it as a "unique create/productive power, [with the potential] to bring about change or something new". Therefore, love can also be approached as a creative or productive force, which enables us to not only consider what love is but also about the potential possibilities that it produces.

This approach deviates from earlier explorations of love which understood emergent forms of love as either an onset of a 'neoliberal chaos' which threatened the sustainability of social relations or as necessary processes which democratised love and intimate relationships (Giddens, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Illouz, 1997, 2012). From this perspective, love is approached from a materialist perspective through notions of production and exchange, where love is a material energy realised through embodied practices of love and care (Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2014). Jónasdóttir (2014, p. 14) describes this material energy as simultaneously circulating "inside and outside our enminded bodies" and shaping relationships and social settings, cultural and political forms shape, constrain and promote the changing conditions on which people labour, love and lead their lives". However, in imagining the productive or creative potential of love, these perspectives do not negate the work of earlier theorists. Instead,

as mentioned earlier, the critical perspective warrants a nuanced approach which takes into consideration the incongruities that emerge in young men's experiences of love, what Bhana (2018, p. 2) refers to as the "paradoxes of love". In this way, while not overlooking the circulations of love that produce experiences of domination, I also pay particular attention to the possibilities of the productive and transformational experiences of love.

Critical scholars of love are more attuned to the ambivalences of love, noting its capacities to liberate and constrain in its daily circulations (Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2014; Gunnarsson et al., 2018; Morrison et al., 2012). In addition to love being relational and political, Morrison et al. (2012) further maintain the significance of spatiality in conceptualising love. They contend that conceptualising love as spatial enables more critical understandings of love which take into consideration the embodiments of love in "different spaces, places, configurations, blends and guises" (Morrison et al., 2012, p. 516). Namely, how love is "experienced, performed, felt and shared" in the course of daily life (Morrison et al., 2012, p. 517). This argument is essential for explorations of love among young men living in the township who, as Langa's (2008, 2010, 2016, 2020) research has demonstrated. According to Langa (2020), young men located in the South African township of Alexandra enact diverse, contested and contrasting masculinities, which move through and experience the township in different ways (I expand on this later in the chapter). Furthermore, such an approach helps extend current thinking on love and allows for "new kinds of love" to emerge, and for "more ethical relations with others" to be conceptualised (Morrison et al., 2012, p. 506). In illustrating the politics and power of love, they note how some types of love are often considered to be in place, while others are considered out of place.

Jackson (2014, p. 34) advocates for the maintenance of "a critical feminist perspective on heterosexual love while not denying that love remains meaningful for, and highly valued by, many women". I agree with Jackson in this regard. However, I extend this to specifically young black men whose lives (and loves) I explore in this study. Jackson (2014) argues that an exclusive emphasis on only one aspect of love risks denying its complexity and thus producing overdetermined accounts of heterosexual love relations. For her, explorations of love should be multidimensional, focusing on structure, meaning, practices and subjectivity (Jackson, 2014). Importantly, 'focusing on the positive' has not been taken to mean the abandoning of feminist politics. Rather, these scholars continue to actively challenge "harmful aspects of patriarchal, heterosexist and colonial concepts of care and love" in ways that encourage equitable gender relations, power, and social justice (Ferguson & Toye, 2017, p. 5).

Another defining feature of critical feminist approaches to love is that the circulations of power cannot be assumed to be configured in any specific or fixed way. From this perspective, critical feminist scholars have begun, in various ways, to inquire about 'the power of love' (Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2014; Ferguson & Toye, 2017; Gunnarsson et al., 2018; Jónasdóttir, 2011; Toye, 2010). However, taking into consideration contemporary understandings of masculinities as multiple, fluid and contingent on context and structure, it has been established that patriarchy does not serve men in the same way (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt et al., 2018). This would then mean that for some men, love was also a source of life, a reason for becoming more equitable and somewhat transgressing the requirements of patriarchy. Thus, as Lorentzen (2007, p. 193) cautions, explorations of love in men's lives would eschew imposing universal notions of love and instead focus on "understanding different relationships and situations" of love. According to Jackson (1993, p. 212):

> We create for ourselves a sense of what our emotions are, of what being 'in love' is. We do this by participating in sets of meanings that are constructed, interpreted, propagated, and deployed throughout our culture, through learning scripts, positioning ourselves within discourses, constructing narratives of the self. We make sense of feelings and relationships in terms of love because a set of discourses around love pre-exists us as individuals and [it is] through these discourses [that] we have learnt what love means.

Jackson (2014) further underscores the significance of subjectivity in the shaping of love, which she feels may only be accessed to the unpicking of the social and cultural discourses from which subjects assemble their versions of love. Jackson offers three potential avenues for the exploration of love, all of which focus on the discursive constructions of love subjectivities. First, she suggests exploring the ways individuals talk about love, which is often related to how love is represented in contemporary culture. Culture, in this sense, becomes a broader concept, encompassing culture in conventional terms but including popular culture as a fixture of capitalism (Bachen & Illouz, 1996; Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Illouz, 1997). Second, love may also be explored by engaging with its significance in the lives of lovers. This would consider how it impacts their daily actions and interactions, and the meanings it gives to activities in relationships (see Giddens, 1992). Third, she suggests mapping the social parameters of love by exploring how it is socially ordered and the material effects this social order has in the lives of love subjects.

From this we might understand how individuals create narrative as part of their daily experiences and practices, as a way of making sense of their own lives, and of the lives of

others. Implicitly and explicitly, we recount or witness the telling or performance of these narratives in the world, in our relationships and in other (homo)social spaces. Jackson (1993, p. 214) argues that "we learn to construct and reconstruct our own biographies in narrative form from a young age, and we become more adept with practice and experience". Our narratives thus bare the marks of our subjective, intersecting, social markers. Thus, love stories are inherently refracted by gender, race, age, class and geographic location. Love discursively constructs specific subject positions (Jackson, 1993). Although these narratives of romantic love may be accessed by men and women, these are not equally so; notions of women as emotionally competent and men as emotionally inept create and maintain this differential access. Furthermore, "it is important to remember the material power differences between men and women", and further between men considering other intersecting markers (Jackson, 1993, p. 217).

This highlights the importance of considering the material aspects of love, thus motivating a focus on both the material and discursive aspects of love. Factoring in the material will allow critical focus on a "taken-for-granted" aspect of love, which supports the hegemony of men (Hearn, 2004, 2014). Jackson (2014) challenges notions that may conceptualise love as a pre-existing emotion that is impervious to material forces and argues that love is contingent on the social and material conditions that precede it. Love thus occurs within specific social milieux that delimits the possible iterations of love subjectivities, thus determining the terms of being in love. Social markers such as gender, race, class, age, the law and geographic location become some of the material factors that determine what forms of love are possible. Centrally, gender relations are equally inflected by the material factors outlined above and determine the expression and experience of love (Jackson, 1993, 2014).

For Berlant (2011), love and intimacy have to be engaged in political and transformational terms. According to (Berlant, 1998) intimacy, as a particular kind of love, builds worlds and creates spaces. In line with feminist politics, Berlant was concerned with moving away from the culturally idealised notion of love, towards understanding how these worlds, spaces, and places are associated with the everyday practices of love. Namely, Berlant (1998, p. 282) is concerned with the ways that idealised "versions of intimacy meet with normative practices, fantasies, institutions and ideologies that organise people's worlds" and how these versions shape lived experiences and subjectivities. For Berlant, it is important that when engaging with love and intimacy, we also engage with the inequalities and injustices produced through public structures, institutions, and discourses, which are in turn reproduced in the private space. Thus,

people are drawn into troubled and unpredictable "institutions of intimacy" where they consent, hope, desire, place and love (Berlant, 1998). For her, the intimate thoughts, emotions and embodiment of the individual, although resilient, are corroded and corrupted by the external. Love, as both personal and political, cannot only be explored discursively. There has to be a consideration of the material realities which persist beyond idealised cultural discourses about love subjectivities. These material contexts determine what is possible, what bodies may and may not do, what they may or may not feel, and how they may or may not express these feelings. It is thus vital to consider the material and the discursive conditions within which love subjectivities are formed (Jackson, 2014). Thus, romantic relationships and friendships "inevitably meet the instabilities of sexuality, money, expectation and exhaustion, producing, at the extreme, moral dramas of estrangement and betrayal, along with terrible spectacles of neglect and violence even where desire, perhaps, endures." (Berlant, 1998, p. 281).

As outlined above, earlier texts on love mainly focused on establishing love as a legitimate area of study, and thus sought to uncover universal notions of love. Over time, key ontological shifts set in motion the emergence and recognition of shifting configurations of gender and sexual subjectivities, and these had further implications for intimacies and definitions of love (Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2014; Jackson, 1993; Stacey & Pearce, 1995). In terms of knowledge production, these ontological shifts enabled the identification and thus conceptualisations of shifting configurations of love (Illouz, 1997, 1998; Jackson, 1993, 2014; Jónasdóttir, 2011, 2014). Developments in feminist scholarship played a fundamental intellectual and political role in shaping critical engagement with understandings of gender and sexuality (Connell, 1995; Stacey & Pearce, 1995). Following Butler (1990), feminist scholars began to suggest that gender and sexuality should not be considered coherent or consistent categories and that these often intersect with other social categories such as race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and region (see also Connell, 1995). Similarly, scholars increasingly argued that conceptions and experiences of love were not universal and that these varied in line with how they intersected with other social categories (Illouz, 1997, 1998; Jackson, 1993; Lindholm, 2006).

2.3.Locating the study: Limited research on heterosexual romantic love and masculinities

The texts outlined above, although not exhaustive, feature significantly in the literature which I will engage with throughout this study, and were thus a necessary starting point for how the current study approaches love. Importantly, these texts have demonstrated that there are various

conceptualisations of love (Jackson, 2014). However, as mentioned, the key challenge of these texts is the limited focus on *lived experiences* of love, how these are relationally configured by gender discourses and sexual subjectivities. This limitation is further enhanced by the almost exclusive focus on contexts whose dynamics are far removed from the global South (Cole & Thomas, 2009). In the South African context, late modernity was coloured by the injustices of apartheid and a myriad form of racialised oppression. Not only did these injustices complicate the social conditions in which black South Africans lived, they further complicated the social conditions that determined their lived experiences of love. Evidently, the realities of love in South Africa were, and continue to be, radically different from the realities captured by most of the influential literatures covered in the previous section. There is a need to engage with recent scholarship which has attempted to uncover the realities of love and intimacy among young people in South Africa. In this section I offer a brief overview of relevant studies, both global and local, to illustrate how they have established the matter of love as an important aspect of young men's lives, and one which requires scholarly inquiry.

2.3.1. Young men's entanglements with love and performance of masculinities

Over the past two decades, it is only a handful of studies that have directly sought to explore the place of love in the lives of young men as they negotiate emerging personhoods in an ever-shifting world (Allen, 2003, 2007; Forrest, 2010; Korobov, 2009a; Korobov & Thorne, 2006; Redman, 2001). Yet, research on love and heterosexual masculinities remains scant, globally and in South Africa. Although these studies have performed the important function of highlighting the significance of researching love and intimacy in relation to masculinities, they have produced an archive that is disproportionately skewed towards white, middle-class masculinities which are mainly located in the global North (Edgley & Roberts, 2021; Forrest, 2010; Holmes, 2015; Javaid, 2019; Vogels, 2016, 2020a). Furthermore, most of these studies have focused mainly on love as a regulatory force, which further entrenches gender, class and racial inequalities (Redman, 2001; Forrest, 2010; Vogels, 2020a, 2020b), with little consideration of the ways romantic love affords young men alternative subject positions (Allen, 2007). This is even more important in the context of renewed focus on the significance of men's emotional lives and the affective influences on the ways masculinities are performed in different social and material contexts (de Boise & Hearn, 2017; Gottzén, 2019; Oliffe et al., 2022; Reeser, 2020; Rootham et al., 2015). Considering the overabundance of critical scholarship on young men and youth masculinities globally (Barker, 2005; Barker & Ricardo, 2005; Frosh et al., 2002; Ricardo et al., 2011), the overwhelming majority of these studies are

invariably informed by 'crisis discourse' which positions young men as troubled or troublesome in different spheres of social, and private, life (Barker & Ricardo, 2005; Flood, 2019; Peacock & Barker, 2014; Ricardo et al., 2011). Understandably, most of these studies are focused on how issues such as intimate partner violence and other related public health concerns are either fuelled by or conspire with gender-inequitable masculinities (Flood, 2019; Pease, 2019).

However, there is also a growing call among scholars for studies of young men that consider the discourses of crisis in relation young poor and working-class young men as "negative, pernicious and also increasingly redundant" (Roberts, 2018, p. 3). These scholars call for more nuanced and situated retellings of young peoples lived experiences in ways and modes that actively work against simplistic and marginalising ways that young men who are either black, working-class, poor or located in the global South have been conceptualised in research (Peltola & Phoenix, 2022; Roberts, 2018; Langa, 2020). These scholarly approaches that position young men in these ways remain severely limited and have mainly focused on highlighting how young masculinities are constrained and pathologised by the intersecting social inequalities that frame their lives, with little consideration of the possible capacities that might emerge. Yet, despite these sustained calls for studies that go beyond crisis, there remains a death of empirical studies on the lived realities of love and intimacy in the lives of young men, especially in the South African context.

Redman's (2001) study, for instance, conducted among young heterosexual men and explored how they grappled with new life transitions in their social and educational worlds. Drawing on an admittedly small sample (of ten participants), Redman (2001) argued that as the young men navigated these new realities, love become even more important as an orienting discourse, which enabled them to make sense of their emergent adult subjectivities and related futures. The young men drew on love discourses and practices to position themselves in relation to gender discourses. As the young men came of age, love and its related practices became more meaningful and involved more than just sex, but "greater levels of mutuality, commitment [and] intensity of emotion" (Redman, 2001, p. 190). Through the discourses and practices of love, the young men enacted relational masculinities and imagined futures which aligned with these discourses of love. Love, for the young men, had "life-shaping" implications; beyond just being a discourse with little resonance for masculinities, Redman (2001, p. 192) seemed to illustrate the increased intensity and thus significance with which love emerged in the lives of young men. Understood thus, love could not be overlooked as having little or no purchase for

young men. In this regard, even Redman's (2001) profound surprise at young men's investments in the affective and emotional aspects of their relationships speaks to the significance of exploring entanglement of love and young masculinities. Like the general crisis approach to young masculinities, which focuses on risk and deficit, he mainly expected "more predatory attitude[s] towards girls", he further noted that, among the young men, love "existed in parallel with a number of relationship practices" (Redman, 2001, p. 186). Redman's (2001) study is one of the first in critical masculinities scholarship which engaged with love and young men and demonstrated the complexities that love presents against otherwise popular notions about young men not being adept or invested love relationships.

Allen (2003, 2007) has critiqued approaches which distance romantic love from young men lives through feminising it and thus maintaining gendered binaries in studying their sexual and intimate subjectivities as overdetermined and redundant. This was clearly illustrated in Allen's (2003) study which explored 515 young people's sexual subjectivities. Contrary to common assumptions, more young men (32%) than young women (23.9%) reported love as a vital feature within a heterosexual intimate relationship (Allen, 2003). Moreover, Allen's (2003) participants challenged often taken for granted assumptions about the place of sexual and emotional intimacy in lives of young people. She further hypothesised that this unexpected divergence could be because "(hetero)relationships offer a context in which less traditional expressions" of young men's sexualities could be performed (Allen, 2003, p. 230). According to Korobov and Thorne (2006, pp 48-49), young men's discourses on love reveal the "kind[s] of romantic partners they are, what they value, what they are willing to tolerate, and what they feel they are responsible for within their relationships". These explorations of romantic relationships have served to further complicate understandings of how love is implicated in young men's daily lives, as well as how it is further implicated in the production of dominant and resistant masculinities (Allen, 2003, 2007; Forrest, 2010). Therefore, these studies demonstrate that love can no longer be assumed to be a neutralising agent for hegemonic masculinities; instead, young men could be thought of as invested in the possibilities and capacities of romantic love. Young men must simultaneously display "romantic sensitivity and hard masculinity", thus rendering "them as neither hard men nor sensitive romantics" (Allen, 2007, p. 149). These findings also emerged in other related, albeit smaller, studies.

In a small-scale study concerned with young men's serious relationships, Forrest (2010) found that his participants either perceived romantic love as either potentially detrimental or enriching to their public performances of masculinity. In line with similar studies mentioned above, the

data suggested that intimate relationships were part of young men's performance of their masculinities, and that certain performances could be linked to certain relationships. Namely, love had implications for the kinds of relationships they established as well as how they performed masculinities (Forrest, 2010). For instance, while some young men remained complicit in the production of hegemonic masculinities within their relationships, there were instances where some participants distanced themselves from these patterns. Like Allen (2007), Forrest (2010) warned that the gender work and performance of masculinities did not occur with certainty or in specific ways. It was important to further consider the "specific local and temporal" forces that shaped young men's notions of intimacy, romantic and masculinity (Forrest, 2010, p. 213). Therefore, while serious intimate relationships complicate how we understand masculinities, they are also further complicated by prevailing social discourses and material realities inform understandings of love, (hetero)sexuality and young masculinities (Forrest, 2010). An example of this was further illustrated by the different ways that the participants perceived the expression of emotions and performance acts of intimacy within their relationships.

Even though researchers have established that romantic love can expand hegemonic masculinities and thus result in various gender-inequitable discourses and practices (Korobov, 2009a, 2009b; Vogels, 2020a), there is limited understanding of the ways that love curtails gender-inequitable masculinities or produces caring practices. A handful of studies have demonstrated that for some young men expressing emotions and practicing intimacy is perceived as enriching gender performances, while for others such actions were understood as potentially detrimental to their manhood (Allen, 2003, 2007; Korobov, 2009a, 2009b; Korobov & Thorne, 2006). As a result, young men are expected to perform romantic masculinities through establishing and maintaining a balance between romantic love and hegemonic masculinities (Allen, 2007). These love-masculinity 'balancing acts' have also emerged other studies and have been argued to be symbolic of young men's expanding discursive practices of intimacy and romance (Korobov & Thorne, 2006). Furthermore, Korobov and Thorne (2006, p. 48, emphasis in original) observed that, among young men, "displays of intimacy … teeter on the edge of antinormativity, while *at the same time* being normative enough so as to be practiced". Significantly, hegemonic masculinities hybridise romantic love in ways that, at best, do not threaten then complicity and, at worst, embolden their dominance over their girlfriends and other masculinities (Allen, 2007; Korobov, 2009a).

Despite the considerable foundational knowledge established by the above studies, research has developed slowly over the decades. This slow progress and limited scholarship in this area prompted Monaghan and Robertson (2012) to advocate for more concerted efforts by researchers to understand heterosexual men's intimate and emotional lives. In a two-part review, they highlighted the urgent need for studies that offer more insights into how they negotiate issues of intimacy and performing masculinities. Specifically, they argued that "understanding heterosexual masculinities is a complex but necessary sociological venture" which will help surface the "nuances and patterns of men's emotional" lives (Robertson & Monaghan, 2012, p. 161). Taken together, these studies illustrate the importance of exploring heterosexual intimacies, namely romantic love, as more than the preserve of the private sphere. Namely, exploring how men negotiate intimate relationships, romantic love and their (hetero)sexualities has implications for how future policies and related interventions may be formulated. As the above studies demonstrate, it is important to scholar have been instrumental in extending current thinking in critical scholarship about the ways that masculinities become entangled with romantic love. These studies are significant in their attempts to highlight the growing significance of love in the lives of young men as they navigate their love relationships and challenged limited notions about boys' and men's ineptitude for love and intimacy (Allen, 2003; Forrest, 2010; Holmes, 2015; Seidler, 2007). More significantly, these studies have demonstrated that young men are not only actively engaged in establishing and maintaining their love relationships but are further invested in the emotional and affective spheres of their relationships (Allen, 2003; Forrest, 2010; de Boise and Hearn, 2017; Waling, 2019a; Vogels, 2020a). This is especially important for the South African context which has intersecting pandemics that manifest predominantly within and through intimate sexual relationships (Gibbs, Dunkle, Washington, et al., 2020).

2.3.2. Young men, love and intimate relationships in South Africa

Compared to a robust body of global literature on love (Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2014; Ferguson & Toye, 2017; Gunnarsson et al., 2018; hooks, 2000; Illouz, 1997, 2012; Jackson, 1993, 1995; Johnson, 2005), similar studies in Africa and specifically in South Africa, are woefully scant (Bhana, 2013b, 2018; Cole & Thomas, 2009; Hunter, 2010). Unlike most gender and sexuality scholarship, which sidelines love in the African context, these studies have foregrounded love as a key component of understanding social worlds and gaining insights into multiple realities. In line with this, Cole and Thomas (2009, p. 29) challenge this oversight and remind us that explorations of love in African contexts should meaningfully

engage with the "tangled, multi-layered histories through which they emerged". They further critique perspectives that produce reductive readings of love in scholarship in Africa and advocated for a more expansive conceptualisation of love and related modes of attachment. In addition to being critical of the essentialising tendencies that turn to sex, (hetero)sexual behaviours and social institutions as indicators of love in the African context, they further called for meaningful engagement of "contemporary discourses, sentiments and practices" (Cole & Thomas, 2009, p. 4). For them, intimacies and desires in the African context should never be reduced to sex, nor should a study purporting to explore love overlook the intersecting sociohistorical processes that frame daily practices and experiences of love (Cole & Thomas, 2009, p. 29). Similarly, Hunter (2010) argued against de-historicised and reductive tropes, which undermined critical understandings of contemporary experiences of love as located in within a range of social processes in diverse social contexts. Relatedly, Bhana (2013a, p. 6) has also averred that the reduction of love to "a bond of inequality simplifies relations of intimacy and ignores the possibilities of tenderness and agency" that exist despite the 'dangers of love'. Without denying the presence of the pandemics that continue frame experiences of love in South Africa, these authors have argued for a different approach to love, one that centres love as a phenomenon, that traces the intensities, feelings and emotions that circulate. Most significant about the arguments advanced by these scholars are their approaches of love as an analytic framework, which enables them to engage with the contextual discourses and practices that shape meanings and experiences of love.

Studies on love among young people are not new in the South African context, although they remain considerably low. Focusing on love enables this study to traverse several aspects of gender and sexualities research that South African scholars have proffered over the last three decades. Starting in the early 90s, normative heterosexual relationships among young people have been the focus of much concern in terms of public health research, policy and social justice interventions (Shefer and Hearn, 2022; Shefer et al., 2018). Throughout these decades, there have been overarching crises which have, and continue to, variously take centre stage as the crises against which the intersecting (hetero)sexual and gendered lives of young South Africans have been read. Namely, these can be broadly themed as post-apartheid realities and youth subjectivities (Laubscher, 2013; Seekings, 2000); the onset and proliferation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which revealed that vulnerabilities were mapped onto the intersecting social challenges such as gender-based violence and intimate partner violence (Bhana &

Pattman, 2009; Jewkes et al., 2003; Jewkes et al., 2010; Selikow, 2004; Brown et al., 2005; Zembe et al., 2015).

Perhaps because of researchers' exploration of local dynamics driving HIV incidence, love among young people in South Africa remains within the realm of danger and risk, as researchers sought to explore matters pertaining to HIV incidence in the country. In line with this, recent studies that have explored the (hetero)sexual and intimate lives of young people have highlighted the complex ways in which power circulates between young men and their girlfriends (Graham & Mphaphuli, 2018; Mphaphuli, 2015; Gibbs et al., 2022; Willan et al., 2019). According to these studies, gender-inequitable dynamics and behaviours are almost always due to precarity or low socioeconomic status which makes money, or lack thereof, an important aspect of intimacy (Bhana, 2018). Social expectations of men to provide, as demonstrated by concept of 'provider masculinity' (Hunter, 2010) further reveal the pressures young men experience in being expected to fulfil the provider (of money) role within their intimate relationships (Nasser El-Dine, 2018). As scholars exploring love in South Africa have demonstrated (Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Hunter, 2010; Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013) there definitely are connections between money, love and intimacy, however the links that some studies establish between these two require more critical application. As Hunter (2010) has warned, such relationships require more critical analysis that looks beyond perceived 'transactions' and takes seriously the contextual components that necessitate and sustain such exchanges. Bhana (2018, p. 148) has also gestured towards the "complex entanglements" of money and love in the lives of young people who must simultaneously navigate love and socioeconomic disadvantage. Thus, these studies highlight the importance of moving beyond conventional perceptions which essentialise young people and the social realities that shape their daily lives. In this study I argue that the love-money connection does not always result in young men dominating their girlfriends and aim to highlight alternative possibilities.

Globally, researchers have further outlined the various performances of heterosexual masculinities that emerge in the context of romantic relationships (Javaid, 2019; Nasser El-Dine, 2018; Vogels, 2020a, 2020b). Taken together, these studies have demonstrated the importance and utility of studies that surface situated understandings of young men's subjectivities in their relationships. In South Africa, for instance, there remains a significant gap in the ways that research engages with young black men in romantic relationships. This realisation has led to scholars in youth sexualities highlighting the need for more complex constructions which reflect the diversity of experiences among young people (Bhana, 2014,

2018). In the South African context, although scholars have established the significance of practices such as *ukushela* and *ukuqoma* (cultural and gendered love practices which I address in Chapter 6) significantly frame the power dynamics and capacities within the romantic relationship (Harrison, 2008; Zibane, 2021), young women's vulnerability. Furthermore, these studies have emphasised the importance understanding how young men's subjectivities shape and are shaped by their involvement in (hetero)sexual intimate relationships. However, it is worth noting that recently there has been a gradual upsurge in studies which directly explore romantic love, intimate relationships and heterosexual masculinities (Malinga & Ratele, 2016, 2018; Manyaapelo et al., 2019). These findings are further corroborated by South African studies that have hinted at the importance of love in young men's lives, albeit these remain considerably limited (Bhana, 2018; Malinga & Ratele, 2012, 2016, 2018). However, despite these incisive findings provided by these studies, there remains a gap in our understanding of how romantic love and heterosexual masculinities are entangled in young men's daily lives. There is an urgent need of studies that illustrate, in nuanced and multifaceted ways, how young men in the global South negotiate their heterosexual masculine subjectivities. Therefore, love, conceptualised as a transformative and productive force, has the potential surface these otherwise overlooked understandings.

2.4.Conclusion

This study is interested in the masculinities that are taken up or performed among young black men living (and loving) in a township. There are several axes of power that derive from the multiple social markers that emerge within the township space. Townships are environments that bare the legacy of apartheid policies and reflect the social and economic shifts brought about by neoliberal South Africa. Thus, young men in these spaces are likely the best reflection of fluid and contextualised masculinities. These are individuals who are marked in their communities as boys, young men, some good and some bad, still in school and, regardless of age, as children of the community. On top of these social markers, class status is also a factor in the lives of these young men and introduces another aspect of intra-township variability. Some parents or family members are employed and can support the young men, and for others the situation is different. All these experiences significantly shape the subjectivities of young men. Love, especially the love of young black men, is so rarely explored. Yet, as scholars have consistently demonstrated, it not only exists, but it is also an integral part of their daily lives. However, most of these studies have been epistemologically limited by their reliance on social constructivist theorising, which is rooted in modernist thought. Considering that the field of

Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities is positioned as a pro-feminist offshoot of feminist thought, this tendency has been increasingly critiqued for its tenuous links to feminist thought, practices, and politics.

CHAPTER THREE

Towards understanding of how young black men negotiate masculinities: A theoretical framework

3.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that inform the analysis of this study. Principally, this study is located within the subfield of critical studies of men and masculinities (CSMM), which draws mainly from the feminist principles which challenge gender inequality and oppression (Connell, 1987; Hearn, 2019). Generally, CSMM problematises heteronormativity and patriarchal notions which naturalise men's dominance and power over women and agitates for transformed gender relations based on equality. Drawing on feminist scholarship, CSMM challenges simplistic understandings and popular assumptions of gender as biological and fixed. Drawing on Connell's (1987, 2000) conceptualisation of masculinities, it has been established that men's subject positions in the world are multiple, contextual and contested, determined by structural markers such as race, age, sexuality, class and nationality. Approaching masculinities from this perspective, this study did not presuppose the positions of the young men but sought to explore which structural markers were most prominent in their lives and how they shaped their daily experiences in relation to love.

In this study, I was interested in how these structural markers manifested in the lives of the participants and how they expanded or constricted their experiences and expressions of love. While I certainly do not negate the prevalence of intimate partner and gender violence in South Africa (Jewkes et al., 2003; Jewkes et al., 2010; Zembe et al., 2015), my study challenges the exclusive focus on violence relating to young black men and sets out to uncover other-than-violent performances of black masculinities. Thus, in exploring young black men's negotiations of love, the project was interested in how the participants' subjectivities interfaced with the experiences of negotiating love and what these negotiations looked and felt like for the young men.

3.2. Towards an ecology of knowledges: Theoretical paradigms that inform this study

Contemporary masculinities are profoundly shaped by South Africa's intersecting histories of colonialism and apartheid (Ratele, 2018; Rustin, 2018; Shefer, 2021). In understanding this, scholars have intimated that gender subjectivities in post-colonies, as in South Africa, should

be informed by epistemologies which address these realities and related lived experiences (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2021; Beasley, 2008; Boonzaier et al., 2020; Lykke, 2010; Morrell, 2016). This is an instructive notion, considering this study's interest in the experiences of young black men whose lives are framed by postcolonial and post-apartheid realities. I contend that these young men, like many others living in the global South, are variously engaged in the daily struggles for better lives and better worlds and it is these aspirations that inform their navigations of daily socio-political inequalities (de Sousa Santos & Meneses, 2020). In this regard, they call for alternative ontological and epistemological approaches that aim to give a critical appraisal of all the ways that the oppressed struggle against legacies of oppression. Furthermore, de Sousa Santos and Meneses (2020) have acknowledged capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and related institutional vestiges of power as key forces of contemporary oppression within the global South. In this regard, they advocate for knowledge that traces the contours of these oppressions and actively agitates for social justice. However, in articulating these injustices, it remains important to trace the forms that these oppressions take and how they variously conspire with markers of subjectivity to marginalise and silence individuals or communities (Rustin, 2018). In light of this, this study aimed to generate new understandings of the participants through a situated exploration of their experiences, resisting the uncritical application of notions and approaches from the global North (Lewis & Gabeba, 2021; Mfecane, 2018; Ratele, 2018; Shefer, 2021). I thus drew from critical feminist, postcolonial feminist and pro-feminist concepts to weave this study's conceptual framework.

When undertaking this study, I was concerned about the limited knowledge and insights available on young black masculinities and their navigations of love and life beyond the intimacies of violence and disease. I was interested in exploring the intimacies that love affords young men in their daily lives and the progressive possibilities that might emerge in the contexts of these love relations. Thus, in engaging with love, I also drew from a growing critical feminist and transdisciplinary scholarship on love which challenges limited notions of love as a naturally occurring emotion that is felt within (Ahmed, 2014; hooks, 2000, 2004; Jackson, 1993; Jónasdóttir, 2011; Morrison et al., 2012). For these scholars, love is not only explored as a site for the operationalisation of gendered intimacies and (hetero)sexualities, as has been in done other studies (de Beauvoir, 1956; Giddens, 1992; Johnson, 2005). Rather, love is approached as a productive force which increases the abilities of bodies to act against inequality and oppression (Jónasdóttir, 2011; Lanas & Zembylas, 2015; Toye, 2010), and as a radical site that offers men and masculinities opportunities for healing and transformation (hooks, 2000,

2004). Similarly, CSMM is concerned with political and ethical engagement to explore the possibilities and capacities for transforming masculinities towards equity and nonviolence (Flood, 2015, 2019; Lorentzen, 2007; Seidler, 2006, 2007). These subfields enabled me to employ a critical lens approach to the participants' lived experiences as intersectional, contingent and fragmented. Exploring the role and impact of love in the lives of the young men I collaborated with in this study revealed how their capacities, choices or actions could either be enabled or inhibited by the salient aspects of their lived experiences (Bhana, 2018).

3.3. Navigating the ecologies of masculinities studies

In this section, I engage with the salient concept used to theorise masculinities, namely hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1987, 2000, 2005), which not only has been taken up widely in global critical masculinities scholarship (Allen, 2007; Beasley, 2012, 2013; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gibbs et al., 2015; Hasan et al., 2019; Messerschmidt et al., 2018; Vogels, 2019, 2020b; Wedgwood, 2009), but retains considerable influence in South African masculinities research (Bhana & Mayeza, 2019; Hodes & Gittings, 2019; Jewkes et al., 2015; Jewkes & Morrell, 2018; Morrell, 2020; Stern et al., 2015). I trace the development of Connell's framework and consider its epistemic purchase in relation to contemporary South African masculinities generally, and in relation to the young men who are the focus of this study. As the relationship between love and masculinities has been minimally explored in the South African context, this treatment of Connell's framework will be guided by a focus on the concepts that best elucidate the role of love in the lives of young men. I begin with masculinity as a central concept relevant to the study. I explore how young men negotiate their masculinities within and in relation to their love relationships. In doing so, I am concerned with challenging stereotypical notions about young black men that dominate the literature.

3.3.1. Gender and social structure: Approaching masculinities as socially constructed

"Gender is a social practice that [constantly] refers to bodies and what bodies do, as opposed to practice being reduced to the body" (Connell, 2000, p. 27). The inception of Connell's framework was motivated by the need for more politically inflected social theories of gender that problematised what seemed to be men's presumed dominance over women. Connell (1987) found approaches that conceptualised gender as determined by biology to be inadequate; she challenged sociobiological understandings of gender which grounded the social in the biological and which linked the attributes of being women to the female anatomy or being men to the male anatomy. Echoing de Beauvoir's (1956, p. 608) famed quote, "One

is not born, but rather becomes a woman", Connell (1987, p. 78) argued that "the social is radically unnatural". For Connell (2000, p. 18), gender is "profoundly social" and it cannot be limited to individual traits which are "somehow connected to bodily difference". Instead, she establishes gender as "a complex and powerfully effective domain of social practice", and it is through these social processes that sexed bodies practice bodily differences. Connell established that 'men are not born', rather they are socially constructed in contextual and fluid ways (Morrell, 1998a). Thus, to speak of men and women, and of masculinities and femininities, is to name patterns of embodied gender practices (Connell, 2000, p. 28).

This perspective has also been influential in studies that have explored love and related intimacies in the lives of young men, as most have approached masculinities as socially constructed, multiple, contextual and always in flux (Allen, 2007; Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Forrest, 2010; Korobov, 2009a, 2009b; Malinga & Ratele, 2016; Monaghan & Robertson, 2012; Nasser El-Dine, 2018; Patulny et al., 2017; Redman, 2001; Schmidt-Sane, 2021; Vincent & Chiwandire, 2013). In this study, masculinity is approached as a reference to male bodies and what male bodies do but may not be automatically associated with the male body. This was particularly relevant to the study as exploring masculinities was not just about working with males, but about understanding how their daily actions and interactions were shaped by society. Thus, I approached the young men in this study with the understanding that their masculinities were produced and enacted socially. Rather than assume that fixed forms of masculinity would emerge because they were young males, I focused on how their practices and behaviours were underpinned by pervasive social and cultural discourses. These social and cultural discourses revealed ways that the prevalent structures configured the socially recognised masculinities among the participants (Connell, 2000). However, masculinities are more complex, occurring individually, collectively and structurally (Morrell, 2001).

From this perspective, masculinity is a positioning within gender relations which necessitates and enables certain practices and embodiments by boys and men in ways that govern their daily, lived experiences (Connell, 2005, p. 71). Thus, masculinity could not be assumed to be innately performed by male sexed bodies, but it is produced through social structures and processes which determine what bodies may or not may not do (Connell, 2005, p. 71). However, Connell maintains that the gendered social practices that bodies perform are not random, isolated actions. Instead, these are ongoing "gender projects" which are implicated in "processes of configuring practice through time… transform[ing] their starting points in gender structures" (Connell, 2005, p. 72). From this perspective, being a man cannot with certainty be

assumed to allude to a particular way of being. Rather, each individual's subjectivity is produced by social structures and processes.

Importantly, masculinities are actively produced and negotiated by the bodies they refer to (Connell, 2000). While an individual may accept or reproduce a particular pattern of masculinity, they may also modify, confront or contest particular forms of masculinity (Connell, 2000, p. 30). This has also been noted in South African masculinities research (Langa, 2020; Morrell, 2001; Shefer et al., 2007). In the context of the complex social and political structures, which simultaneously shape masculinities at individual, social and institutional levels, masculinities employ different strategies either in line with or against the structural tensions (Morrell, 2001, p. 26). This aligns with Connell's framework, which locates masculinities within complex and often contradictory social processes, thus prompting active navigation and negotiation as individuals interact with others, and with structures and institutions (Connell, 2000; Morrell, 2001). The process of taking up a particular subject position is a complex and active negotiation of multiple social relationships (Connell, 2000, p. 30). Because masculinity is a configuration of social practice, it exists independently of any individual, as a subject position. The individual can either occupy this subject position or confront and even contest it (Connell, 2000, p. 30). However, the subject position is not always at extremes; an individual may challenge certain aspects while generally accepting others. This is, of course, in relation to how other social structures converge with the individual's subject position and embodiment. It is the interplay between personal life, social structure and embodied navigations that facilitate the complex processes through which masculinities are actively negotiated in social relationships, institutions and spaces (Connell, 2000, p. 31). This conceptualisation led to the identification of multiple masculinities; namely, hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, marginalised and protest masculinities. I unpack these concepts in the next section and illustrate how they relate to my study.

3.3.2. Gender relations of power: Masculinities as plural and hierarchical

Central to the task of tracing the contours of masculinities is the imperative of understanding the processes that produce hierarchies and inequalities within gender relations (Morrell, 1998a). How masculinities are operationalised in daily interactions and how they may change over time is determined by these structures and intersubjectivities. Significantly, masculinities are thus conceptualised as configurations of practice accomplished through social action, differing according to the social context and gender relations (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005,

p. 836). In focusing on how gender relations are configured, Connell (1987) sought to give a more nuanced account of the dimensions that produced power and domination. Most significantly, this approach opposed the blanket approach that assumed all men equally benefit from and are protected by patriarchy. Thus, the identification of multiple masculinities acknowledged that even within the sexual category that designated males as men, there is still diversity, complexity and contestation. Connell's (1987, 2000) framework put forward hegemonic masculinity as a position within the gender order that is produced in relation to emphasised femininity and other nonhegemonic masculinities (Messerschmidt & Messner, 2018). Significantly, these patterns are not produced or sustained in isolation but within intricately entangled social structures that frame masculinities as gender practices. Because of the variability of structures across the globe, regionally and locally, Connell (2000) acknowledges that there is no one form of masculinity and instead there are multiple masculinities, in line with the gender relations produced by prevalent social structures. Moreover, these same structures prevent these masculinities from "sit[ting] side-by-side like dishes on a smorgasbord" (Connell, 2000, p. 10). Instead, masculinities are produced in relation to each other in line with the interplay of social structures, which determine the relations of power; namely, masculinities could either be termed hegemonic, subordinate, complicit, marginal or protest (Connell, 2000). However, having noted the fluidity and contingency of gender subjectivities, hegemonic masculinities are further complicated by the diversely intersecting structures of race and class, depending on social context (Connell, 2005, p. 76). These complexities are widely apparent in South African masculinities studies, which have demonstrated "a highly complex mix of… race, class, geographical location" (Morrell, 1998a, p. 630) and additional factors such as sexuality, which significantly impact the deployment of one's subjectivity, thus further complicating processes of establishing and achieving hegemony (Morrell et al., 2013; Shefer et al., 2007). I return to this latter point in the proceeding sections of this chapter.

For Connell (2005, p. 77), hegemonic masculinity refers to a "configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy [and] guarantees" the designated group's superiority over women and other nonhegemonic men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt & Messner, 2018). Defined by relative social and material orientations towards hegemonic masculinities, the realm of nonhegemonic masculinities is itself hierarchical, with some configurations either closer to or further from the hegemonic ideal than others. Complicit masculinities refer to a broader category of men who,

while they do not measure up to the ideals associated with hegemony, actively subscribe to and promote hegemonic masculinities. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have also asserted that men who enact complicit masculinities receive the benefits of hegemonic masculinities without doing the work of hegemony. Marginalised masculinities refer to the "interplay of gender with other structures" which further complicate the relationships between masculinities (Connell, 2005, p. 80). Messerschmidt and Messner (2018, p. 38) also observe that these masculinities are often "trivialised or discriminated against because of unequal relations" in terms of "race, class, ethnicity and age". Furthermore, as direct responses to the powerlessness of being marginalised, protest masculinities may emerge through demonstrations of force and violence (Connell, 2005). These are often forceful demands for the respect and benefits that would typically accrue to hegemonic masculinities through consent (Groes-Green, 2009). In strong contrast to the normative and exalted hegemonic masculinities are subordinate masculinities, which are typically defined by their inability to realise any of the legitimising practices of hegemonic masculinity. Because of this, subordinated masculinities are "constructed as lesser than or aberrant from and deviant to" hegemonic masculinities (Messerschmidt & Messner, 2018, p. 38). Globally, scholars found these conceptualisations useful in exploring the gendered nature of power and inequality in diverse contexts and spheres. Furthermore, as researchers in different social and cultural contexts undertook close empirical engagement with local relations that produced masculinities, continuities and fractures emerged in how the theory had been taken up. Essentially, hegemonic masculinities could not account for all men's lived experiences. In response to some of the critiques, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 854) conceded to some of the contestations and rejected any notions of hegemonic masculinities as "a fixed character type, or an assemblage of toxic traits". Following this reformulation, internationally and locally, scholars have convincingly demonstrated the value of the theory of hegemonic masculinities as a lens with which to understand the gender relations that produce or maintain gender inequitable masculinities and have used this to advocate for transformative interventions (Gibbs et al., 2015; Kato-Wallace et al., 2016; Peacock & Barker, 2014; Shefer et al., 2015).

Connell's (1987, 2000) work thus proved useful in understanding how masculinities could be conceptualised and analysed in relation to men's power and dominance over women, as well as other groups of men. My study leverages the insights demonstrated by earlier studies on masculinities in South Africa. Drawing on this understanding, my study sought to explore how masculine subjectivities were negotiated within heterosexual love relationships by young black

men. Therefore, the young men who participated in this study were not essentialised, nor were their masculine subjectivities thought to emanate from their maleness. Rather, this study sought to engage with their daily experiences in ways that enabled them to narrate, explain and demonstrate their perspectives. This was also particularly significant in considering aspects such as age, culture, race, locale and language. While biological sex was certainly a significant aspect of their gender positions, it was not the main axis on which their subjectivities revolved. This framework not only recognises gender as a social structure which configures individual gender projects, it further recognises the multiple sites through which gender projects are configured (Connell 1987, 2000). It is through the articulation of these sites of gender relations that Connell's framework offers insights that extend beyond essentialist notions of gender and sexuality, which otherwise ground masculinity, (hetero)sexuality, patriarchal advantage and related behaviours in male biology. Connell's work is thus helpful as a starting point because of how she has theorised masculinities and how South African studies have engaged with her concepts on masculinities. In an interview with Wedgwood (2009, p. 333), Connell explains that theorising masculinities was about "showing how patterns of gender relations work and change". Connell (2000, 2005) puts forward a framework that locates masculinity within a broader gender order, demonstrating that gender subjectivities are realised and enacted within the contexts of structures and are subject to change over time. Through this framework, Connell (2005, p. 71) emphasises the importance of "the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives".

However, notwithstanding the theory's considerable impact within CSMM, some critiques have persisted. Namely, gender scholars have critiqued the theory's structural emphasis as being out of step with feminist theorising, which emphasises poststructuralist approaches (Beasley, 2012, 2013, 2015). Arguably, given the vast and everchanging worlds produced by postmodern factors, this has limited the scope of Connell's framework. Unlike Connell's structural theory, poststructural feminist epistemologies centre the significance of gender performance (Butler, 1986, 1990), embodiment (Aboim et al., 2018; Chadwick, 2017; Lykke, 2010), lived experience (Ahmed, 2006; Berggren, 2014; Butler, 1988; Chadwick, 2020) and intersectionality (Byrne, 2020; Lewis & Gabeba, 2021; Lugones, 2010; Shefer, 2019) as significant aspects of subjectivity. These critiques have influenced my conceptualisation and analysis of my participants' experiences. These critiques also decidedly demonstrate that, collectively, critical scholarship on men and masculinities should not be presumed to indicate tacit political and theoretical alignment with feminist politics (Hearn, 2014, p. 5). Rather, the

personal, political and theoretical tensions must be duly unpacked to facilitate the transformation of masculinities (Hearn, 2019).

3.4. Contemporary critiques of hegemonic masculinities within CSMM

3.4.1. CSMM, feminist theory and practice

More recently, poststructuralist feminist scholars have critiqued Connell's theory for its structural focus, which is perceived as out of step with contemporary gender theories (Beasley, 2012, 2013; de Boise & Hearn, 2017; Papadelos et al., 2023). Significantly, while scholars concede that Connell's framework does retain utility for how researchers explore and understand masculinities, they have also problematised its sustained structuralist leanings, thus characterising it as an 'elephant in the room' or 'the odd man out' (Beasley, 2012; Gottzén, 2018). Furthermore, while Connell's attempt to break away from normative structuralist thought is acknowledged, the sentiments of her critics suggest that her framework does not fully commit to poststructural thought. A key drawback to this epistemic position is the sustained separation of structure and subject. To demonstrate the ingenuity of poststructuralist thought, Beasley helpfully moves away from the top-down, mind-body examples of the structuralist paradigm and uses a continuum to illustrate the position of Connell's work and those who continue to use it. Most notably, by placing it in a continuum she concedes that the framework retains some utility. However, the further away it is from contemporary poststructuralist feminist thought, the further away it is from the ultimate goal – gender transformation and equality. Thus, Beasley (2012) argues that this ambivalence positions the theory of hegemonic masculinity, and by extension CSMM, as a weak structuralist and a weak poststructuralist approach. Importantly, she does not conceptualise structuralist and poststructuralist thought as mutually exclusive, rather these are in a continuum. The main warning here is that such epistemic ambivalence results in a muddled 'sticking together' of theoretical tools, which results in conceptual tensions and contradictions that compromise the field's pro-feminist objectives (Beasley, 2015, p. 575). To overcome these disjunctures, she calls for thoughtful engagement and consideration of the implications for theory and practice (Beasley, 2012, p. 760). This means that engaging with poststructural thought is not a ceremonial gesturing to Butler or Foucault, but requires serious rethinking of what key terms mean in a postmodernist context. This logic also holds for CSMM and ceremonial gesturing to Connell's framework; instead, commonly employed concepts have to be de/constructed and qualified in line with poststructuralist feminist thought.

Similarly, Jackson (2018) adds more complexity to structuralist thought in a way that moves her closer to the imperatives of contemporary feminist thought. Jackson (2018) contends that there is a need for a degree of theoretical and methodological eclecticism in order to appreciate all aspects of the social. For Jackson (2018, p. 139), the social structural analysis still maintains some purchase and remains "vital to understanding the many inequalities and oppressions that exist globally". However, she warns that it must be supplemented with other forms of analysis to sufficiently engage with the complexities of gender and sexuality. In observing the strong structural link between the gender order and (hetero)sexuality, Jackson (2018, p. 152) further concedes that this strong link does not "determine other points of connection within other dimensions of the social". Within heterosexual relationships, love (including emotions and intimacy) becomes a 'point of connection' that requires going beyond the structural scope of cathexis (which emphasises embodiment). We cannot deduce from structural arrangement how individuals practice (hetero)sexualities, their meanings, or how they shape subjectivities (Jackson, 2018). In line with this perspective, I argue that in exploring the meanings and experiences of love in the context of heterosexual relationships, marked by contextual idiosyncrasies, it is vital to go beyond Connell's corpus.

For Beasley (2008), the theoretical limitations within the subfield of men and masculinities have research and political implications, especially in relation to transforming masculinities. She problematises the conceptual dissonance, the haphazard 'sticking together' of modernist and postmodernist terms, in the study of men and masculinities, which has the potential to undermine the social justice project (Beasley, 2012). Perhaps reflective of her own political positionality, she conceptualises modernist and postmodernist thought as located on a continuum opposed to discreet categories. With this, she concedes it is possible and necessary in particular instances to combine theoretical tools. However, she warns that such a process should be carefully considered. Feminist poststructuralist scholars have called for the foregrounding of situated, decolonial and intersectional approaches (Berggren, 2014; Boonzaier et al., 2020; Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2020; Byrne, 2020; Lugones, 2010; Ratele, 2013, 2021). It is also worth noting that the modernist underpinnings of Connell's framework, which mainly focused on the structural production of power, were seen as critics were also increasingly upended by the challenges introduced by postmodern realities which prompted the postmodernist-attuned responses of scholars in the critical feminist, decolonial and queer traditions (Ahmed, 2004b; Beasley, 2012; Berggren, 2014; Butler, 1990; Lugones, 2010). A central feature of these shifts was the overall challenge to binary thinking which had sustained

separations such as man/woman, mind/body, reason/emotion, public/private and material/discursive.

In this vein, Hearn (2014, p. 9) advocates for the destabilisation of gender identities through naming categories as a way of deconstructing them. He gives an example of how conducting a study at a 'girls' school would make it difficult to not name the gender category, despite the aim being to interrogate and unsettle gender categories and related identities. In considering practice in the context of prevention interventions, naming gender categories would be most effective when considering social determinants, who the vulnerable populations are and how broader social responses can be shaped (Beasley, 2015, p. 576). From this perspective, consideration must be given to the political significance of using gender identity categories. Therefore, the critical component of studying men and masculinities finds context in postmodernist feminist thought. As Hearn (2019, p. 54) has recently opined, the critical study on men and masculinities "should not be considered a neat or coherent field but rather a messy and fragmented subfield of feminist, gender, and women's studies". This is yet another call for realigning CSMM with feminist scholarship.

3.4.2. CSMM, hegemony, discourse and embodiment

Messerschmidt (2018, p. 107) defines hegemonic masculinities as "configurations of social practice that produce simultaneously particular social relations and social meanings, [which determine] what is acceptable and unacceptable gendered behaviour". In addition to maintaining the framework's utility, Messerschmidt (2018, p. 77) has further offered some conceptual depth to the theory in order to highlight the fluidity of masculinities and their movement between and beyond the subject positions put forward by Connell. Messerschmidt (2018, p. 77) argues that hegemonic masculinities "are contingent and haphazard as well as provisional and temporary". This extends Connell's framework to alternative possibilities within hegemonic and nonhegemonic subjectivities. For example, Messerschmidt (2018) differentiates between hegemonic masculinities and dominant masculinities, clarifying that these should not be considered interchangeable terms. Hegemonic masculinities are those that actively legitimate unequal power relations through materially and discursively embodying the socially sanctioned ideals of masculinity, whereas dominant masculinities are those that are "the most celebrated, common, widespread, or current form of masculinity in a social setting" (Messerschmidt, 2018, pp. 75-76). This distinction is important because it demonstrates that 'dominant' does not mean 'hegemonic', which means that the most common masculinity

would not necessarily be working to maintain power and dominance over others; furthermore, hegemony is not taken to be a negative archetype of violence and force (see also Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, Messerschmidt (2018) provides another important qualification; hegemonic masculinities may also be fleeting, meaning that dominant masculinities are capable of momentarily enacting hegemonic (oppressive/marginalising) masculinities in specific contexts or spaces, for specific purposes. In this regard, he makes an example of young men who, in particular circumstances/contexts such as being in school, might bully those who are perceived as embodying subordinate (race or class) or marginalised (feminised, homosexual) masculinities for specific purposes which would not have much salience beyond the circumstance or context. Messerschmidt's treatise on hegemonic masculinities concepts speaks to the need to refine further Connell's framework within this study, which takes seriously the postcolonial realities that frame the lives of young black men and require critical examination beyond static taxonomies.

Like Beasley (2015), Hearn (2004) acknowledges the profound impact of Connell's framework but advocates for a poststructuralist analysis which engages with the complexities of hegemony. He feels that in order to go beyond a focus on the competing configurations of masculinities, it is important "to subject concepts to scrutiny in their changing historical" (and epistemic) contexts (Hearn, 2004, p. 59). In light of this, he advocates for "a shift in focus from *masculinity* to *men,* namely from hegemonic masculinities to the hegemony of men" (Hearn, 2004, emphasis in original). He arrives at the argument through what he considered to be a more nuanced treatment of Gramsci's concept of hegemony in comparison to Connell's approach. For Connell (1995, p. 77), the concept of hegemony "refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life". However, for Hearn (2004, p. 53), the concept of hegemony refers to "overarching ideologies at the level of the everyday, taken-for-granted ideas and practices performed 'with consent', 'without coercion'". While both scholars seem to agree on hegemony being the dominance of a particular group, Hearn (2004, p. 54) goes further to consider how dominance, control and active consent are produced. In this vein, scholars are encouraged to explore "that which is taken-for-granted about the categorisations of and constructions of men" (Hearn, 2004, p. 59). Such a focus goes beyond identifying plural (and hegemonic) masculinities and dissects the 'building blocks' of hegemony, that position men as a gender class and individual actors. The implication of this is "to address the double complexity that emerges from men being a dominant gender category formed by a gender system and individual agents of social practices" (Hearn, 2004, p. 59).

Thus, focusing on the hegemony of men puts men's dominance and class status up for scrutiny. Key in this perspective is not only an interrogation of the processes and actors that produce domination, control and consent, but also the opportunity to challenge and destabilise these processes and actors.

In seeking to further align with a poststructuralist feminist approach, Hearn (2004, 2014) favours the destabilisation of men's gender category and contingent identities. For him, the notion of hegemonic masculinities has itself become hegemonic in the study of men and masculinities and is limited in its ability to deconstruct gender and gender relations (Hearn, 2014, p. 10). To remedy this, a stronger poststructural approach is more likely to yield greater insights than attempts to impose a single, structuralist 'grand' theory. The "double complexity" suggests the significance of not only engaging with masculinities discursively, but further considering the material ways through which the hegemony of men and masculinities is operationalised in the world. He prompts an understanding of society that engages with social processes from a poststructural perspective which seeks to destabilise and challenge the practices that uphold the status quo. I argue that exploring love in the lives of young men provides this opportunity. Although there is limited research that specifically explores love among young black men in South Africa (Malinga & Ratele, 2012; Manyaapelo et al., 2019), there is a considerable body of work that explores love among young people (Bhana, 2018; Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Harrison, 2008; Mudaly, 2013; Willan et al., 2019). Significantly, while these studies identify material conditions as significant aspects of love and gendered subjectivities, there remains a dearth of studies which seek to engage with both the material and discursive realities among young black men.

For Hearn (2014, p. 13), researching and theorising men and masculinities requires a plural, composite material-discursive approach that will simultaneously locate men as material *and* discursive bodies [my emphasis]. The poststructuralist project represents an engagement between the material and the discursive which has implications for how we ought to engage with the hegemony of men (Hearn, 2004, 2014). What he is trying to demonstrate is that the material and discursive are not necessarily mutually exclusive, particularly in the subjective realities of men. Rather, the material and the discursive are mutually constructive. According to Hearn (2014, p. 6), poststructural perspectives may be seen as expansions of materialism rather than antithetical critiques, especially in relation to "multiple social divisions, multiple oppressions and intersectionalities". Thus, for Hearn (2014, p. 12) a material-discursive approach to the studying and theorising of men would yield more complex accounts of not just

masculine bodies, but of being masculine, performing bodies. To this end, his suggestion is to simultaneously address the relations of the phenomenological body in being men, the material body and the discursive body. Importantly, he acknowledges that this would work differently for different occurrences of bodies, as each would require different ways of making sense. A material-discursive perspective is especially relevant for studying and theorising about young black men and their negotiation of love in a South African township. In this instance, not just their material bodies matter but also their discursive bodies. Thus, the "situated knowledges" that this study seeks to explore will be key to understanding the complexities (Javaid, 2019) of relations between young black men as a gender class and the differences between them (Hearn, 2014, p. 13). Their subjectivities are the key bases of knowledge (Hearn, 2014).

For this study, the feminist poststructural approaches enable me to conceptualise gender, sexuality, love and other subjectivities that are inextricably linked. As such, the ways in which young men negotiate their masculinities and their love subjectivities may best be understood through a material-discursive lens. Beyond Hearn's double complexity, I conceptualise the young men's experiences of negotiating love within a township context, further adding to this complexity. They have to negotiate their masculinities in varying contexts, such as at home, in the community, among peers and at school, and they also must negotiate their intimate relationships in relation to the same contexts, such as the complex process of *ukushela,* a courting practice where a young man is in active pursuit of a young woman's love (Mvune et al., 2019; Zibane, 2021). For the young men in this study, this process took on a deeper meaning as the process of ukushela and its outcomes (acceptance or rejection) can be experienced as either stabilising or destabilising the masculinities. Throughout my fieldwork, the young men also spoke at length about the significance of space and place in relation to other activities they considered as significant to their masculinity, which often overlapped with how they established or maintained their relationships. For example, some relationships had been established at school, others during their walk to or from the soccer fields and others at the local tuckshop. Thus, their movement about the township was significant. In the process of these negotiations, there are various discourses, emotions and other embodied experiences that the young men must further navigate. Through a materialist analysis, this study seeks to make sense of these moments and experiences and to consider how such events either stabilise or destabilise masculine subjectivities (Reeser, 2020). There are often the crucial moments of becoming, in the Deleuzian sense, where the young men are grappling with discursive conventions and material resources. In these moments, hegemonic masculine subjectivities are

either emboldened or dismantled (Reeser, 2020). Because of the complexities of this process, the young men invested much effort and focus in ukushela. Thus, a material-discursive approach assisted in making sense of the discourses and material practices that emerged as part of this process.

3.5. Masculinities in South Africa: From 'Changing Men' to 'Liberating Men'

American critical scholars have been instrumental in providing further developing insights into theorising black masculinities in this study (Dumas & Nelson, 2016; hooks, 2004; Nelson, 2020; Way et al., 2014; White & Peretz, 2010) especially following the recent emergence of the #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) movement (Carey, 2020). However, as Ratele (2013b) has advocated, I drew especially on the scholarship of black critical feminists throughout this study. For instance, Mutua (2006), in an incisive vignette of her own sons who are young black men, reflects on how hegemonic masculinities hinder the performance of progressive masculinities. For Mutua (2006), black men occupy volatile positions in American society because of their race and, by virtue of being men, are required by the tenets of patriarchy to dominate women and other subordinated men. In line with this, she proposed progressive black masculinities "as the unique and innovative performances of the masculine self that on the one hand personally eschew and ethically and actively stand against social structures of domination" (Mutua, 2006, p. 4). This demonstrates the importance and urgency of alternative ways of theorising black boys' and men's lived experiences. Of course, as #BLM has since demonstrated, it is not enough to only just focus on patriarchy and resisting hegemonic masculinities. This presents the conundrum of being black men in general, but one that becomes more complicated for young black men as they wrestle with their standing within a gender order that subordinates and marginalises them.

This is also powerfully illustrated by bell hooks in her book *We Real Cool*. She reflects on the different encounters of love she experienced with the black men in family, her father, her maternal grandfather and her brother (hooks, 2004, p. xv). hooks laments that her father's commitment to "patriarchal thought and action" not only denied her the "love [she] craved the most", but also produced within and through him feelings of contempt, isolation, leading to violence and abuse (hooks, 2004, p. xv). Yet her grandfather represented a radical departure from her father's wanting affections. Not only was he "calm, tender, gentle, creative, a man of silence and peace", he also "gave [her] the love [her] heart longed for" (hooks, 2004, p. xv). Of her brother, hooks (2004, p. xiii) observes:

> My brother who managed in his childhood to subvert patriarchal domination by remaining emotionally aware still strives to realise an unattainable ideal of patriarchal masculinity thus undermining the positive agency in his life. He often feels confused and discouraged.

hooks' description of her brother's simultaneous negotiation of the gender regime and his own emerging masculinity paints a picture of a journey towards adulthood for many young black men, one that becomes increasingly complicated and fraught over time. It is most likely, a journey that both her father and grandfather had to traverse, from which both emerged as radically different versions of black masculinity. Her brother, who is not yet 'there', represents the becoming of black masculinity which is punctuated by contradicting messages about manhood. Further reflecting on her brother's upbringing, hooks (2004, p. 84) concedes that young black men receive "mixed messages about manhood". These mixed messages indulge and value young black men simply for being male, celebrate and reward them when they meet the ideals of hegemonic masculinities and shame them when they do not. During this process of emerging personhood, young black men are expected to prove that they are real men. hooks' description of the three men in her life highlights three aspects that are important to this study.

Black men, and thus the lived experiences of black masculinities, are not monolithic. By highlighting the different experiences and actions of the men in hooks' life, we come to see how even in the same context radically different masculine subjectivities emerge. Most significant of course, among these three men, is the matter of age and how this modulates the forces of hegemonic masculinity. Although young men are constantly monitored and expected by others to conform, there are possibilities of resistance, which accounts for her grandfather's experience. Through these examples, it is also established that love and black masculinities are not mutually exclusive. Rather, I argue, it is possible for love to produce new capacities for young black masculinities. In line with hooks' recollections, love can combine with different configurations of masculinities in ways that produce different versions of love. Perhaps exploring love subjectivities might also reveal the ways that hegemonic masculinities are disrupted or resisted, thus making it possible to explore how alternative masculinities, which are based on caring, tenderness and peace, emerge. Therefore, romantic love is an important site for exploring the ways that young men can relate to women in non-violent and gender equitable ways.

The observations gleaned from the above scholarship are important in thinking about the private and public lives of black masculinities. They inform the concerns of this study; the public discourses of young black men's violence rarely provide context of their private lives.

Even within research studies, the focus tends to be on social and material structures and how they produce violent masculinities, and rarely do such studies consider how the private performances of masculinities link to public enactments, especially among young black men. Although I did not mainly draw on US scholarship on black masculinities in this study, the texts I have outlined above were key in shaping my conceptualisation of young black men. Furthermore, in the wake of #BLM, some of these texts proved to be an important starting point for my approach. However, in the following sections, I will engage with and critically reflect on masculinities studies in South African literature, which are strongly influenced by European (Hearn) and Australian (Connell) authors.

3.5.1. Theorising post-apartheid masculinities

Over the last three decades, South African researchers have continued to leverage productively Connell's framework to provide gendered analysis across various disciplines and to drive policy-focused gender transformative interventions (Gibbs et al., 2014, 2015; Jewkes et al., 2009; Jewkes & Morrell, 2018; Morrell et al., 2013). As such, Connell's framework enjoys considerable prominence in Southern African scholarship across diverse disciplines to explore ever-shifting gender relations and heterosexual intimacies among young people (Groes-Green, 2009, 2012; Morrell et al., 2012, 2013; Oxlund, 2012; Wood & Jewkes, 1997, 1998; Zembe et al., 2015). The utility of the hegemonic masculinities thesis has been demonstrated by the seminal agenda-setting text, *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, in which Morrell (2001, p. 31) contends that in post-apartheid South Africa masculinities have "shifted and continue to shift". This volume, and others that since followed, sought to make sense of men and masculinities in a time of rapid socio-political changes locally and regionally (Morrell & Ouzgane, 2005; Reid & Walker, 2005; Shefer et al., 2007). These demonstrate the heightened concern among researchers to gain situated and contextual understandings of men and masculinities as defined and shaped by South African realities. In light of this, scholars drew variously on Connell's framework to trace the structural determinants of social, political and cultural relations that produced hegemonic and nonhegemonic masculinities, although more attention is paid to the former. In *African Masculinities*, Morrell and Ouzgane (2005) sought to highlight the diversity of Africa in terms of gender, culture, race and geography, thus demonstrating the importance of giving due consideration to how these axes of difference shaped diverse social worlds and equally diverse masculinities in Africa. Thus, Connell's (2007, p. viii) framework was helpful not only in revealing the plurality of masculinities and their hierarchical arrangements, but also in further exploring "the very complex tissue of gender beliefs and practices that operate in

particular situations, and the varying ways young men draw on them in constructing ways of life". In this regard, the contextualisation of Connell's framework has proven useful for local scholars who continue to draw on it to make sense not only of the socio-political changes underway in South Africa, but also of the ever-shifting gender relations.

Maintaining Connell's structuralist tenets, three broad categories of masculinities were identified to explain how men's lives were reflective of shifting gender relations (Morrell, 2001). Men who resisted the shifts in gender relations were grouped as reactive, as actively defending the hegemony of men (Hearn, 2004) and the heteropatriarchal ideals that upheld this gender order. In terms of Connell's (1987) framework, these would be hegemonic masculinities. However, there was also evidence of men who did not outrightly oppose the current gender order or any shifts towards equality. As South Africa continued to change, these men found other ways of constructing and enacting their masculinities and avoided the use of violence and legitimating gender inequality as key sources of securing or maintaining power. However, the use of or the capacity for violence and misogyny was not completely eradicated. Morrell (2001, p. 29) categorised these masculinities as "accommodating", as they seemed to accept the status quo in post-apartheid South Africa. In terms of Connell's (1987) framework, these would most likely align with complicit masculinities. Finally, Morrell (2001, p. 31) identified "emancipatory masculinities", which were conceptualised as completely breaking away from normative heteropatriarchal ideals typically associated with Connell's framing of hegemonic masculinities. On the surface, these masculinities track with the concept of marginalised masculinities, in that they include gay men because of the proliferation of gay rights in South Africa. However, as Morrell (2001) observes, these also include heterosexual men across different races who are resisting hegemonic performances of masculinity, choosing to embrace nonviolence and gender equality. Within this category are men who subvert the practices and discourses through which men establish and maintain domination of women and other men. These emancipatory masculinities either outrightly challenge regressive notions or overtly align with the tenets of gender equality, and are overall progressive in their thinking and practice. However, in this period more focus was directed towards cataloguing masculinities and behaviours that were read as hegemonic; that is, men and masculinities were understood as invested in dominating women and other men.

Although Connell's framework does assist in grappling with the complications and contradictions introduced by simultaneous struggles for and resistances to the hegemony of some masculinities by other masculinities, these are often insufficiently theorised. As Connell

and Messerschmidt (2005) have also acknowledged, the hegemonic masculinities framework has, in some instances, been applied in restrictive and uncritical ways which have limited the theorising of situated constructions, enactments and embodiments of masculinities (see also Boonzaier et al., 2020; Groes-Green, 2012; Ratele, 2021). South African masculinities studies have not been immune to these limitations. Despite evidence of young black men's vulnerabilities, anxieties and fears, studies have mainly focused on violent, criminal and dangerous embodiments of hegemonic masculinities (Ratele, 2013). For example, despite noting "loneliness and reduced opportunities for intimate social relationships" in the lives of black mineworkers, "flesh-to-flesh" sex as a supposedly hegemonic and risk-taking behaviour performance is foregrounded (Campbell, 2001, p. 285). While Campbell's argument no doubt surfaces valid concerns in relation to sexual behaviours, the concern with prevention and epidemiology essentialises the men's sexual experiences, and prevents meaningful engagement with their intimate experiences and knowledge about feelings, pleasure or vulnerability (Pinheiro & Kiguwa, 2021). Similarly, while Wood and Jewkes (2001) productively tease out discourses and instances of intimate partner violence that permeate young people's romantic relationships, young black men are essentialised as violent and young black women as vulnerable. Essentially, what makes love 'dangerous', their article suggests, is young black men's adherence to social discourses that legitimate their physical and affective domination of their girlfriends. While Wood and Jewkes (2001) do caution against simplistic assumptions and generalisations about the role of violence in young black men's lives and love relationships, drawing on the hegemonic masculinities framework prevents meaningful engagement with alternative enactments of masculinities (Groes-Green, 2012).

Thokozani Xaba's (2001) study on militarised masculinities explores the liminal experiences of anti-apartheid veterans who were trying to adjust to post-apartheid South Africa in the 1990s. According to Xaba (2001), the changing role and currency of violence left veterans unable to meaningfully reintegrate into their communities. Despite noting the structural violence that not only severed their social relationships but also prevented them from obtaining any formal schooling, training or employment, more focus is directed towards what seems to be an inevitable path to crime, violence and death. Once again, the hegemonic masculinities thesis prevents a view of their vulnerabilities, their fears and frustrations with their inability to liberate themselves in a 'free' South Africa. Commenting on Thokozani Xaba's (2001) study, Morrell (2001, p. 21) suggests that young black men have gone from "heroes to villains" because they have 'chosen' crime and violence. Xaba's (2001) study focused on struggle and

post-struggle masculinities in the townships and their continued use of violence even after 'the struggle' was won. While no doubt addressing important issues, explorations of post-apartheid violence and criminality have overlooked the complexities and anxieties that shaped the lives of these young men. Almost two decades later, Wanelisa Xaba (2017) reflects on a similar or related incident, but from a radical black feminist perspective. Commenting on the proliferation of the Fees Must Fall movement in the South African higher education landscape, she problematises the hypermasculine performances of cisgender male protestors who often resorted to violence and criminalised behaviours. However, unlike Thokozani Xaba's structuralist perspective, Wanelisa Xaba's black feminist lens enabled her to further trace and locate the multivariate circulations of state violence that entangled black lives, bodies and capacities. For Xaba (2017), it was important to understand the actions and protests of black youth as responses to a gratuitously violent and comparatively well-resourced state, whose violence and power were unquestioned and normalised. Significantly, what emerges here is that the young black men who comprised the Fees Must Fall movement were in various ways marginalised and subordinated, and thus could not be uncritically said to be enacting hegemonic masculinities (Groes-Green, 2009; Ratele, 2013). By employing a decolonial feminist lens Wanelisa Xaba (2017) demonstrates the ambivalent positionings of black youth in South Africa, specifically that of young black men and masculinities who are routinely (and uncritically) criminalised and problematised. How the experiences of young black men are explored and how their bodies are located in research is limited.

Similarly, in a study on the resilience and aspirations of young black lifeguards from a township in Durban, Hemson (2001) highlighted how the young men had to navigate violence, crime and substance abuse as they sought out better futures and opportunities. In the same study Hemson (2001) recounts how the same young men had routinely experienced extreme violence as well as the deaths and incarcerations of their peers; these challenges and how they shaped their daily lives received limited attention and were not explored in ways that complicated their acts of violence and crime. In fact, Hemson offers a powerful demonstration of how the deaths of young black men have become normalised and routinised in South Africa. He observes that when, at the funeral of one of their peers, the young men were overcome with emotion and clung to each other for support, they were hushed by the community. These studies illustrate the ways that the social embodiments of young black men are not only reductively written about in research, but are further restricted by their daily experiences and the contradictory sociocultural discourses about how to navigate these experiences (Ratele, 2013). In this regard,

I follow Boonzaier and colleagues (2020, p. 53) who problematise the reductive positioning and exploration of young black masculinities in South African literature. They note that literature continues to portray young black men in "one-dimensional ways" and overlook the complexities and nuance of their daily lived experiences. Moreover, they note the tendency of researchers to uncritically explore their lives in ways that minimise or ignore the "intergenerational and deeply traumatic violence of past injustices and continuing depravations and dehumanisations" (Boonzaier et al., 2020, p. 54). Thus, there is an urgent need to challenge the limited critical engagements with lives of young black men whose experiences happen in the townships.

3.5.2. Towards situating the lived experiences of young black men

> He is a young black man… this is the imaginative position from which we must read him, and the proper one from which we should build our critique (Ratele, 2003, p. 239).

In the above quote, Ratele makes a comment in relation to Steve Biko's rhetoric on the politics of blackness in apartheid South Africa. Biko, a leader of the Black Conscious Movement, had developed a discourse that aimed to enlighten black youth on the depth and complexities of their oppressions, and thus invigorate resistance against the apartheid state. Thus, Ratele urges us to contextualise our reading and critique of black masculinities, understanding how they are positioned in the world, materially and discursively. Ratele reminds us of the significance of subjectivity and reflexivity in approaching and understanding young black men. Black men are not a monolith, and our explorations of their lived experiences should consider that they have diverse "aspirations, needs, personalities, histories, connections… class, sexualit[ies]…desires, tastes, and so on" (Ratele, 2003, p. 248). More recently, Ratele (2013, p. 256) has argued that the critical engagement of black men and masculinities should extend beyond exploring the production of gendered subjectivities and should be invested in liberating black men and masculinities.

In this study, I was specifically interested in the lived and situated experiences of love in the young men's lives. In addition to being interested in distinctly feminist epistemologies to understand these, during my fieldwork, I was always struck by how the young men narrated their daily experiences and, specifically, their negotiations of love. For instance, narratives about growing up, experiencing loss, falling in love and even experiencing heartbreak were often explained in terms that demonstrated complex subjectivities, which could not be easily disentangled. Being young black men from the townships of Durban coloured their daily lives

in specific ways, which required a considered accounting of their discursive *and* material experiences. Ratele (2020, p. 126) contends that beyond the broader field of CSMM, which is mainly undergirded by epistemologies of the global North, there are epistemologies that offer African and black men and masculinities greater visibility, namely critical and postcolonial perspectives. Ratele (2020, p. 126) further notes that black and African masculinities have no proper place in northern epistemologies and political thought, which is why "they have to be *named* to be recognisable". This naming is a qualification which is not extended to their white contemporaries.

South African masculinities scholars have sought to understand how the political shifts would shape masculinities and, in turn, how masculinities should shape gender politics. The central focus for masculinities studies in South Africa has been on the engagement of men for transformation and gender justice, considering the rising levels of violence against women and among men. Morrell (1998b, p. 10) has noted that such violence is men's responses to feelings of vulnerability which are brought about by diminishing opportunities and rising poverty. In addition to men's collective dominance over women, there are also multiple masculinities in circulation for black men and for white men, as well as for urban and for rural men (Morrell, 1998b; Ratele, 1998; Wood & Jewkes, 1997, 1998). Yet, despite this proviso, reductive stereotypes about young black men as violent, criminalised, unfeeling and hypersexual continue to dominate research in South Africa (Dube, 2016; Langa & Kiguwa, 2013; Langa et al., 2020; Ratele, 2013). Shaped mainly by public health imperatives, an overwhelming majority of studies which explore young black masculinities draw on the hegemonic masculinities framework (Bantjes et al., 2020; Closson et al., 2020; Gibbs et al., 2019, 2020; Gibbs, Sikweyiya, et al., 2015).. These studies suggest that idealised masculinities among young men are mainly established and maintained through risky and antisocial behaviours, such as heightened sexual prowess and/or enacting intimate partner violence. Consequently, these studies have established a casual relationship between young black masculinities and the risks that young women face within their intimate partnerships. Theferfore, based on currently available research, one could be forgiven for concluding that intimate relationships for young black men are mainly a means to maintain or recover their hegemonic advantage and power through demonstrating heterosexualities, dominating women and other 'lesser' men (Jewkes et al., 2010; Watt et al., 2012; Wood et al., 2008; Wood & Jewkes, 1997, 1998; Zembe et al., 2015). Shefer and colleagues (2007, p. 2) contend that "researchers have not been immune to the slippery slide into problematic discourses that reproduce and legitimise the very power

inequalities and traditional assumptions they seek to challenge". The challenge with these problematic slippages, they continue, is that they reductively represent young black men as dominating their female love partners through violence.

Despite aptly highlighting that "men's bodies are not uniform" and that inequalities and oppressions are embodied in different ways (Morrell, 2001, p. 40), there is limited engagement with experiences of embodiment and the implications that inequalities and marginalisation have on men's daily lives. I further agree with Boonzaier and colleagues (2020, p. 53) in their suggestion that South African subjectivities are profoundly shaped by a "violent history of colonisation, slavery and apartheid". However, further qualifications are in order in this regard. While there are certainly continuities between the symbolic and material violence of these political epochs, respectively, they were crafted and utilised at different times and in different ways. Thus, these should be conceptualised as discontinuous and their material and discursive impacts should be unpacked accordingly, as these continue to circulate in contemporary South Africa. As evidenced in the recent protests against colonial statues in South Africa, they should not only be thought of as material representations of a 'distant past', but as *still* powerful tools of colonialism in the contemporary. As Knudsen and Andersen (2019, p. 253) have noted, these colonial statues are rarely historic symbols, but continue to serve as a political proxy in a continuing "struggle over race, economy, socio-political formations and cultural affirmation". Yet, in South African scholarship, the terms colonial and apartheid tend to be considered as one broad history that dutifully refers to a distant past that was replaced by a 'postcolonial' or a 'post-apartheid' South Africa. While South African scholars give due consideration to the impact these political periods have had in terms of gender, race, socioeconomics and geography (Morrell, 1998a; Morrell & Ouzgane, 2005; Shefer et al., 2015), explorations of (black) men's lives in post- South Africa often emphasises, in limited and mainly discursive ways, how masculinities are perpetually becoming undone or violent in the contemporary. However, more critical unpacking is required to better comprehend the lives and experiences of young black men. Thus, the uncritical use of the terms colonialism and apartheid as temporal markers in relation to the lives of young black men (re)centres on the very histories that scholarship aims to decentre. Thus, my inquiry is broadly framed by the questions: What do post- realities look like when inflected through the daily experiences of young men living in the townships of Durban? Moreover, when looking beyond the remarkable aspects of violence, disease and criminality, what might we uncover about young black men?

Furthermore, the challenges of the South African context also require that we go beyond Connell's framework when exploring masculinities. As helpful as these situated conceptualisations of South African masculinities have proven to be, the hegemonic masculinities framework limits thinking about their vulnerabilities and anxieties amidst these changes. As such, hegemonic performances emerge almost always as associated with behaviours observed among young black men and, more often than not, as located in the townships (Dube, 2016). This oversight tends to surface problematic, one-dimensional narratives about young black men (Boonzaier, 2022; Motimele, 2021; Ratele, 2013, 2021; Shefer et al., 2018). For instance, it is telling that the section on sexuality in *Changing Men in Southern Africa* mainly explores and troubles the sexualities of (young) black men (Campbell, 2001; Louw, 2001; Moodie, 2001; Wood and Jewkes, 2001). Of course, this is not only limited to this volume and it is also evident in more recent scholarship (Langa & Kiguwa, 2013; Ngidi, 2022; Swartz & Scott, 2013; Wood & Jewkes, 1997). In line with this, Messerschmidt (2018) has problematised the difference between dominant masculinities and hegemonic masculinities. The former refers to widespread and visible performances, and the latter refer to masculinities that actively sanction power and gender inequalities between men and women, and between men. I argue, in line with scholars (Qambela, 2021, 2022; Shefer et al., 2015) who are increasingly demonstrating that while young black men may subscribe to and even be complicit to dominant notions of masculinities, these should not be automatically conceptualised as hegemonic. This study thus challenges the limited consideration given to the diverse, complex, and contradictory ways these play out in the daily lives of young black men. This prevents us from exploring other aspects of young black men's lives that are evident but muted by the focus on power being produced by structures.

There is a limited critical engagement with the spatiality of masculinities and their situatedness in townships, the spatial diversity of township cartographies as more than a static repository for black bodies and, importantly, as spaces in which other-than-violent encounters and intensities thrive. The survival of many physical/material structures and cartographies are not just legacies or reminders of these histories but actually continue to perform the material and discursive functions for which they were created. Thus, decolonial scholars remind us that writing about these terms in posterity clouds their impact in the present (Knudsen & Andersen, 2019; Kumalo & Praeg, 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Importantly, an uncritical emphasis on post-apartheid discourses can function to mute the material realities of those whose lives continue to reflect the violence of a "neo-apartheid dispensation" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p.

239). A glaring example of this in contemporary South Africa are townships, which are not just legacies of apartheid, but continue to fulfil the functions of apartheid by locating the black, working class and poor away from economic centres. Furthermore, for the many who continue to live in townships, these spaces linger with the memories and effects of apartheid and colonialism in post-apartheid South Africa. Thus, a proper feminist poststructuralist analysis was important in this regard. I contend that we cannot attend to the violence of (black) masculinities without duly attending to the multiply entangled discursive *and* material effects of the structures that produce raced, gendered, classed, cultural and situated subjectivities (Boonzaier et al., 2020; Knudsen & Anderson, 2019; Hearn, 2014).

I acknowledge that being a young black man in the townships of Durban is also likely to vary "based on location, gender, social status, class, educational status and other factors" (Mfecane, 2020, p. 4; see also Langa, 2020). To surface the often silenced and muted experiences of young men, I resist limited conceptualisations of the township as a repository site of violence, poverty, disease, and chaos. My positionality and location in relation to the townships of Durban, thus prompted a critical conceptualisation of the township as a dynamic site within and through which the varied experiences, embodiments and feelings of young men occur. Although masculinities scholars have demonstrated the link between young black masculinities and the township (Hodes and Gittings, 2019; Langa, 2020; Morrell, 1998a), minimal attention has been extended to the variability and agency of the subjectivities that live (and love) within the township. For example, Meth's (2009) study among black men living in an informal settlement in Durban, demonstrated a strong connection between masculinities, emotions and geospatial location. Through focusing on the gendered and emotional geographies in the lives of these black men, Meth (2009, p. 855) sought to "broaden understandings of men's engagements with violence [and] to move away from simplistic gendered dualisms of male perpetrator/female victim". In line with this thinking, my exploration of black masculinities undertook a more critical treatment of the township as a complex aspect of subjectivity, not just as a static stage on which black masculinities are performed. In this regard, I am also influenced by critical human geographers who have established the connection between gender, love and space (Morrison, 2010; Morrison et al., 2012). These new understandings must refuse the binaries established by conventional Northern approaches that separate the mind from the body, and reason from emotion or feeling (Lewis and Gabeba, 2021). I also draw from Langa's (2010, 2016, 2020) work with young black men in the township of Alexandra, which demonstrated diverse and contested masculinities. Such shifts would not

only enable new ways of perceiving and sensing the worlds we traverse, but they would also further allow for the alternative surfacing of subjectivities that have otherwise remained silenced (Lewis and Gabeba, 2021).

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have plotted the conceptual framework that informs the understanding and analysis of masculinities in this study. I have sought to demonstrate the study's location within the subfield of critical studies of men and masculinities (CSMM). It has also taken seriously the sustained critiques from scholars about the hegemony of hegemonic masculinities, the urgent need for ostensibly feminist approaches to masculinities as well as the growing call for situated understandings of black masculinities in South Africa. While acknowledging Connell's framework as a valuable starting point for explorations of young black masculinities, troubling essentialist notions of masculinities means centring the discursive and materialist realities that shape subjectivities in South Africa. Drawing on feminist, postcolonial perspectives, this study takes seriously the multiple, contextual and contested, determined by structural markers such as race, age, sexuality, class and nationality. As mentioned in the earlier sections of this chapter, this study challenges the exclusive focus on violence in relation to young black men and sets out to uncover other-than-violent performances of black masculinities. Thus, the next chapter outlines how love is conceptualised in this study, in the light of current and relevant literature.

CHAPTER FOUR

Exploring everyday negotiations of love and masculinities: A methodological approach

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the epistemological approach that framed how the lived experiences of the young men who participated in this study are theorised. I argued that to generate critical and situated understandings of the young men's negotiations of masculinities, relational subjectivities and related realities of township life, it is important to draw on decidedly feminist epistemologies. Thus, the chosen methodological approach for this study situates it within critical feminist epistemologies, in line with the recent and nascent masculinities scholarship that currently advocates for transformative approaches to exploring masculinities (de Boise, 2018; de Boise & Hearn, 2017; McQueen, 2017; Patulny et al., 2017; Pease, 2014; Stahl & Keddie, 2020). In this chapter, I outline the methodological approach and research methods adopted for this study, as informed by the commitment to feminist epistemologies. As Hearn (2013) points out, in strengthening the alignment of research on men and masculinities with feminist politics, the focus should not only be on the choice of research methods, but also on how these methods are deployed. In the following sections, I outline the research design, the data generation methods, the engagement and recruitment of participants and the analysis of data. Incidentally, in reflecting on how the research process was operationalised and how the data were generated, I also critically examine my own ambivalent positionality as an insider and researcher. As I have done throughout this thesis, this chapter draws on relevant literature to demonstrate the significance of the research design and methods, particularly in relation to feminist politics.

4.2. Towards reclaiming feminist methodologies for working *with* young men

> I urge us to reclaim feminism for men, [to show] why feminist thinking, and practice are the only way we can truly address [masculinities] today. (hooks, 2004, p. xvii)

This study sought to explore how young men negotiated love in their daily lives. Furthermore, in exploring their understandings, experiences and expressions of love, the study was also concerned with their emotional and embodied practices of love as they, discursively and materially, navigated masculinity and township realities in Durban. In the above quote, hooks' proclamation highlights the significance and promise of love as a feminist method of recovery

and transformation, for practice. Taking hooks' argument into cognisance, this study employed critical feminist lenses as guiding principles for the research practices and methods for engaging young men. Additionally, the research practice and methods adopted in this study were used "critically and imaginatively" (Hearn et al., 2018, p. 1), which, according to pro-feminist scholars, needs to be strengthened in critical masculinities scholarship (Beasley, 2013; Berggren, 2014; Ratele, 2018).

To this end, I leverage the explicitly pro-feminist poststructuralist perspectives of feminist love studies (Boonzaier et al., 2020; Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2014; Ferguson & Toye, 2017; Gunnarsson et al., 2018; Hearn, 2014; Ratele, 2013, 2018). As mentioned in Chapter 2, scholars in this transdisciplinary field of love and affective desires approach love as a productive force that is equally implicated in the contingent shaping of subjectivities and in the embodiments thereof. Relatedly, CSMM researchers explore boys' and men's implications in discursive and material relations of power and seek to challenge intersecting gendered inequalities. Although enquiries into heterosexual love have been broached in the South African context (Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Malinga & Ratele, 2016; Ngabaza et al., 2013; Oxlund, 2012; Rule-Groenewald, 2013; Vincent & Chiwandire, 2013), these studies have mainly elucidated love as an incidental outcome of gendered power and inequality, thus highlighting the ways in which men and masculinities reproduced love as relations of dominance and/or violent intimacies. However, the consequence of this, to a varying degree, is that these studies have inadvertently reinscribed the very notions they set out to challenge and almost always surfaced black boys and men as dangerous (Ammann & Staudacher, 2021; Ratele, 2013a; Shefer, 2014). According to Ratele (2013b), reclaiming feminist praxis is especially necessary for liberating black masculinities. Importantly, this begins with empathic work that positions black men and boys' restrictive discourses about hard and unfeeling masculinities, allowing for black masculinities to "feel secure enough to rethink themselves" (Ratele 2013b, p. 265).

Therefore, the very choice of exploring love's link with black masculinities, as opposed to their typical association with violent intimacies (Closson et al., 2020; Gibbs, Dunkle, Mhlongo et al., 2020; Kuo et al., 2019), is in itself a radical and decidedly feminist departure that seeks to surface the complexities and ambivalences of black male subjectivities (Motimele, 2021); this is what hooks (2000, p. 158) might refer to as "doing the work of love". Consequently, my methodological approach employed a critical feminist praxis, which enabled me to examine the experiences of love and masculinities as inextricably linked, thus moving beyond constructivist notions that positioned women and femininities as the only subjects of love.

Instead, critical feminist perspectives helped me operationalise my research approach in ways that could account for the material and discursive as subjective and intersubjective, which further enabled me to gain a comprehensive understanding of young men's negotiations of love.

4.2.1. Situating myself within pro-feminist praxis

For Shefer and Hearn (2022, p. 12), it is important that researchers interrogate their own research approaches and the assumptions underlying them, which they term "self-critique positioning". In other words, researchers must acknowledge the multiple, intersecting, and contested locations that inform their subjectivities and the extant positionalities to the studies they undertake. Therefore, in this study, my own "lived experience as a[n isiZulu-]speaking man" from the townships of Durban also had implications for how I approached, navigated, and analysed the experiences of my participants (Mfecane, 2020, p. 4). While an increasing number of studies on masculinities and love in the township have undoubtedly made important contributions (Langa, 2020; Manyaapelo et al., 2019; Pyke, 2020; Qambela, 2021), there remains a plethora of experiences, bodies, voices, feelings and places that remain marginalised and silenced in these studies. My situatedness, which draws from "observations and reflections [based] on regular interactions with… friends, family and community", has resulted in unease with the discrepancies between the realities of young black men and how their lives are theorised in literature (Mfecane, 2020, p. 4). For instance, from my home, which is in the township of KwaMashu and surrounded by at least five high schools, I have frequently observed young people walking to and from school. While there certainly are instances of violence, bunking school, drug use and the occasional pregnant learner (Bhana & Chen, 2020; Hampshire et al., 2011; Ngidi, 2022; Wood et al., 2008), these often cannot be reduced to young people being reckless or the township being unsafe. All these issues require more nuance. Young men are certainly 'proposing love on the way to school', as Hampshire and colleagues (2011) suggest, but there are also boyfriends and girlfriends strolling together to or from school and other young men plotting their proposals of love together; there are also moments of laughter, friendly chaos and egging each other on. However, these experiences are not reflected in research. Moreover, my location and positionality give me further insight into the complexities and contradictions of being a young black man in a South African township. Not only are there diversities in perspectives and experiences, but there are also diverse and intersecting oppressions. Here, I argue that young men do not only exist within the extremes of violence and, in this regard, I draw from scholars who have argued for explorations of black

men beyond crisis (Ammann & Staudacher, 2021; Dube, 2016; Ratele, 2021), and those who have further insisted that black South African men are not monolithic (Everitt-Penhale & Ratele, 2015; Langa, 2008, 2010, 2012; Morrell, 1998a, 2001; Ratele, 2018). Thus, I argue for explorations of young men's lived experiences that move beyond mere theoretical gestures towards context, fluidity or diversity. In this study, I prioritise lived experiences as key sources of knowledge and due acknowledgement of progressive possibilities in the lives of young men. Importantly, I acknowledge the materialities that are inextricably linked to the discourses that shape young men's lives and emerge in their narratives: the dusty streets they run and play in, the structures that offer momentary privacy for them and their girlfriends, and the intensities they experience within and around their changing, ever-mobile bodies.

As I further outline later in this chapter, data were generated in the INK (Inanda, Ntuzuma, KwaMashu) precinct of townships. This precinct has always been, and still is, home. When I was born, my family lived in Ntuzuma and we lived there until I was 18. In 2005, my family moved to KwaMashu, where we have lived until now. In addition, my extended family was scattered throughout the INK precinct, meaning that I am familiar with the area. Although navigating and conducting research in the INK precinct would be familiar in some respects, some aspects of the study required more critical consideration. For instance, based on my familiarity with two of the three townships, I resolved to prioritise Inanda as my research site and starting point for my study. However, it is important to note here the vastness of these townships and the porous nature of their borders. Even in one township, there are bewildering degrees of diversity and complexity which, when intersected with cultural and political legacies[1] make even one's backyard a compelling area for exploration. As a 32-year-old researcher aiming to work with young people, 'entering the field' and accessing participants and developing rapport had to be negotiated with care and in collaboration with my prospective participants.

[1] Officially, townships in Durban that were established pre-1994 (INK) are mainly demarcated in two ways. First, there are sections which are identified by a letter the alphabet. Second, there are house numbers, which further demarcate a section into smaller zones (1-199; 200-299), so that a house number would read C211, for example. Unofficially, these demarcations, when further overlaid with historical, political or cultural significance, produced spatial subjectivities. For example, in the civil unrests of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the area of Ntuzuma I grew up in was associated with the ANC, while a bordering section was associated with the IFP (see Kaufman, 2017). I highlight these to demonstrate the significance of place and embodiment in relation to young men's mobilities in the township.

This aligns with Ratele's (2018) advocacy for research praxis that explores young men's lived experiences through a pro-feminist lens. He contends that to engage young black men meaningfully, researchers need to take "radical interest in their bodies, ideas, words and feelings, particularly their unprocessed pain and fears" (Ratele, 2018, p. 104). Therefore, in this study, I was concerned about the limited knowledge and insights available on young black masculinities and their navigations of love and life, beyond the intimacies of violence and disease. I was interested in exploring the intimacies that love affords young men in their daily lives, and the progressive possibilities that might emerge within their love relations. Thus, in engaging with love, I was guided by growing critical feminist and transdisciplinary scholarship on love which challenges the limited notions of love as a naturally occurring emotion felt within (Ahmed, 2014; hooks, 2000, 2004; Jackson, 1993; Jónasdóttir, 2011; Morrison et al., 2012). For these scholars, love is not only explored as a site for the operationalisation of gendered intimacies and heterosexualities, as has been done in other studies (de Beauvoir, 1956; Giddens, 1992; Johnson, 2005). Rather, love is approached as a productive force which increases the capacity for bodies to act against inequality and oppression (Jónasdóttir, 2011; Lanas & Zembylas, 2015; Toye, 2010), as well as a radical site that offers men and masculinities opportunities for healing and transformation (hooks, 2000, 2004). Similarly, CSMM is concerned with political and ethical engagement to explore the possibilities and capacities for transforming masculinities towards equity and nonviolence (Flood, 2015, 2019; Lorentzen, 2007; Seidler, 2006, 2007). These subfields enabled me to employ a critical lens to approach participants' lived experiences as intersectional, contingent and fragmented. Exploring the role and impact of love on the lives of the young men I collaborated with in this study revealed how their capacities, choices or actions could either be enabled or inhibited by the salient aspects of their lived experiences (Bhana, 2018).

4.2.2. Research design and approach

In keeping with my positionality and feminist practice, I challenged the current limited understanding of young black men in masculinities scholarship. Therefore, it is crucial that I be critically aware of the research methods utilised in this study and how they should be used (Hearn, 2013). This is in line with Pini and Pease (2013), who problematised the lack of critical interrogation of methodological issues in undertaking empirical research on men and masculinities from a feminist perspective. They emphasise the need for critical consideration

of how research methods align with the theoretical frameworks used to conceptualise masculinities and the principles of social equality and gender justice. Without the critical alignment of these components, researchers risk reinscribing the injustices and inequalities they challenge (Pini & Pease, 2013). Therefore, it is important that this study gives due consideration to how love and young masculinities are theorised, and the implications this has for research methods.

As noted in the previous chapters, men and masculinities are multiple and fluid, and these multiplicities are further mediated by differentially intersecting markers of subjectivity (Connell, 2005; Morrell, 2001; Morrell et al., 2013; Ratele, 2013a, 2016), even within township contexts (Langa, 2020; Pyke, 2020). From this perspective, being 'a man' cannot with certainty be assumed to allude to a particular way of being. Rather, social structures and material processes contingently produce subjectivity. Relatedly, Morrell (1998a, p. 607) contends that "there is not one universal masculinity, but many masculinities". Not only was this evident throughout the fieldwork of this study, but it also further influenced my interactions and approach to generating the data. For instance, there were terms such as *umfana* (a boy), *umfana osakhula* (a young man), *umjita* (slang equivalent for guy or dude) or *umkhaya* (being rural or 'country') which described the subjects' positions in various contexts. There were also terms such as *isoka* (a young man with multiple girlfriends) and *indoda* (being a man or someone's boyfriend), which described masculinities in relation to love relationships. While some of these terms are not new and have been noted in previous studies (Dlamini, 2016; Hunter, 2004; Mfecane, 2016), how they were understood and used by participants in the context of this study required an understanding of the socially contingent and fluid nature of masculinities. For instance, the term indoda (meaning man) has different connotations and implications based on the geographical and cultural locations in South Africa. Among those who are culturally designated as *amaZulu*, this is loosely observed and mainly based on the ability to fulfil the provider role and be heterosexually active (Gibbs et al., 2014; Hunter, 2010; Morrell et al., 2016); among those culturally designated as *amaXhosa*, the term is strictly predicated upon undergoing *ulwaluko*, which is a cultural ritual for initiation into manhood (Mfecane, 2016, 2020; Qambela, 2021).

Taking into consideration the multiple contextual factors that mobilised individual and collective subjectivities, this study adopted a qualitative research approach. Connell (2000, p. 9) acknowledges qualitative methods as "being key research techniques for studying the social constructions of masculinities", as well as having the ability to capture specific "local

constructions and expressions of young masculinities". This study affirms that a qualitative approach is appropriate for examining and documenting young men's love negotiations. In this instance, a qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore "the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviours, beliefs, and language" that are significant in the lives of young men (Creswell 2003, p. 68). Moreover, beyond attempts to 'make sense' of the young men's understandings and performances of masculinities in relation to love (Creswell, 2003; Sarantakos, 2005), feminist inflected qualitative methods are based on "principles of equality, reciprocity, collaboration, partiality, non-hierarchal practices and commitment to action and social justice" (Morrison, 2010, p. 69).

4.2.3. Navigating township materialities

This study was conducted in the Inanda, Ntuzuma and KwaMashu (INK) precinct of townships in the eThekwini Municipality in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal (see Figure 1). Recent population estimates suggest that KwaZulu-Natal has the second-highest population in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2022), with a significant portion migrating to urban areas such as the INK precinct for employment and educational purposes. According to the Department of Provincial and Local Government (n.d.), these townships were established and designated for black Africans at various times in the 20th century. Of the three townships, Inanda was designated for black people prior to the promulgation of the Group Areas Act[2] in 1950, with KwaMashu and Ntuzuma established in the 1950s and the 1970s, respectively. Over the last two decades, the INK precinct has experienced major social, economic and cultural shifts that have improved employment prospects and livelihoods (Jürgens and Donaldson, 2012; Pernegger & Godehart, 2007). Available census data estimate that only 37% of the total population has completed high school education. Of South Africa's general youth population, which is estimated at 20.6 million, KwaZulu-Natal is home to over 4 million (Statistics South Africa, 2022). More specifically, the Department of Provincial and Local Government (n.d.) estimates that 65% of households in the INK precinct are under the age of 29, making it a youth-dense municipality. Built on the periphery of cities, townships are under-resourced,

[2]During the apartheid era, the South African government enacted the Group Areas Act No. 41 of 1950, which aimed to enforce racial segregation by designating specific areas within urban regions for different racial groups. See: https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/group_areas_act.pdf

under-serviced, urban living areas occupied almost exclusively by black South Africans, who also constitute a significant portion of people who live in poverty, are unemployed, and are victims of violence (Hunter, 2010; Swartz & Scott, 2013).

Although townships are often viewed in literature through a post-apartheid lens that indexes the persistent histories of racial, gendered and structural inequalities of apartheid (Moolman, 2013; Richards & Langa, 2018; Swart and Scott, 2013; Zembe et al., 2013), they are, in equal measure, represented as landscapes of violence, death and disease (Ragnarsson et al., 2010; Swartz, 2009; Watt et al., 2012; Wood & Jewkes, 1997; Wood et al., 2008) with young black men at the helm (Dube, 2016; Ratele, 2010). Furthermore, despite increasing evidence of young black men's vulnerabilities to multiple forms of material and discursive violence (Ratele, 2010, 2013), township masculinities continue to be framed in overdetermining ways that give limited attention to ambivalences and contradictions of lived experiences (Langa, 2010, 2020; Motimele, 2021). The view of this study is that these framings present reductive and pathologising representations of young black men and townships while inherently overlooking complexity and nuance. However, as Ratele (2018) maintains, it is important for researchers seeking to transform masculinities to be critical yet sympathetic in their approach.

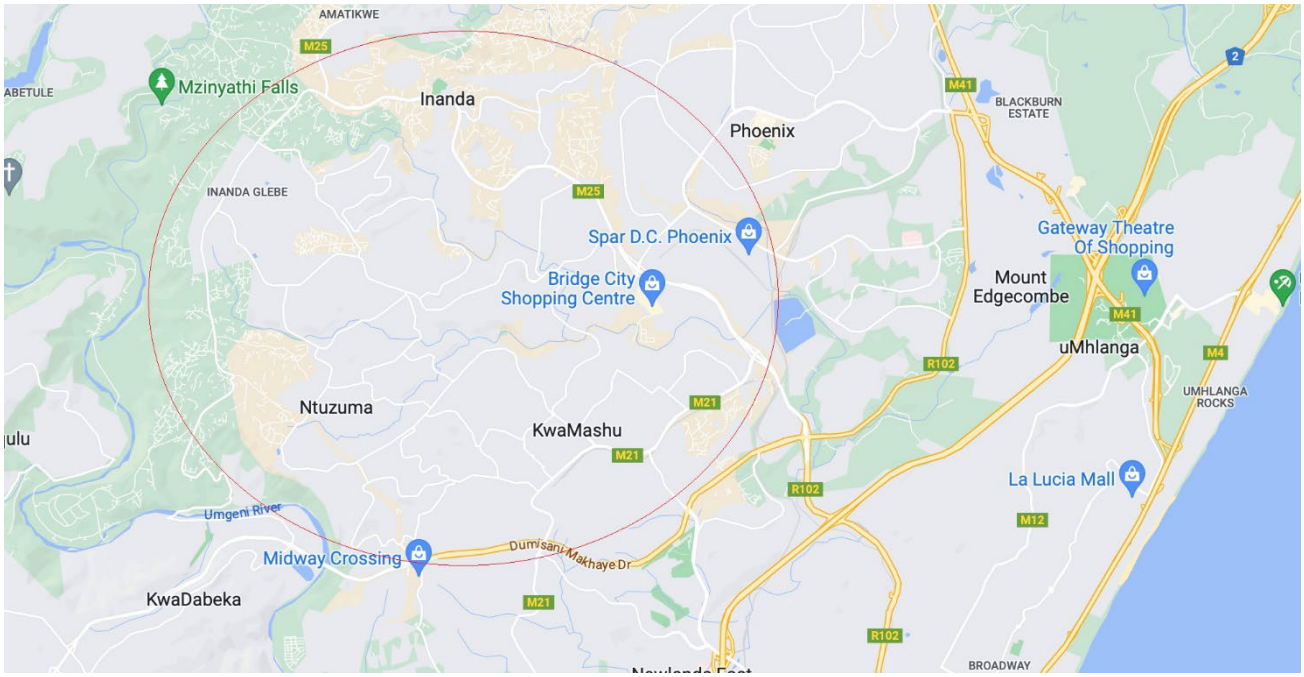

Figure 1: Map of the Inanda, Ntuzuma, KwaMashu (INK) Precinct. Source: Google Maps.

Recently, a small but growing body of critical geographies research exploring South African townships have begun to chart the profoundly visceral cartographies of marginalisation and exclusion which continue to be enacted by the structures, distances and boundaries of apartheid spatial planning (Charlton & Meth, 2017; Jürgens et al., 2013; Pyke, 2020; Reynolds, 2014). Although recent research in eThekwini suggests that these cartographies of exclusion and marginalisation produced destructive and violent masculinities (Gibbs et al., 2018; Gibbs, Myrttinen, Washington et al., 2020; Ngidi, 2022; Willan et al., 2019), they mainly focused on the discursive understandings of violence and masculinity. Furthermore, conceptualisations of masculinities in these studies are often prefaced with statistics and reports of men's violence which, I argue, limit the possibilities for interventions and further obfuscate any alternative embodiments of masculinity. Given the current stalemate of masculinities scholarship and activism in South Africa (Ratele, 2013b, 2015), these representations not only reify unhelpful and pathologising notions of young black masculinities (Graham, 2014; Shefer and Hearn, 2022) but also present them as one-dimensional and perpetually in crisis (Ammann & Staudacher, 2021). The evidence suggests that young black men find ways to positively navigate their daily lives (Graham, 2014) by establishing and maintaining relationships of love, care and support (Malinga & Ratele, 2022; Morrell et al., 2016; Msiza, 2020; Mvune & Bhana, 2022).

Critical geography studies undertaken in eThekwini have demonstrated positive subjectivities, thus demonstrating the significance of spatiality and embodiment in conceptualising masculinities (Meth, 2009; Meth & Charlton, 2017). I argue that these progressive possibilities are often obscured by the uncritical application of Northern frameworks and approaches when exploring township subjectivities. A study that has attempted to remedy these shortcomings by exploring the meanings and constructions of young masculinities in urban South Africa is that of Langa (2008, 2010, 2012, 2020). Langa made use of the photo-narrative method to surface the "multiple voices and versions of masculinity" within his sample group (2008, p. 20). Other notable enquiries include Malinga and Ratele's (2012, 2016, 2018) sustained examination of young black men's constructions of love. Through this body of work, Malinga and Ratele revealed the significance of love for the lived experiences of young black men beyond pathologising tropes. However, despite the undeniable value of exploring the psychosocial dynamics that produce dominant, alterative and ambivalent township masculinities (Langa, 2010, 2020; Pyke, 2020; Ratele, 2013a, 2018), studies in South Africa continue to prioritise disembodied modes of knowledge creation. Thus, although violence and other gender-

inequitable performances of masculinities among young men could be detected in these studies, notions of intimacy, hope, emotional attachments, and love also emerged in various ways. These studies indirectly suggest the importance of giving due attention to corporeal intensities that are an intrinsic aspect of young men's daily negotiations, a task that this study attempted to address.

Therefore, informed by the critical feminist perspectives that undergird this study (Boonzaier et al., 2020; Shefer & Hearn, 2022), I argue for more critical considerations of the ways in which townships, as discursive spaces and material places through which realities are embodied, practised and felt, are explored in research. Thus, in this study, 'the township' was conceptualised as relational and contingent, in line with the narratives and experiences of the participants. Importantly, this approach helped me to prevent the "knee-jerk identity-based listing" (Shefer & Hearn, 2022, p. 13) of pathologising tropes (namely, gender inequality, poverty, violence, drugs) that almost exclusively associate township spaces and subjectivities with danger, while overlooking the systematic ways in which intimacies and desires were made dangerous through the racialised, gendered and spatialised (Shefer, 2013). Therefore, as part of a feminist praxis, this study was cognisant of the need for nuanced approaches to the INK precinct and the lives of the participants. This included attending to the challenges of a dense population, characterised by high levels of poverty and precarity, with almost 77% of households in the INK precinct reportedly earning less than R1 600 per month (approximately 90 USD), with only 27% of residents employed and about 43% of households without formal housing (Department of Provincial and Local Government, n.d.). Yet, this approach also meant exploring the everydayness of the young men's experiences of the township, without reductively reading their lives. Moreover, this perspective enabled me to read young men's situatedness in the township as ambivalent and contested. Although the realities of violence, poverty and disease were apparent through my fieldwork, it was also important to remain cognisant of the alternative possibilities.

Therefore, in undertaking this study, my research approach and methods were framed by Shefer (2014, p. 507):

> We need to generate more focus on the ways in which boys and men currently *do* resist normative practices of gender, *do* practice alternative masculinities that are more gender equitable, and *are invested* in more equitable practices in their personal and public lives.

In relation to Shefer, in this study, I wondered how love was implicated in the way young black men resisted heteronormative masculinities. What new capacities emerge when young black men enact love subjectivities? In what ways do these love subjectivities facilitate young men's investment in gender equality? How are these love subjectivities lived out in their daily, public lives? Essentially, this framing helped me problematise dominant framings of love and young black men as mutually exclusive and, instead, to read them as mutually constitutive. Therefore, in further enquiring about 'what love does' (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 117):

> Emotions play a crucial role in the "surfacing" of individual and collective bodies through the way in which emotions circulate between bodies and signs. Such an argument clearly challenges any assumption that emotions are a private matter, that they simply belong to individuals, or even that they come from within and then move outward toward others. It suggests that emotions are not simply "within" or "without" but that they create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds.

Ahmed's approach to emotions is a critical rethinking of feminist research praxis, and for understanding the significance of love, related emotions and notions of intimacy among participants. For instance, Bhana's (2018) study, which was located in Inanda, highlighted how young men countered the constraining forces of poverty and enacted future masculinities which resisted dominant masculinities. This is proof of the alternative possibilities that deserve critical attention in the exploration of township subjectivities (Graham, 2014; Langa, 2020). This approach required that I focus on how meanings of concepts of masculinity and love were constructed among the young men in this study and consider how meanings materialised, as objects and bodies, as mutually constitutive and situated within the township. This means paying attention to the material-discursive meanings, definitions and conceptualisations of love to further reflect the embodied experiences and practices of love. These definitions and conceptualisations not only represent negotiations of love as discursive notions but also as emotions and affective intensities that are felt within and between bodies. Exploring negotiations of love is to explore how the discourses of love materialise in daily life, as well as the subjectivities, capacities and possibilities they produce.

4.3. Towards generating situated and embodied data

This study sought to explore young men's lives in ways that accounted for their situated understandings and experiences of love, while taking into consideration the realities of life in the township. The feminist epistemologies chosen for the study further dictated that I search for multiplicity, nuance and complexity, not only in the discourses that framed love, gender

and sexualities, but also in the emergent materialities of bodies, spaces and places. My starting argument was always that exploring only the discursive notions of love served to surface it as a relation of unequal power, domination and violence. As Hearn (2014, p. 9, emphasis added) avers, "violence is simultaneously material *and* discursive… simultaneously painful *and* full of pain". I thus sought to frame love, and young men's attendant negotiations, as simultaneously material and discursive, as loving, *and* full of love. Therefore, through this study, I was interested in love as productive and the capacities of love subjectivities. This meant exploring young men's lives beyond discourse and also focusing on their embodiment. In addition to ensuring that the study centred their voices, it was equally important that the materiality of their everyday lives be given due consideration.

Globally, matters of men's embodiment, including their emotions and feelings, as relationally entangled with structural discourses, have only recently been explored as strategic sites of engagement for transforming masculinities (Berggren, 2014; de Boise, 2018; Monaghan & Robertson, 2012; Pease, 2012, 2014; Robertson & Monaghan, 2012; Seidler, 2007). Despite what Connell (1995) noted as the recalcitrance of the body, particularly in relation to structures of power, issues of masculine embodiment and materiality have consistently received limited attention in masculinities scholarship (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Garlick, 2021; Hearn, 1998, 2004; Seidler, 2007). In the South African context, Mfecane (2018, p. 301, see also 2016, 2020) has lamented this epistemic lacuna and has called for "approaches that deal with the whole person in order to adequately address these multiple dimensions" of black masculinities. For Mfecane, the implication of this would be research and interventions that are grounded in African-centred ontologies which, unlike the currently accepted framings of gender and sexualities, bring into focus the "immaterial elements of personhood" that are often "believed to have an influence on social conduct" of young men (Mfecane, 2018, p. 299). Yet, despite conceptualising problems as more than structural, Mfecane's view of materiality remains focused on employment which, arguably, is more a 'tangible thing' than corporeality, which remains awkwardly out of focus. Although I agree with Mfecane (2018), the approach is emblematic of the treatment of embodiment in South African masculinities literature. Even as he does the work of advocating for interventions that centre on African ways of being, the binaries of the very epistemologies he seeks to displace are inadvertently reified. It is also interesting to note that materiality in this instance remains tethered to employment, a key feature of dominant provider masculinities which is also noted in other studies (Gibbs, Jewkes et al., 2015, 2018; Hunter, 2010; Jewkes et al., 2012; Sikweyiya et al., 2022). Furthermore, in

this scholarship, emotions and feelings emerge mainly as outcomes of enacting masculinities. This is demonstrated in Mfecane's (2018, pp. 297-298) account of Thabo, a young man who "broke down and sobbed uncontrollably" because "his hope of becoming a complete person and a better man" was shattered by his paternity results. Here, the argument for African-centred masculinities foregrounds a son's masculine personhood and his search for biological paternity as an ontological search for (ancestral) belonging. However, the materiality of this search, the physical journeying across the country, the corporeality of paternity and the significance of DNA are relegated. From this perspective, Thabo is rendered mainly 'full of pain' and the embodied pain of his experience is implied.

This framing is also evident in Hunter's (2010, p. 155) ethnography, in a chapter titled "failing men", he detailed an encounter with an unemployed participant. Hunter's (2010) work thoughtfully advances a rich and poignant treatise on the ways intimacies are attenuated by inequalities in race, gender and class in post-apartheid South Africa. Similar to Mfecane (2018), in Hunter's (2010) study, masculinity is linked to employment and notions of provider masculinity. Of a young unemployed participant, Hunter (2010, p. 163) writes:

> Beginning to walk out of his *umjondolo*, Andile stopped suddenly in the doorway. Facing toward me the sugar plantations to the east of Isithebe, he said, 'I am not supposed to be living in *umjondolo*. I am twenty-five; even the bread you see, it is paid for by my girlfriend, it is not supposed to be like this.' His eyes welled up and overflowed; this was the one of the few times I had seen a man (anywhere) cry. Witnessing his desperate state made me feel uncomfortable.

Hunter's (2010) discomfort is instructive and speaks to the position of young black men in masculinities research. Although Hunter correctly locates the failed masculinity that defines Andile's life in structural inequalities, this discursive conceptualisation of subjectivity keeps our focus only on the ways Andile is unable to live up to provide masculinity. Hunter's discomfort aligns him with a heteronormative script which dictates that men, anywhere, should not cry. From this perspective, the researcher is aligned with dominant masculinity and the researcher's subject with subordinated masculinity. Moreover, if one advances a situated, critical and sympathetic view of Andile's life (Ratele, 2018; Shefer and Hearn, 2022), we might extend our focus to consider Andile's embodied experience which is connected to words of frustration. Importantly, at this moment, we see how Andile defies the heteronormative discourse *indoda ayikhali* (a man does not cry) which generally discourages men from expressing their feelings, particularly through crying (Mayekiso, 2017). This instance also illustrates how the feelings and emotions of young black men are often apprehended in

research. To his credit, Hunter (2010) surfaces this research encounter in his analysis. However, the embodied expressions of frustration and desperation are indexed as the machinic functions of a defective masculine subject, a 'failing masculinity' (Hunter, 2010). This reading of black masculine subjectivity, which focuses mainly on the discursive, I argue, limits how researchers account for the complexities and ambivalences of participants' lives. From this perspective, there is an overemphasis on subjectivity as constructed by discourse, despite the very corporeal experiences of living in informal housing.

Therefore, in this present study, in addition to exploring how participants construct masculinities and the meanings they attach to these constructions, I sought to use methods that would further enable them to articulate their situated, embodied experiences. In addition to privileging the voices of the participants, the study created situations in which the young men could express and interrogate their own expressions of love and intimacy. The significance of this approach is rooted in the positioning and rendering as knowledge of aspects, especially within masculinities scholarship, that until recently have been overlooked: namely, emotions, love and embodiments (see de Boise and Hearn, 2017; Hearn, 2014; Lorentzen, 2007; McQueen, 2017; Seidler, 2007). However, as de Boise and Hearn (2017) have opined, although the exploration of men's emotions is not new, it is the way of studying them that must be given critical consideration. In this regard, they maintain that "to understand the ways men interpret, organise and put [their] experiences into language requires an appreciation of both materialist (in embodied, societal and natural senses) and discursive perspectives" (de Boise & Hearn, 2017, p. 791). Therefore, my methods and analysis had to critically trace the material and discursive aspects, without simply replicating dominant perspectives. To this end, I undertook semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and informal hanging out as key methods of generating data, which I discuss later in this chapter.

4.4. How were the data generated?

In conducting this study, I adhered to all the ethical guidelines stipulated by the University of KwaZulu-Natal and granted by the University's Higher Degrees Committee in February 2019 (Appendix E). The following months were spent negotiating access and recruiting prospective participants. As explained earlier in this chapter, key individuals in communities I wanted to work in were approached for their guidance and assistance. During this process, even with all the necessary documents readily available (information sheet and ethical clearance letter), I frequently had to introduce myself and explain the purpose of the study, why the study focused

on young men and what participating in the study would achieve. Although, in these processes, I had my proverbial researcher hat on, having grown up in these very streets, I was quickly reminded how young men were often regarded with a measure of suspicion. Although the initial plan, purely for logistical purposes, was to limit my focus to one of the townships in the INK precinct, I soon found that the young men's daily mobilities required that I broaden the study's geographical focus to align with this. Common among the participants were that these mobilities varied slightly. For example, some participants reported living in Inanda with one parent, whilst having another parent located in KwaMashu and attending school in Ntuzuma. More relevantly for this study, it was a common occurrence for a participant to live one township and have a girlfriend in another (see Chapter 6). In the interest of capturing the young men's lived experiences, I was guided by their daily mobilities to extend my focus on the greater INK precinct to further capture the temporal and spatial contingencies of love, emotions and intimacies (Morrison et al., 2012). Overall, data generation for this study took place between August 2019 and June 2021, with a total of six months spent on data generation activities in the field. Data were generated mainly through focus group discussions (FDGs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs).

4.4.1. Navigating entry and recruiting participants

This study uses a purposive sampling strategy. According to Henning et al. (2005), purposive sampling is the selection of participants who adhere to the desired requirements informed by the study's objectives, epistemic framing and the contributions it seeks to make. For this study, I sought to recruit young men aged 15 years or older who lived within the INK precinct and would be keen to share their experiences or ideas about relationships, love and girlfriends. As a methodological strategy, purposive sampling best fitted with the commitment to feminist praxis because it allowed for the selection of participants who were most relevant to the research objectives. Moreover, it allowed for flexibility in recruiting participants during the research project, in line with the data generated by initial research encounters. This flexibility also allowed for adjustments in the recruitment of initial participants, as it could be modified to accommodate snowball sampling (Henning et al., 2005). Significantly, the flexibility of purposive sampling and the adjustments of strategies are always informed by the data and/or the researcher's interactions with participants. It is a flexibility that prioritises the lives of the participants which studies explore. In this study, these flexibilities and adjustments proved instrumental as the project continued.

The participants in this study were recruited in three different but interrelated ways. First, at the time of starting fieldwork, I was employed in an organisation that implemented comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) programmes in several schools and youth centres in the eThekwini Municipality. Although I was not directly involved in the implementation of these programs, I was familiar with the youth structures and networks of civil society. I set out to access young men within the INK area who were active in the youth sector. To do this, I frequented libraries and community halls in Inanda, Ntuzuma and KwaMashu, and I eventually met with two young men who had been (independently) recommended on two different occasions – Mandla and Kabelo[3]. In their early 20s, they were actively engaged in youth community work and passionate about empowering boys and young men. Both pioneered the local chapters of Boys' and Girls' Scouts. In 2019, Mandla was a final-year BEd student and was carrying out his teaching practical training in a local high school, and Kabelo was also in university and studying for a BCom degree. Mandla was from KwaMashu and Kabelo was from eMachobeni (a section of the township on the border of Inanda and Ntuzuma). Both Mandla and Kabelo were instrumental in helping me arrange meetings to address young men and recruit prospective participants. The second strategy was an attempt to diversify the study sample; I also sought assistance in identifying high schools and youth centres. I was able to identify nine schools (three in each township) and approached principals to request the opportunity to address learners on Fridays, just before the learners were released. Of the nine schools, three responded favourably, while the other six did not respond or cited scheduling issues. Two of these schools were in Ntuzuma and one was in Inanda. I was invited to address male learners in grades 8 – 10, and I was often informed that grades 11 – 12 were busy preparing for exams in the third and fourth terms. Although school premises were accessed and the assistance of teaching staff was obtained with the logistics of accessing young men, no research activities were undertaken during curriculum time[4]. The final strategy was to attend local youth organisation meetings, such as local chapters of Scouts or sporting events.

These group interactions with young men were an opportunity to address prospective participants and explain the nature of the project, what participating in the study would entail,

[3] Unless otherwise stated, all the names mentioned in this study are pseudonyms. This was done to protect the participants' identities, as per the provisions of ethical approval.
[4] Often, schools in townships double as churches and all-purpose meeting venues for communities as long as permission is granted.

and to distribute consent and assent forms. The typical format of the information sessions started with my introduction, then I would explain the study and respond to questions, followed by distributing participation materials. The materials comprised an information sheet, a consent form to be signed by a parent or guardian and an assent form for the young men to complete; all three of these were provided in English and IsiZulu (see appendices). Generally, this process took approximately 40 minutes, and once the session was completed, I would also wait around for another 20 minutes in case they had further questions. Although more than 50 young men indicated interest in participating in the study and requested forms, only 45 returned their forms; of these, 36 across all groups returned duly completed forms. Ultimately, data were generated through six focus group discussions (involving 29 participants) and 34 individual interviews, all of which were with participants between the ages of 16 and 21. This comprehensive recruitment strategy facilitated access to a diverse group of young men, which is key to generating rich data. Almost all of the participants reported having previous or current experiences with heterosexual intimate relationships. What follows is a description of how these methods were employed in this study to elucidate participants' definitions, gendered understandings and embodied experiences of love in their daily lives.

Table of Participants' Information

No	**Name**[5]	**Age**	**Grade**	**Family/Household**	**Romantic relationship?**	**Duration**
1	Dingani	18	10	Mother (d[6]), Father (d), Brother, 2 Sisters	Yes	1 year
2	Xolani	18	11	Mother (d), Stepmother, Father	Yes	3 years
3	Shaka	16	10	Grandmother, Mother, Aunt, 2 Uncles, 4 siblings	Yes	2 years
4	Liseko	18	10	Mother, Father (d), Grandmother, Aunt, 2 brothers	Yes	3 months

[5] All the names indicated here, and throughout the thesis, are pseudonyms.
[6] Indicates that the person is deceased.

5	Simba	18	9; NEET[7]	Mother, Father, 2 siblings	Yes	4 years
6	Jabulani	18	TVET[8]	Mother, 2 older Brothers	Yes	4 years
7	Samora	16	10	Grandmother, Father, Mother (d), 2 Uncles, Sister	Single	-
8	Thabang	16	10	Grandmother, Father, 3 younger Sisters, Mother (d)	Yes	6 months
9	Menzi	18	12	Father (d), Grandmother	Yes	4 years
10	Simo	17	11	Mother, Father, 2 Brothers (2 &11 years)	Yes	3 years
11	Philani	16	10	Father (d), Mother, Brother (12 years)	Single	Broke up, 9 months
12	Banzi	17	11	Mother, Father (d), 3 older Brothers	Yes	5 months
13	Qhamani	16	11	Father (d), Mother (d), Grandmother, Aunt, 3 Siblings	Single	-
14	Lubabalo	17	12	Mother, Sister (26 years), brother (24 years), Nephew (8 years)	Yes	2 months
15	Anathi	19	12	Mother (d), Father (d), 3 older Sisters, 2 older Brothers	Single	Broke up, 4 years
16	Onele	20	12; NEET	Father (d), Mother, Uncle, 3 siblings	Yes	1 year
17	Sihle	18	12	Mother, Father (d), 2 Sisters (21 & 15 years)	Yes	1 year

[7] NEET indicates that the participant is currently 'not in employment, education or training' (Holte et al., 2019), and the preceding number refers to the highest grade passed as reported by the participant.
[8] Indicates that the participant is currently enrolled at a Technical Vocational Education and Training institution.

18	King	18	12	Grandmother, Mother	Single	-
19	Lubanzi	18	11	Mother, 2 Sisters (20 & 15 years), Brother (19 years)	Yes	11 months
20	Okuhle	21	University	Aunt, 4 younger cousins, Son	Yes	4 years
21	Tito	20	12; NEET	Mother, Father, 3 Sisters (18, 16, 8 years) brother (8 years)	Yes	3 years
22	Smanga	19	12	Grandmother, Mother, Aunt, Brother, 3 cousins	Single	Broke up, 1 year
23	Nkonzo	18	TVET	Mother, Aunt, 3 younger Siblings	Yes	2 years
24	Rinaldo	18	12; NEET	Mother, Sister (8 years)	Yes	1 year
25	Messi	17	12; NEET	Mother	Single	-
26	Zozoh	18	12; NEET	Mother, 2 Sisters (12 & 19 years)	Single	-
27	Spijoh	18	12; NEET	Grandmother and Sister	Yes	8 months
28	Mfundo	19	12; NEET	Mother, Sister	Yes	3 years
29	Vusi	18	12; NEET	Lives alone. Father (died recently)	“Complicated”	4 years
30	Khaya	18	12	Mother, Aunt, Sister (11 years), brother (7 years)	Yes	2 years
31	Jub-Jub	16	10	Father, Stepmother, Sister	Yes	2 years
32	Norman	19	12; NEET	Mother, Father, 3 siblings	Yes	2 years

33	JB	16	10	Grandmother	Yes	1 year
34	Wandile	20	12; NEET	Father (d), Mother, 3 brothers	Yes	8 months

4.4.2. Focus group discussions

In this study, focus groups were chosen as a strategic approach for assembling embodied social encounters that would generate dynamic interactions between participants and the researcher, thus producing rich accounts of their daily negotiations of love and intimate relationships (van der Riet et al., 2019). Focus group discussions in CSMM have been used extensively (Allen, 2005; Frosh et al., 2002; McGeeney, 2015; Ravn, 2018) and locally (Gibbs, Jewkes et al., 2015, 2018; Mgwaba & Maharaj, 2018; Sikweyiya et al., 2017) as effective methods for generating data on men's lived experiences. However, Pini and Pease (2013) problematised the uncritical use of research methods by critical masculinities scholars in studying men's lives. Noting the field's already tentative alignment with feminist politics (see Beasley, 2013), they have advocated for researchers to critically reconsider how their chosen methods may be useful in challenging men's dominance of women and other(ed) men (Pini & Pease, 2013). In the context of this study and its commitment to feminist politics, my approach towards the focus groups was mediated by a love ethic, which emphasises generative and transformative relations that prioritise solidarity, equality, empathy, understanding and healing (Nash, 2013; Toye, 2010; Zembylas, 2017). I ensured that they were participant-centred, so that the participants were positioned as experts in their lives, and that sufficient space and opportunity was created for them to meaningfully participate in the study. To ensure that the participants felt respected and safe within the research encounters for them to contribute their knowledge, we undertook a value clarification exercise at the start of the focus groups (see Figure 2).

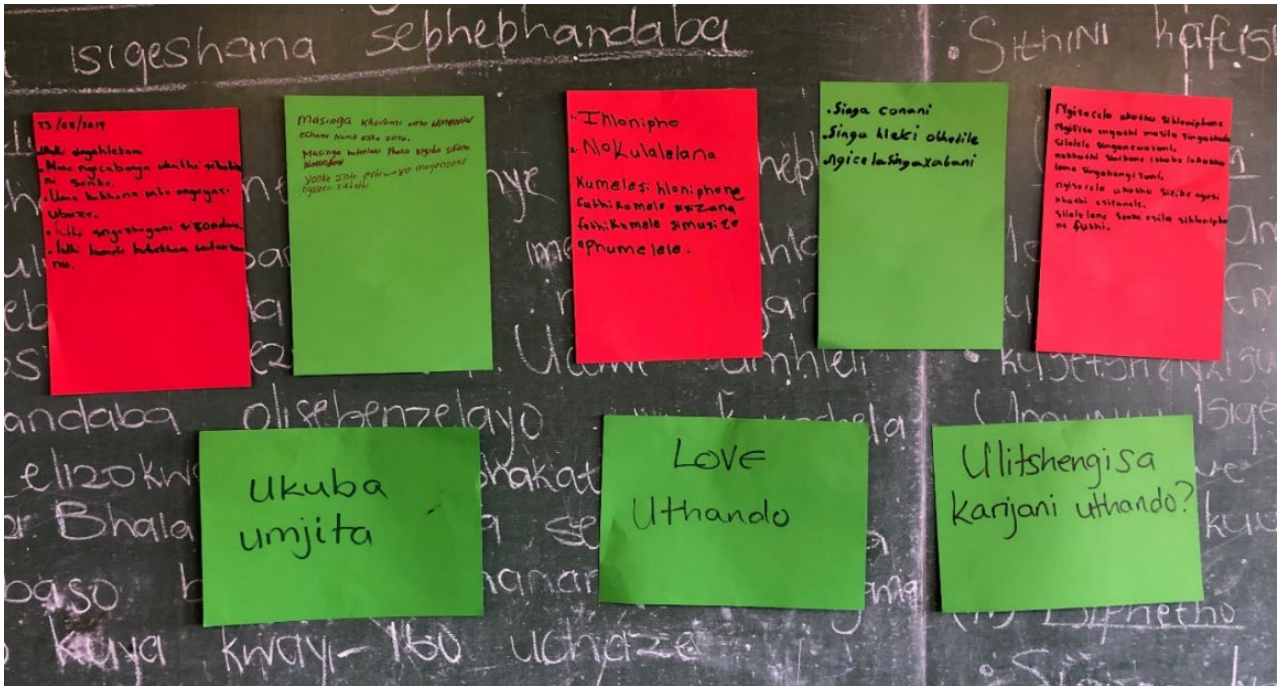

Figure 2: *this image shows the values developed collectively by participants during the value clarification exercise, as well as the prompts used to generate discussion.*

After the introductions, participants were asked to take time to discuss what values were important for all, including the researcher, to observe during the group discussions. This activity helped to democratise the power dynamics within the space and the interactions within the research space as the rules were set by the participants, and applied to all. I also found that it set the tone for the participants in making them realise that they could openly express their opinions if they adhered to the 'rules'. Pattman (2015) advocates a rethinking of research methods as more than tools with which to collect data, but as social encounters in which discourses are relationally produced and negotiated between all those who are present, including the researcher. To this end, this study conceptualised focus group discussions as social encounters and prioritised the participants' perspectives and experiences as key components of knowledge. Furthermore, these group encounters were vital to establishing how I would approach the central issues in the lives of the participants, as well as focusing on reading these as both social and embodied.

To generate data in these sessions, participants were offered two prompts in both sessions. In the first one, they were asked to discuss "being a young man in the township" and in the second one, they were asked to discuss "love and relationships for young men in the township". These prompts were intentionally broad to generate discussion and debate. To ensure that all the

participants' views could be shared, I would first give them a few minutes to respond individually to the prompts by recording their views on an individual piece of paper. Once they were finished, I collected the papers and put them on a board in a random order. I found this approach to be an effective way to generate rich discussions among participants about love, intimacy and masculinities. For instance, as a group, we drew on these points in our discussions, and interrogated similarities and differences in perspectives. According to Mudaly (2016), using such modes of generating data provides a basis for participants to communicate their perspectives and experiences more candidly. I found that this approach also gave participants agency over articulating their perspectives and experiences in ways that were meaningful to them. Furthermore, these sessions were instrumental for revealing locally dominant discourses about normative masculinities and how these were negotiated individually and socially. Significantly, the discussions surfaced the multiple and contested discourses about love, intimacy and masculinities that framed the participants' lives (Langa, 2010, 2020). The broad themes that were generated in these sessions included: the good (friendships and solidarity); the bad (crime and drug use, hyper-visibility and vulnerability to violence); the social pressures (losing virginity, having sex, having girlfriends); showing and experiencing love. In addition, these sessions reflected "everyday [material and] discursive elements, such as common slang, figures of speech, personal stories, jokes and arguments" (Korobov & Thorne, 2006, p. 33). Although these were not taken to directly represent the everyday conditions of being young men in the townships, they surfaced the discourses that framed the materialities of their daily lives. They illustrated the salient discourses and the ways in which they produced different actions and feelings in different bodies.

I found that English terms and concepts were frequently used in the participants' daily conversations and research encounters. As Ndimande-Hlongwa and Ndebele (2014, p. 239) have observed, within the INK precinct isiZulu and English exist concurrently and are "integrated into single communicative events and speech acts" in daily casual conversations. They identify these as instances of "code-switching" which perform social and cultural functions, thus pointing to the significance of language. In the present study, these instances not only influenced how I administered the processes of recruiting participants but also further framed how I approached language in the process of data generation and analysis. For instance, in all interviews and focus group discussions, I frequently asserted that the participants were free to communicate in any form of language that they felt most comfortable with. This also extended to local colloquialisms that did not necessarily fit into the categories of isiZulu or

English, namely, what the participants referred to as *isilokishi* (township slang) or Zu-nglish (the weaving together of isiZulu and English in daily conversations).

Another key outcome of these encounters was how to frame the questions I had translated from English to isiZulu for the individual interviews. Although almost all inhabitants of the INK precinct, including the participants and myself, are first-language isiZulu speakers, my approach in this study was that I could not take language for granted. First, isiZulu is a complex and mutable language that enables those who speak it to negotiate how they are positioned in relation to heteronormative masculine scripts and other relations of gendered power (Msibi & Rudwick, 2015). Therefore, as an older and differently situated researcher, whose experience of and movement through the township was intersectionally different, my positionality meant that my access to some concepts, phrases and even spaces could not be taken for granted. Second, in addition to linguistic conventions, the first phase enabled me to gain further insights into the affective processes that informed participants' daily lives, how these processes were registered on their bodies (material), and how these were captured through their talk (discourse) (Reeser & Gottzén, 2018; Stahl & Keddie, 2020). Thus, the discursive expressions used by the participants not only provided insights into the salient discourses, and thus relations, in their daily lives but also indicated how these discourses were embodied or the forces they enacted on their bodies. These research encounters were critical starting points through which I could critically consider how I could generate situated and embodied accounts of the participants' lives that not only spoke to what love is for young men, but also provided insights into the productive capacities it introduced in their lives (Ahmed, 2004b; Archambault, 2016).

Noting that this study approached love "as something that is spatial, relational and political" (Morrison et al., 2012, p. 506), these meetings were aimed at establishing these components of love in the lives of participants. Therefore, taking into consideration the racialised, classed and gendered marginality of South African townships as "peripheral urban spaces" (Salo, 2007, p. 179), it was important to establish the contemporary materialities of being young men in the townships I had chosen for the study. Moreover, as someone who had grown up in these townships, I understood the intricacies that further nuanced these spaces. Townships are further marked by material and discursive "socio-spatial boundaries [that] crisscross the apparently continuous geographic unit, dividing it into multiple small communities" (Salo, 2007, p. 169). Therefore, these meetings were key to determining how masculine subjectivities were framed by the complexities of space and mobility in the township. This further assisted me in establishing the best ways to engage young men throughout the project. For instance, in these

meetings I found out about the rivalries between certain groups of young men from different parts of the township. I also found about the importance of soccer tournaments for some, and the hypervisibility they often felt as young men moving about the township. These encounters enabled me to examine the social dynamics that would further attenuate the data-generating process. Thus, as part of my commitment to a pro-feminist praxis, it was important that key aspects of my methods, such as the times and places, and how to approach central issues in interviews be informed by my engagements with young men. Thus, these meetings were integral to establishing the engagement strategies for the study.

4.4.3. Individual interviews

The young men also attended individual interviews. In following a pro-feminist praxis, my approach to engaging participants in the interviews was framed by a commitment to establishing situated accounts of their lived experiences as relational, thus requiring critical consideration of the temporal, spatial, social, affective and embodied aspects of their lives (Morrison et al., 2012; Ratele, 2018). While some elements pertaining to public performances could be established in the group discussions undertaken in the first phase, the psychosocial dynamics pertaining to the inner life worlds could not be critically explored and engaged with (Pease, 2012; Ratele, 2018). To this end, individual interviews were another crucial method for engaging participants and generating data. As a tool of enquiry, individual interviews assist in eliciting detailed personal narratives in ways that centre participants' perspectives and position them as producers of knowledge (Mack et al., 2005). Therefore, the second phase of the study entailed individual, semi-structured interviews with 34 participants. To cover the research objectives of the study, the questions on the interview schedule were fitted into the following broad categories:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What is it like to be a young man in INK?
- Speak about the good and bad things about being a young man.
- Speak about the significance of relationships.
- Speak about your understandings and experiences of love.
- What are your wishes for the future?

In this study, the individual interviews also focused on establishing aspects concerning young men's daily and embodied experiences of negotiating love. Therefore, as a research encounter, the individual interview was an interviewee-centred conversation in which I, as a researcher,

undertook a careful exploration of the participants' lived experiences (Blackbeard, 2011; Morrell, 2007; Roberts, 2018). These interviews yielded rich data and lasted for 45 minutes, on average. The dates, times and venues of the interviews were determined by the participants. This was done to ensure that the exchange would be most comfortable for the participants and to further democratise the research encounter. Over time, as the participants became comfortable with the study, they would often invite me into their homes, their yards, their soccer games and to lively PlayStation tournaments. I even met several family members of some of the participants. These invitations became significant in further highlighting the everyday processes and spaces navigated by these young men and made for richer exchanges with them. This became apparent when I honoured Simba's invitation. Like a few other participants, when Simba began puberty, his mother decided he could no longer sleep in the house where his female family members resided. Consequently, his family built him his own room in the yard outside the main house. As we sat in his "man cave," he animatedly shared how his mother had once caught him sneaking his girlfriend into his room. Alternatively, depending on the day or the time they had available, some participants would suggest that we sit in their yard or in the garage, where we were far enough from family that we could speak privately. It was easier in the context of individual interviews to trace affective intensities.

4.5. Ethical considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary, and all participants were made aware of this via consent/assent forms provided in English and isiZulu. These terms were always further clarified and confirmed prior to any recording, both for individual and focus group discussions. Specifically, participants were made aware that they were not under compulsion to participate in the study and were free to withdraw at any time. All participants were anonymised, and pseudonyms were used throughout this study. Since some of the participants knew each other to varying degrees, it was imperative to reassure them that what was shared with me in interviews and in the plenary during focus group discussions would remain confidential. I was especially firm with this rule in individual interviews to either establish or maintain the levels of trust I had gained from the participants over the time I had worked with them in the study. In this regard, there were numerous instances where during the interviews, the participants would share sensitive information regarding themselves or a friend who was either part of the study, or someone I had (indirectly) encountered during my time in the field. A story illustrating the sensitivity of some of the narratives shared with me involved a confession by one of the participants that he had fallen in love with a friend's girlfriend, and although he had since

broken things off with her, his friend did not know. When listening to this deeply personal story, it was important that he felt comfortable enough to share such intimate details without fear of admonishment or judgement. All interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed, and permission for this was included in the consent and assent forms that were signed by the participants, their parents or guardians.

For the consent form, participants below the legal age of consent (18 years old) had to obtain signed permission from a parent or legal guardian before signing their agreement to be part of the study. Participants who were of and above the legal age of consent were still advised to obtain verbal consent, although this was not strictly enforced. Several parents and guardians contacted me to find out more about the study before granting permission and I used this opportunity to provide further details and confirm the days and dates. The participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions and seek further clarity regarding the research process. Since most INK precinct residents are first-language isiZulu speakers, all forms were provided in English and isiZulu.

As previously specified, all participation was voluntary. I further explained to the participants that if at any moment and for any reason they felt that they could no longer take part, they were free to excuse themselves. I reiterated to the participants that all activities would be audio-recorded and that their permission would always be solicited prior to recording; I reassured them that no recording would happen without their knowledge or authorisation. I also explained that these recordings were only for the purposes of the study and would be kept confidential. Furthermore, all transcriptions of the recordings would be cleaned and anonymised for any personal data. On the question of how the data would be used, I explained that the data were an integral part of my doctoral studies and after transcription they would be further analysed and ultimately result in a dissertation. I found that it always generated some excitement among participants that their words would feature in a PhD. In addition to reassuring them that transcripts would be anonymised, I also explained that the matter of confidentiality extended to what was shared in private (informal) conversations and individual interviews. In short, I laboured the point of confidentiality to ensure that the participants felt comfortable expressing themselves.

4.6. Analysing the data

Broadly, the data analysis for this study was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. More recently, they have modified their theorising of the framework and have further

emphasised the researcher's active involvement in the generation of the data and the production of knowledge that emerges from the analysis (Braun et al., 2019). In line with this approach, the data from the digital recordings of the individual and group research encounters were translated and transcribed into English; the transcribed data were then uploaded onto NVivo 12 software for analysis. I replayed the audio recordings and reread the transcriptions, making notes and annotations. I went through each mode of data to familiarise myself with the textual data and to add any other audio cues that could be further noted in the transcriptions. For instance, within the research encounter, I would often pick up on visual and audio cues of excitement by either noting bodily comportments such as leaning in, or a variation in cadence as the participant responded to a prompt. These additions helped me incorporate into the transcripts the affective moments as embodied data, which participants would not always put into words, but were worthy of noting. The repeated re-encountering of the recorded and transcribed data was useful in terms of the languages used (English and isiZulu) during the data generation. As stated above, although all the participants were first-language isiZulu speakers, code-switching and code-mixing (Ndimande-Hlongwa & Ndebele, 2014)[9], was common among all the participants, although to varying degrees. However, there were some terms, concepts and even proverbs that could not be directly translated into English; these terms were retained, although the attempt to explain them did not always capture the same essence or feeling. Capturing participants' contributions to the study as accurately as possible is an important consideration. Therefore, by working through the audio, adjusting transcripts and annotating them not only helped with familiarisation but also ensured that the richness of the data, which would have otherwise been overlooked, was captured.

A key aspect of reflexive thematic analysis is coding, which is the "detailed and systematic engagement with the data" which aims to make sense of the data (Braun et al., 2019, p. 853). Although feminist scholarships seem to support the thematic analysis framework's emphasis on reflexivity and flexibility, the practice of coding has received considerable attention from feminist poststructural scholars for purporting to derive meaning from data in a way that centres the researcher and marginalises the research (St Pierre & Jackson, 2014). Jackson and Mazzei (2011, p. 732), proffer the notion of "thinking with theory" as a method of guiding the search for meaning and establishment of themes in the data, which implies a deductive coding approach. From this perspective, an inductive approach is problematised for reducing people's

[9] The mixing of isiZulu, local colloquialisms and English.

lived and embodied experiences to data that are only made meaningful by a researcher (St Pierre & Jackson, 2014). Similarly, MacLure (2013, p. 170) has cautioned that coding, when performed under the guise of being scientific and objective, "handles poorly that which exceeds and precedes" discourse, which is corporeal. Therefore, in seeking to challenge the current epistemological positioning of young black men in South Africa, I had to exercise caution in ways that I made sense of the data. In the present study, this process entailed a line-by-line reading of the entire dataset with the aim of distilling the components of meaning. For this component of the analysis, I undertook an inductive reading of the data, with the aim of seeing the trees instead of the proverbial forest. My ambivalent positioning as a local researcher meant that while I could leverage my insider capital to access certain forms of knowledge and meanings, my researcher positioning and logistical concerns with the study or commitment to praxis could possibly prevent certain insights. In this way, I found that inductive coding was instrumental in tracing "circuits of power, culture and knowledge" (MacLure, 2013, p. 170). Therefore, momentarily 'stepping back' as part of inductive coding allows for these possibilities. The NVivo software was also helpful at this stage, as its additional analysis functions further enabled me to search for key terms (English and isiZulu) or to visualise links between codes within the whole dataset. Critically, despite feminist critiques of coding, the inductive process is a necessary first step in navigating through the bulk of the data.

The coding approach is a significant process, as it determines the themes that are eventually generated and, more importantly, the study's link and contribution to existing knowledge, an aspect carefully considered in this study. In his pro-feminist study of African masculinities in Ghana, Dery (2017) suggests that both inductive and deductive approaches can be used, especially to bring further nuances and theoretically align meanings and themes that emerge inductively. This dynamic approach has also been modelled by Mayeza (2015), whose initial approach to coding involved inductive coding and the development of provisional themes, which were then finalised following engagement with relevant literature and theories. Therefore, after coding, I referred to the study's research questions, the literature and theories to link units of meaning to relevant theoretical concepts and thus begin the process of constructing themes. In this regard, Braun et al. (2019) are adamant that themes are actively constructed by the researcher and do not emerge independently from the data. It is the researcher's involvement through the mutually entangled processes of theorising and data generation, culminating in coding, through which the themes are then assembled. To this end, the process of developing themes was an iterative process of rereading coded data in line with

theoretical concepts and other related literature (MacLure, 2013). Ultimately, the process of analysis was not a once-off succession of recording, transcribing and synthesising data as discrete phases for finding themes. This approach helped ensure that the lived experiences of the participants were not reduced to raw data of which I, as the researcher, had to make meaning. I found that the richness of data was due to the balancing act of generating the themes, and throughout this process, I ensured that the complexities that characterised the research encounters were not steamrolled in the process of working with and working through the data. Significantly, the themes and data presented in this study have broad relevance to the literature and theories.

4.7. Ensuring validity and reliability of the data

In undertaking a qualitative study that sought to elucidate the situated and complex lives of young men and their daily negotiations of love, it was essential to generate rich data. However, qualitative researchers are expected to demonstrate rigour throughout processes of data generation, analysis and presentation of findings. Creswell and Miller (2000, p. 124) observe that qualitative researchers are required "to demonstrate that their studies are credible". This process of demonstrating credibility is also referred to as rigour, which seeks to establish the quality of a study's findings, by critically evaluating the suitability of research processes, methods and analysis followed by the researcher (Morse, 2015). Thus, to determine a study's rigour, a researcher must demonstrate its validity and reliability as it relates to the methods and processes of the study. However, Morse (2015, p. 1213) further opined that "in qualitative enquiry, validity and reliability are often intertwined, with reliability attainment inherently integrated as processes of verification in the attainment of validity". In this study, validity was taken to mean the reliability related to the strategies I used throughout the processes of data generation and analysis, to ensure that the data sufficiently and authentically captured the richness and situatedness of the participants' experiences. To safeguard the validity of the data generated, I ensured that it was generated with a sizeable sample of young men, across several areas within the INK precinct, and used multiple research methods (interviews and group discussions) to explore young men's negotiations of love. Moreover, the use of these methods was further enhanced by spending extended periods negotiating access and recruiting participants (two months) and generating data with the participants (six months). Throughout these periods, I was able to deepen my understanding of participants' lives through the observations I made, both within the context of formal research encounters and in informal settings. Therefore, over time, these field and research encounters often provided instances that

I could follow up across interviews and focus groups, which was key to developing rich data and thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the participants' lived and embodied experiences. To ensure that I could follow up on these occurrences, I kept a reflexive journal throughout the process of generating the data.

4.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have delineated the steps and processes that comprised the methodological approach adopted for this study. I have outlined how each of these was informed by pro-feminist praxis, and thus also aligns with tenets of critical masculinities scholarship. As data generation methods, this study employed focus group discussions and individual interviews as key research encounters that encouraged and enabled the participants to share their perspectives and experiences. Importantly, these methods were participant-centred and ensured that the young men felt comfortable to participate in ways that were meaningful for them. As such, the young men were allowed to set their own interview times and venues and were encouraged to articulate themselves in whichever language they were most comfortable. The participants' perspectives and agency remained central to the methodological approached and proved even especially fruitful in generating embodied data. This enabled the participants to not only articulate their discursive understandings of love, but also share their corporeal experiences of love, intimacy and care. I have also detailed the process of analysing the data, which was also influenced by a pro-feminist reading of the participants' lived experiences. Consequently, this methodological approach was central to generating rich data which helped me address the study's research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

Filling a gap and finding balance: Young black men's understandings of love

5.1. Introduction

This study sought to break away from the sustained tendency of local scholarship to ignore how young black men "navigate, negotiate and invest in [love] under varying social conditions" (Bhana, 2013b, p. 3). Therefore, this chapter relates to the first research question: how do young black men, located in the township, define and understand love? I address this question by paying attention to the different situated experiences of love that young men offered throughout the study. Globally and locally, literature which highlights young men's emotional ineptitude and propensity for violence, especially in relation in intimate relationships, abounds (Dery, 2021; Gibbs, Dunkle & Jewkes, 2020; Hill et al., 2020; Peacock & Barker, 2014; Stern et al., 2019). Rooted primarily in a crisis discourse, these studies focus on finding ways to challenge men's power and domination over women and othered men, as well as to transform masculinities positively (Flood, 2015; Frosh et al., 2002; Gottzén, 2019; Waling, 2019a). There continues to be a limited focus on men's vulnerabilities and emotions, despite researchers highlighting their political and theoretical potential as critical sites for transforming masculinities (Holmes, 2015; Pease, 2012, 2019; Seidler, 2007; Waling, 2019a). This challenge also holds within the South African context and, because of the intersecting legacies of racialised and gendered colonialism and subsequent apartheid, these oversights have reinforced notions of dangerous black men (Boonzaier, 2022; Boonzaier et al., 2020; Dube, 2016; Langa et al., 2020; Langa and Kiguwa, 2013). As such, there is limited research that explores young men's capacities for non-violent intimacies and other-than-violent enactments as it pertains to relations of love.

Young black men's negotiations of love and intimacy, beyond the focus on force and violence, are minimally explored in South African scholarship. Consequently, very few studies have documented the instances where young black men deviate from harmful gender scripts and, instead, attribute value to loving relationships and actively work to increase possibilities for care and intimacy (Groes-Green, 2012; Malinga & Ratele, 2012; Ratele, 2013). Although these studies have highlighted the way heterosexual relationships have functioned as entities through which men have maintained their dominance of women, they have also reinforced essentialist and pathologising notions about young black men (Dube, 2016; Ratele, 2013; Shefer, 2021; Shefer & Hearn, 2022; Shefer et al., 2018). Furthermore, these studies have glossed over the

nuances of young men's emotional lives and the significance of love in their daily lives (Forrest, 2010; Malinga & Ratele, 2016; Seidler, 2007).

Throughout the process of generating the data, I often questioned the young men, in various ways, on their definitions of love and how these definitions related to the ways they experienced and expressed love in their daily lives. I was interested not only in what they thought love was, but also in how relations of love produced feelings, intensities and practices in their daily lives (Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b). This line of enquiry was important for situated understandings of how the forces of love circulated between theirs and other bodies, how they determined what their bodies did and the environments of these occurrences (see Archambault, 2016; Morrison et al., 2012). Given the limited data on young men's, and specifically young black men's, experiences of love, I was interested to explore how their definitions were informed by other processes, practices and embodiments of love. In acknowledging the diversity of the young men's subjectivities and how these shaped their experiences and thus definitions of love, I approached love as relational, spatial and political (Morrison et al., 2012), and further opted to consider what love does (Ahmed, 2004a), as opposed to what love is. This approach prompted me to think of love not just as an emotion, but as a multidimensional sensual force that is felt and experienced in relation to bodies, spaces and discourses (Ahmed, 2004b; Morrison et al., 2012). I explore young black men's capacities "to love and be loving" (hooks, 2004, p. 35) and the significance of these in their daily lives. Therefore, in this chapter, in addition to exploring the discourses of love circulating in the young men's lives, due consideration also goes to the material practices and embodiments of love (de Boise and Hearn, 2017). Therefore, beyond acknowledging that young people's "constructions of love are deeply gendered" (Bhana, 2018, p. 70), I also attend to how the meanings and understandings derived from these constructions are complicated and nuanced by daily engagements.

5.2. *What happens in real life*: Young men's navigations of love and daily life

Although scholars have begun to grapple with the topic of love in South Africa (Bhana, 2018; Harrison, 2008; Hunter, 2010; Mudaly, 2013), representations of young black men's experiences with love have received little critical appraisal (Malinga & Ratele, 2012, 2016). Even in the localised experiences of love among young people, the archetype of power-wielding, forceful and emotionally inaccessible young males continue to emerge in these (Bhana, 2016; Firmin, 2013; Rule-Groenewald, 2013). This was further supported by a considerable body of work located in South African townships, which almost exclusively

positions young black masculinities as mainly oppositional and only interested in love as sexual or transactional (Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Gibbs et al., 2021; Hunter, 2010; Willan et al., 2019; Wood & Jewkes, 1997; Zibane, 2021). Yet, among the young men in this study, different understandings and expressions of love emerged as they reflected on and narrated their experiences. Shifting focus from what social discourses suggested love ought to be, to exploring the feelings, emotions and daily dealings of love in their lives, a different understanding has emerged. This is not to suggest that these discourses were totally displaced by narratives of love as an embodied intensity. However, the ways young men related to these normative, overarching discourses has shifted, as demonstrated below. In a group discussion with six participants, I posed a question about their definitions of love. In the excerpt below, Banzi offers a response to my question: what is love? Following seconds of silence, he volunteered his response:

> *It's what we see on dating shows like "Too Hot to be Single" and "Date my Family" … charming girls… take her on a date, buy her flowers and chocolates… [But] we can't do those things, that's not what happens in real life! [Laughter, other participants commenting]* (Banzi, 16 years, FGD 4)

In this narrative, Banzi establishes the omnipresence of love in the discourses that frame his and his peers' daily lives. Banzi suggests that, as young men, their ideas about heterosexual love and relationships are also informed by the discourses that circulate through popular media such as the dating shows[10] he references. As he outlines, these shows portray love and relationships as these grand gestures of charm, fancy dates and buying of expensive gifts. Consequently, love remains mainly what young men like him only "see on dating shows". For Banzi, these TV shows portray ideals of what love should look like and the roles that young men should play in these relationships. However, these portrayals have little resonance with his experiences, especially since he cannot afford to charm, date and buy in the same ways that the young men on these shows can. Banzi's response points to the divergent discourses and experiences of love in the lives of young men, as they grapple with reconciling the ideals of love and masculinities with their own lived realities. Not only are the portrayals of young black men in relation to love scarce in South African popular media (Malinga & Ratele, 2016), but they further lack the depth and nuance of what happens in the lives of young men like Banzi.

[10] For instance, "Too Hot to be Single" had just started airing that year (2021) on SABC 1, which is public access television, unlike "Date My Family", which had been on air for at least two years and only available on DSTV, a paid service.

The approving interjections from some of Banzi's interlocutors suggested that this was not only limited to him, that they too had alternative experiences and understandings of love. Like Banzi, most young men were very much aware of the ways that their lives deviated from popular ideals of how their subjectivities related to love. However, this did not mean their lives were limited by their inability to live up to the masculinities of dating. As demonstrated by the excerpt below, Thabang, in recognising the restricted resources of his real life, says:

> *I'm [not] a spender, but [when I see] something or I just think that 'oh she would love this'… then I do it. For example, like schoolwork, [when] I am able to help her in any way. We put our relationship aside and then focus on schoolwork and when we are finished, we have our own time.* (Thabang, 16 years, IDI)

Here, Thabang distances himself from the spender archetype proffered in popular discourses. As a young man in grade 10, he has very limited resources and cannot afford to splurge on his girlfriend. However, he suggests that he is always looking for alternate opportunities and thinking of ways that he can make up for his financial shortcomings as a boyfriend. For Thabang, schoolwork is one of the ways he can demonstrate his love because his girlfriend attends the same high school and is also in grade 10. As they move closer to their final grade of high school, there is increased pressure for both to focus on their studies and limit social interactions, which includes their relationship. However, Thabang uses this as an opportunity to spend time together in ways that are productive for their schoolwork and for their relationship. He further explained:

> *I am able to walk to her house [because] they know me as her classmate… When I get there, we do not study in the bedroom, we work where elders are sitting and having tea.* (Thabang, 16 years, IDI)

With the limited opportunities to spend time together, being able to go to her house and work with her after school helped recover the time they needed, albeit in unconventional ways and without the privacy they wanted. In addition to these school-focused visits, he was able to establish himself as a platonic classmate, which afforded opportunities to meet for school projects in the community library on weekends. Although schoolwork remained an important consideration, having their own time was just as important. Thabang conceptualised this time as another important resource that he spent with his girlfriend, in lieu of dates, flowers and chocolates. Although other participants were able to raise funds through saving their pocket money and doing piece jobs, these were still considerably limited. However, even with these

limitations, they found ways to navigate their shortcomings in ways that created possibilities for love, as Anathi shares:

> *If there is some money, I got from doing chores, running errands or helping someone with their groceries I buy cooldrink, chips and sweets and leave them on the side of my bed… sometimes its amagwinya and fried chips*[11] *… She finds them on the side of my bed [when she visits] or when I go to see her she enjoys them... It is how I want to show her that I love her… I want her to see that I am committed to her.* (Anathi, 19 years, IDI)

Anathi's statement responded to my question about how he demonstrated and expressed love to his girlfriend, whom he had been with since primary school. Anathi's parents died when he was very young, leaving him and his four older siblings orphaned and with few resources. More recently, he lives with his eldest sister and his other siblings have moved away. Although his sister was able to put him through school, he had to find ways of making extra money and was very diligent in scoping opportunities. This meant he had slightly more money than some of his peers and could spend some of it on his girlfriend. Although his resources are extremely limited, knowing the kinds of treats and snacks his girlfriend enjoyed, he ensured that these were always stocked when she visited and that he brought some with him when he went to see her. As he states, this is his way of showing her that he loves her; by paying attention to the things she likes and ensuring that they are available for her. For Anathi, the level of attention and effort become indicators of his deep affection and commitment to his girlfriend. Similarly, another participant explained:

> *Sometimes I would see her at the tuck shop queue to buy food… buying amagwinya and fried chips and she has R8. I would just give her a R20 and say you can just add a cool drink and she would say thank you. As time went on, we ended up in a relationship, loving each other.* (Onele, 20 years, IDI)

Although Onele's narrative seems to mimic Anathi's approach, it diverges slightly. His father, who had been the main breadwinner, died just as he was starting high school. In order to buy himself the things his mother could not afford, he began working at a local carwash on the weekends. Like Anathi, this enabled him to save some money. In recounting his relationship, he explained how he cultivated their love by paying attention and communicating with her when in school. Through these conversations and the practices of love, that he demonstrated

[11] These are staple takeaway items in the township and especially popular among young people because they are affordable.

by being able to give her money, they eventually became girlfriend and boyfriend. However, in other instances, the flow of resources could be reversed, as Dingani's experience suggests. When I asked him about how he expressed love, he said:

> *Dingani: [I give] her all my time… that she needs and [I make] time for her to speak about her hopes and dreams. (Laughs)*
>
> *Melusi: And the laughter?*
>
> *Dingani: It's just that I don't know how I can explain [my situation].*

Unlike the other young men, whose demonstrations of love were about marshalling their resources for their girlfriends, Dingani's narrative suggests another possibility. He classified his expression of love to his girlfriend as spending time with her and the heartfelt text messages he crafted and shared on her birthday and Valentine's Day. Like some of the other young men in this study, his parents passed away (mother in 2012 and father in 2016), and life had become increasingly difficult. Although he could attempt to find a part-time job and earn a bit of money, he felt that a job would be a distraction to his final year of high school. The unique intersection of Dingani's life circumstances had resulted in him not having much to offer in terms of money and the objects or experiences it affords, which limited the scope of how he could express his love. He was surprised to find that his girlfriend had reversed their roles, so to speak. He continued:

> *Let me talk about my birthday and Valentine's Day… I didn't have enough money to buy her things. So, when it was her birthday, I bought her a slab [of chocolate], but when it was my birthday, she bought me something valuable. She didn't care that I bought her something small, her gift for me was very big. So even on Valentine's Day I didn't have money to buy her a gift, but I sent her a message. She sent me a message and she also sent gifts to me. That is when I saw that I was important to her.* (Dingani, 18 years, IDI)

Compared to other young men in this study, Dingani's story diverges from the norm and demonstrates different possibilities. Dingani's experience presents a challenge to current popular discourses and to gender scholarship in South Africa. His laughter and unease in explaining his situation speak to his awareness of how his experience deviates from the popular discourse. Furthermore, receiving gifts and experiencing love in this way represents the possible reconfiguration of otherwise long-standing conceptualisations of the love-money-gender-sex(uality) matrix in South African scholarship. Dingani's narrative suggests that these remain entangled as scholars have demonstrated (Bhana, 2018; Gibbs et al., 2021; Hunter, 2010; Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013; Willan et al., 2019). However, the arrangement of these

entanglements, which determine the emergent feelings and embodied practices, cannot be assumed to be static.

Despite the limited, and limiting, gendered discourses of love that circulate through popular media and other equally significant avenues, the narratives suggest there are diverse understandings of love, informed by varied experiences. These discourses place pressure on young men to express love as per the formulaic models of romance they see on the dating shows referenced by Banzi (Human & Quayle, 2020). However, most young men in this study devised alternative strategies in the face of these demands of love. The young men's narratives show evidence of subtle departures that deserve further attention, as their experiences and expressions of love diverge from popular discourses and produce new capacities to express love (but also new ways of intimacy, feelings and masculinities). As Malinga and Ratele (2016) have opined, the realities of love in the lives of young black men are often in stark contrast to the cultural discourses circulated in the media. These discourses put forward formulaic characterisations of romantic love that are far removed from the experiences of young men of love, creating a dissonance between 'TV love' and love 'in real life'. Importantly, through this statement, Banzi and those in agreement with him, constructed love as different for young men and young women (Malinga & Ratele, 2016). The young men, it seemed, took on a more active role in the cultivation of love by "do[ing] those things", while the young women were more passive and simply received the love. The discourse that Banzi references could also be taken to support studies that theorised provider masculinities among young men as surfacing specifically in the context of heterosexual love relationships in South Africa (Bhana, 2018; Hunter, 2010). Read alongside Banzi's narrative, we see how despite an awareness of social discourses and models of love like those promoted on South African television, expressions of love are further tempered by lived realities of 'real life'.

5.3. *Ukuchecka* as an expression of (everyday) love

> *Liseko (18 years): On the weekend I wake up, wash, clean and then visit my friend… we go to checka (check out) girls and if there are people playing [soccer] at the grounds we watch the game and then come back.*
>
> *Melusi: So, how many [practice ukuchecka]? One…two… oh, all of you?*
>
> *Jub-Jub (16 years): Yeah, all of us. But some are just saying, we have never seen them even at one spot at school [others laughing].*

Shaka (16 years): They are always saying they have girls, but we don't see them with any! [Others laughing].

Throughout the discussions with the young men about love, the practice of *ukuchecka* emerged in their narratives about young women in general but specifically about their girlfriends. For almost all the participants, the practice of *ukuchecka* was a regular and routinised feature of their daily lives, as evidenced by the above exchange. The practice of *ukuchecka* (noun) or *ukuyochecka* (verb)[12], is an aspect of a heteronormative repertoire through which young men performatively embody heteromasculine subjectivities (Qambela, 2022; Sofika & van der Riet, 2017). In the above excerpt, the participants illustrate that there is a collective expectation for young men to uphold and adhere to a gendered heteronormative script (Dworkin et al., 2013; Hamlall, 2018; Morison et al., 2022; Ratele et al., 2010), which extends to their intimate relationships. As Jub-Jub and Shaka suggest, *ukuchecka* is understood as a marker of heteronormative performance which must be publicly demonstrated and endorsed by peers. This tracks with Qambela's (2022) observations that practices of *ukuchecka* are gendered processes of (hetero)sexual socialisation, which shape how young men publicly perform heteromasculine subjectivities. Relatedly, Sofika and van der Riet (2017, p. 2) contend that relational practices such as *ukuchecka* are framed by gender and cultural discourses that not only produce "general normative [relational] practices, [but] often hide the generative mechanisms of vulnerability". Consequently, the focus on *ukuchecka* and related practices has been mainly on how young men labour to adhere to gendered scripts and thus embody heteronormative masculinities with very little consideration of the affective and emotional aspects of these practices (Ratele, 2013, 2016; Monaghan & Robertson, 2012). In this section I engage with how, in the context of love relationships, the practice of *ukuchecka* was understood and experienced differently by the young men. Although undertaken by all young men, those who considered themselves to be in serious relationships, based on love, described *ukuchecka* beyond just going to check on their girlfriends.

Therefore, two broad discursive embodiments of *ukuchecka* emerged in this study. Although both were described as *ukuchecka*, the young men's narratives suggested that different emotions, feelings and embodiments, which I conceptualise as *ukuchecka*-as-checking-out (girls) and *ukuchecka*-as-checking-in (with a girlfriend). The former instance of *ukuchecka*, as

[12] "The prefix *uku* denotes an action orientation" (Sofika and van der Riet, 2017, p. 7).

illustrated in the above excerpt, mainly details *ukuchecka* as a social practice collectively undertaken by young men. Sofika and van der Riet (2017, p. 8), conceptualise *ukuchecka* as "scripted at the interpersonal level [and] involves a young man going to visit his partner", which signals his seriousness to his girlfriend and thus facilitates a sexual relationship. However, among some of the participants, the latter instance of *ukuchecka* as an expression of love, although aligned, went beyond the tenets of the former. Narratives of *ukuchecka* as an expression of love foregrounded the connection between emotional and physical intimacies as the most important aspects. Below I consider how this form of *ukuchecka* contrasts with the form expressed by the young men in the focus group discussion.

> *[We] call each other and make appointment … [I] ask to see her at 5[pm] and say [I] will come and… see if [she is] alright… [We meet by] the taxi rank… around 6[pm] when there are less taxis there. We hug, we kiss, and I ask her… if she knows how much I love her and she [starts to] blush. She says she knows and I ask how does she know because that is something inside me… and I just kiss her unexpectedly. Then we would split… when we arrive at home she would call and say she enjoyed being with me.* (Onele, 20 years, IDI)

In the above excerpt, Onele establishes the importance of *ukuchecka* as an expression of love that not only facilitates sexual intimacy but emotional intimacy as well. In studies that approach *ukuchecka* mainly as a gendered practice, it is mainly understood as a way for a young man to performatively demonstrate his seriousness to his girlfriend to negotiate sexual intimacy (Sofika & van der Riet, 2017). Yet, while Onele's narrative shows that sexual intimacy is an aspect of *ukuchecka*, he goes beyond the prevailing understanding of *ukuchecka* by foregrounding the emotional connection between him and his girlfriend. For Onele, *ukuchecka* as an expression of love does not centre the sexual intimacy materialised in the moment of their meeting but equally emphasises the intimacy produced by their affective communication before, during and after their physical meeting. Through Onele's narrative of *ukuchecka*, we get a glimpse into his emotional life as he negotiates love. Importantly, we come to understand these feelings do not flow from within Onele towards his girlfriend but are relationally produced between him and his girlfriend (Ahmed, 2004b; Holmes, 2015). As an expression of love, *ukuchecka* not only prompts a moment in which their bodies are close, but it further produces a relational closeness and connection that is effectively cultivated through practices of emotional intimacy such as communicating and demonstrating feelings. While Onele's practice of *ukuchecka* might be read as adhering to a gendered heteromasculine script by going to 'check' on his girlfriend (Qambela, 2022), he defies heteromasculine conventions and

current scholarly understanding of young black masculinities through his emotionality (Holmes, 2015; Ratele, 2013). Relatedly, other participants intimated that the practice of *ukuchecka* becomes more meaningful in the face of relational challenges, enabling them to demonstrate their love and commitment to their girlfriends. For instance, reflecting on his challenge, Rinaldo stated the following:

> *When you are still a boy… you just chase after girls… [but] when you [love someone] you want to [be] close to them and talk to them… She gives me everything that I need, but the problem is that she stays far. We see each other for a very short time… I am always with [her] if [she] needs me, I do not make her feel like I don't give her my attention.* (Rinaldo, 18 years, IDI)

In the above narrative, Rinaldo positions his practice of *ukuchecka* as an expression of love by rejecting the performative heteromasculine script. He frames *ukuchecka* as a relation of love that necessitates physical and emotional closeness. However, the former is challenged by their living arrangements. Despite the physical distance between them, he asserts that the practice of *ukuchecka* enables him to express his love and commitment, despite their limited time together. In fact, Rinaldo suggests that because of their current challenges, he is especially primed to maximise any opportunity they might have to see each other as a way of assuring her of his commitment to her. However, he also highlights the importance of physically being with her and physically spending time together. Although it has been argued that *ukuchecka* is mainly used by young men as a gendered script to secure sexual intimacy (Sofia & van der Riet, 2017), in Rinaldo's case *ukuchecka* produces an affective mutuality that prompts him to productively respond to his girlfriend's emotional needs as a demonstration of love. Therefore, as an expression of love, *ukuchecka* challenges reductive conceptualisations of young people's relationships as sexual relationships by highlighting a shift towards heteromasculine emotionality and affective investment (Holmes, 2015). Similarly, Anathi shared:

> *I [moved away] for a year… I lived in Inanda, at my aunt's place. I used to come here every weekend just to see her until I decided to come back here because I wanted to see her all the time. I then told my aunt I [no longer] wanted to stay there... She was the main reason… because the extra days that I used to stay [here] was because of her.* (Anathi, 19 years, IDI)

For Anathi, *ukuchecka* as a relation of love prompts him to reconfigure his living arrangements, to overcome the challenge of distance. Like Rinaldo, physical proximity is an important aspect of his feeling for his girlfriend, which eventually reorders his physical world. As a relation of love, *ukuchecka* had previously materialised his constant travelling back and forth to see his girlfriend. However, as this became increasingly strenuous over time, he was prompted to

rethink and reorder his living arrangements to ensure that he can undertake his practice of *ukuchecka.* Anathi's experience not only relates to the intensity of his feelings for his girlfriend and increasing his investment in his relationship, it also hints at the everydayness of love which was interrupted by their physical distance. Like Rinaldo, Anathi faced the challenge of distance, which prevented his practice of *ukuchecka* from being as regular as Onele's narrative suggests. Relatedly, *ukuchecka* does have spatial and temporal significance as a gendered heteronormative repertoire which dictates that young men should practice it at regular intervals, near their girlfriends' homes and usually at dusk (Qambela, 2022).

> *I see by the way we get happy when we are together… We talk about us and then we kiss each other… We find a place. A place where we can meet and there are no elders because we have to respect adults. An elderly person wouldn't like watching you touching each other. Even if they are not your parents, but we have to respect them. Sometimes you find that we are sitting in those toilets that are at the township… we just chill there. [We talk] about us, and do things like kissing privately where there is no one.* (Thabang, 16 years, IDI)

While studies suggest that by undertaking *ukuchecka* young men are mainly 'following' gendered scripts, the narratives of the young men suggest that they are undertaking a form of affective labour and investment in their relationships. Although the active role of the young men may be seen as adhering to masculine discourses, the young men in this study also suggest that it is the intensity of feelings that determines their investments. Making time to go and check in with their girlfriends becomes one of the ways that they express love. *Ukuchecka* is one of the ways they take up the responsibility of being boyfriends. The young men's narratives of *ukuchecka* enabled me to explore the moments and capacities that love produced in the seemingly mundane moments of everyday life. *Ukuchecka* as an expression of love performs the function of preserving their connection and intimacy, despite their extended time apart.

There are very few studies that explore young men's inner lives and even fewer that explore their experiences of love (Allen, 2003, 2007; Forrest, 2010; hooks, 2004; Redman, 2001; Seidler, 2007), and these are further reduced in the South African context (Malinga & Ratele, 2012, 2016, 2018). While acknowledging the awkward position that masculinities occupy within the domains of love and intimacy, these studies demonstrated the place and significance of love in young men's lives. Yet, despite calls for interventions that create spaces for young men to confront and challenge gender inequitable practices and regressive masculinities (Gibbs, Vaughan & Aggleton, 2015; Keddie, 2021, 2022; Ratele, 2015; Shefer et al. 2015),

these studies remain limited in South Africa. Bhana (2018) highlights how young people can resist and challenge cultural discourses through relationships of love. However, these forms of resistance and challenges are mainly highlighted in relation to young women who are often having to navigate varying forms of emotional, physical and sexual violence within their relationships (Gibbs et al., 2021; Singh, 2013; Willan et al., 2019).

5.4. Emotional and physical dimensions of love

Although there has been a concerted effort to explore how young men's subjectivities are enacted within heterosexual relationships, these have mainly highlighted young black men as gender-inequitable, prone to physical and emotional violence rather than intimacy (Closson et al., 2020; Gibbs, Jewkes, Sikweyiya et al., 2015; Gibbs et al., 2018; Gibbs, Myrttinen, Washington et al., 2020; Gottert et al., 2018). According to these studies, young black men place little value on emotional expression and are more likely to resort to controlling behaviours through emotional and/or physical violence (Willan et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2007, 2008; Wood and Jewkes, 1997, 2001). However, some of the participants in my study deviated from these characterisations and instead foregrounded physical and emotional closeness as key elements of their intimate relationships. In this section, I thus pay attention to the young men's experiences and expressions of love that emerge with embodied heterosexual masculinities and their emotional lives (Monaghan & Robertson, 2011; Seidler, 2007). Drawing on their own experience to explain their understandings and expressions of love, two young men said:

> *This thing we call love is different… A parent's love is enough, but as you grow up you start to feel like there's a gap for another kind of love... you end up thinking about love and wanting someone who will love you…Yeah sure, your mom loves you, but she doesn't kiss you.* (JB, 17 years, FGD 4)

> *It's for different reasons. Some are in relationships for sex, some are of the mindset that they want to find someone to grow [close] with… [I] need someone close to [me] to reassure [me] and tell [me] that everything will be alright, calm you down and be there for you in that moment.* (Lubabalo, 17 years, FGD 4)

JB and Lubabalo illustrate how some of the young men in this study spoke about their experiences of love. For these young men, their love relationships were not just about enacting their (hetero)sexualities (Graham & Mphaphuli, 2018; Harrison, 2008; Mvune et al., 2019) but also about conceptualising and expressing love in different ways. For both young men, love affords opportunities to cultivate closeness and connection in their intimate relationships. JB's

narrative serves two purposes. Firstly, the "we" refers to what was said as he gestured with his two interlocutors in the group. Here, he was suggesting the experiences and expressions of love materialised for either one of them was different. Although all the young men were talking about love, he was making the point that they all had different experiences of it. Secondly, he establishes that even for one person, there are different kinds of love, with equally different emotional and physical implications. He makes this point even clearer with the distinction between parental love and romantic love. While parental love has produced feelings of care and emotional support between him and his mother (Cantillon & Lynch, 2017), it is the 'other kind of love' that produces new emotional and bodily capacities. Importantly, in juxtaposing these two types of love, he highlights how the intensities of both are linked to temporality, with parental love plateauing and romantic love taking on greater significance in his life. Furthermore, he also links his active pursuit of romantic love to his emergent (hetero)sexuality and desires for connection and pleasure. The evocative metaphor of a gap that develops within, not only provides a strong illustration of his deep understanding of his own emotional life but further indicates the profound value he attributes to the relation of love. Seidler (2006, p. 117) contends that as young men navigate the new territories of emergent masculinities, they often assume instrumental relationships with their bodies, which leads to them concealing their "inner emotional lives". In line with the gendered imperatives to overlook their own emotional lives, their bodies are taught to harden against feeling, which develops widening "a gap between how they feel and what they can" reveal to others (Seidler, 2006, p. 117). Typically, this 'gap' stops young men from acknowledging and revealing their inner lives. However, on the contrary, this gap increases JB's emotional reflexivity (Holmes, 2015; Waling, 2019b) towards actively thinking about ways to materialise his desires for love.

For Lubabalo, the experience of a love relationship enables him to offer someone the love he also desires for himself (Seidler, 2006). This leads him to identify love as multidimensional and he delineates the physical and emotional dimensions of love. He makes a distinction between the ways that young men, including himself, relate to love and their intimate relationships. He gestures towards two relational possibilities: a relationship for sex and a relationship for closeness. As the statement suggests, a relationship for sex materialises (hetero)sexually active bodies whose main objective is sex. Alternatively, in relationships of closeness, which may be read as love relationships, the relations between bodies emphasise not just closeness in terms of physical proximity, but also an emotional attachment and intensity. Here, the closeness is a mutually felt intensity of feelings that further produces opportunities

for emotional disclosure. As Lubabalo suggests, the closeness of a love relationship produces exchanges that offer him reassurance and affirmation during times of hardship. He suggests that young men prioritise the physical dimension of love; this is mainly realised through sex as a key deed of expressing their love. Alternatively, young men who emphasise the emotional dimensions of love focus on cultivating an intimacy that allows them to grow closer to their girlfriends. Echoing JB's desire to be loved, Lubabalo placed a greater emphasis on the emotional dimension of love. For Lubabalo the closeness and connection of his love relationship produced the opportunity to be reassured and affirmed by his girlfriend. Lubabalo makes us aware of how love produces the capacities for positive and affirming intensities that help him calm down. Although international studies on intimate relationships and masculinities have noted the ways intimate relationships can often provide space for emotional disclosure (Allan, 2018; Forrest, 2010; Holmes, 2015; Redman, 2001), similar studies are limited in South Africa. Furthermore, despite Ratele's (2013) call for explorations of young black men's lives that take seriously the role of emotions in the shaping of their subjectivities, there is still very little work in this area, especially on emotions associated with positive and non-violent masculinities (see Malinga & Ratele, 2016, 2018). However, Lubabalo's clear articulation of the emotional and embodied capacities of love in his intimate relationship indicates a keen understanding of his emotional capacity as a young man and a boyfriend. In a similar vein, another young man, Smanga, during an individual interview, offered the following reflection on love:

> *I think [love] is important because at the end of the day [every guy] needs someone who will make them feel special and feel weak when they are around... Your life needs to have some balance and you need to show that romantic side of you, not only the angry side.* (Smanga, 19 years, IDI)

Smanga is clear on the importance of love in his own life and the lives of young men in general (Forrest, 2010; Malinga & Ratele, 2012). He suggests that what he values most in his relationship is the chance to experience and express feelings that he otherwise cannot express outside of his relationship. Like JB and Lubabalo, Smanga foregrounds the emotional dimensions of love as a necessary component of being a young man. For Smanga, these dimensions of love provide the emotional and physical space for young men to not only feel the intensities of love but also acknowledge them in ways that do not socially compromise their performance of masculinity (Redman, 2001; Seidler, 2006). Consequently, Smanga does not shy away from the opportunity to feel and express emotions that are not typically endorsed or

positively associated with hegemonic masculinities (Seidler, 2007). Echoing studies have hinted at the growing emotionality of young men within their love relationships (Allen, 2007; Forrest, 2010; Redman, 2001), Smanga suggests that for him, and other young men, the intimacy of a love relationship creates the space for him to not only feel love but to express it in ways he otherwise suppresses. These findings question local gender and sexuality studies that mainly associate young black men with intimacies of emotional and physical violence (Jewkes et al., 2010; Shamu et al., 2016; Zembe et al., 2015). Smanga's narrative suggests that there is more to young black men than just anger and violence, when alternative contexts such as those provided by love relationships are considered. He also suggests that in the context of a love relationship, young men can engage with and express love and associated feelings as opposed to anger, which is the only emotion endorsed for men and masculinities to publicly feel and express (de Boise & Hearn, 2017; McQueen, 2017; Waling, 2019b). Through the notion of balance Smanga suggests an ambivalence within his own masculine subjectivity that has been surfaced by love. A love relationship produces the capacity for the masculinised effect of anger and the feminised effect of romantic love to be experienced as mutually constitutive, rather than mutually exclusive. Consequently, his love relationship becomes an affective site to feel and express vulnerability.

I found that the young men's understanding of love also related to how it produced capacities and opportunities for them to feel and express their emotions in ways that, at times, felt like they could not with their peers or their families. For most of the young men, love relationships offered opportunities to access and share their inner emotional lives (Holmes, 2015; McQueen, 2017; Seidler, 2006), which Smanga expresses above as showing one's romantic side. In line with McQueen's (2017) study, some of the participants in my study highlighted the value of love relationships being important avenues through which, in addition to establishing closeness and intimacy, they could be emotionally expressive and vulnerable with their girlfriends. In expanding his explanation on the importance of love in his and other young men's lives, another young man shared the same sentiments about love enabling vulnerability:

> *The person you're in a [love] relationship with is someone who knows everything about you, the way you feel. For example, I do not speak about my family members to my friends, but I do speak with my girlfriend because she is the one person who cares about me and sympathizes with me.* (Okuhle, 21 years, IDI)

For Okuhle, a love relationship provides the affective space for sharing his feelings with someone who genuinely cares for him. Okuhle's narrative suggests that the intimacy and

closeness he has established with his girlfriend enable him to share about things that matter the most to him – his family. This also implies that there is a level of emotional engagement and disclosure that takes place in his love relationship that does not happen with family or with friends. Therefore, sharing how he feels depends on feelings that he reads as caring and demonstrating sympathy. When young men feel they are in an affective space that allows for emotional disclosure, they are able to do the emotional work of connecting with their girlfriends in deep and meaningful ways. For example, referring to the affective possibilities of being with friends, Okuhle said, "You can always lie to your friends, [because] sometimes guys are inconsiderate". This contrasts his love relationship with the homosocial relations with his friends where the hegemonic masculinity ideals of nondisclosure and emotional control are prized (McQueen, 2017; Reeser & Gottzén, 2018), particularly for young black men (Jackson, 2018; Ratele, 2013). Okuhle's admission departs from established notions of young men being stoic and inexpressive in relationships, which feminist scholars have argued is one of the main sources of women's frustrations in relationships (hooks, 2004).

These young men confirm the arguments of gender and sexuality scholars who have challenged notions about young men being novices of love (Allen, 2007; Forrest, 2010; Redman, 2001). As Forrest (2010) observes, young men are aware of the difference between public and private masculinities and can to use various methods to manage the tension between them. Allen's (2007) delineation of romantic masculinities indicated young men's ambivalent performances of love and masculinities. Their love relationships are avenues where they can express love. For these young men, love is generated through cultivating closeness and intimacy with their girlfriends, and this intimacy begets emotional disclosure and vulnerability. The findings in this section suggest that the young men understand love as multidimensional, with its emotional and physical dimensions being equally important in the cultivation of closeness and intimacy. Importantly, the young men highlighted the importance of developing close intimacies and the foundations of what they understand love to be. They further alert us to ways that public discourses about the relation between young masculinities and love can shut down or limit young men's experiences. This response also relates to studies that have alluded to how young men can, even inadvertently, subscribe to public discourses that offer limited possibilities for young men in love relationships (Korobov & Thorne, 2006; Vogels, 2020a). Allen (2007, p. 137) has also noted that this can happen because love among young men is often seen as involving "attributes associated with femininity such as emotional attachment, care and sensitivity". Despite the conventions of heteropatriarchal masculinities, particularly in relation

to sexual intimacy, requiring that young men encompass masculinity rather than be attentive to feeling things, JB and Lubabalo's yearning for the closeness of love relationships positions them as subjects in touch with their feelings (Malinga & Ratele, 2018).

Narratives about emotional 'gaps' produced by love and deep desires to experience closeness point to the more-than-violent understandings these young men already have of their own emotional lives, which is seldom explored in research. Love for these young men is an important consideration, an exciting and positive feeling that, while seemingly doing the work of affirming the heterosexualities (Allen, 2003; Johnson, 2005), also does effective work which further informs their everyday experiences and their inner worlds. Significantly, we see how love is positioned and understood as that which surfaces positive alternative gendered experiences for the young men (Holmes, 2015; Malinga & Ratele, 2018). Furthermore, we see how love produces the capacities for young men like Lubabalo, JB and Smanga to position the intimacy and closeness of love relationships as positive experiences and to actively seek to realise these relations. Scholars have challenged notions that limit how we conceptualise the significance and experiences of love and intimacy among young men (Forrest, 2010; Seidler, 2007; Way, 2013). Seidler (2006) argued that for young men their heterosexual love relationships afford a site through which they can privately feel, express and practice love differently than when in the glare of public discourses, bodies and spaces. The responses from JB and Lubabalo underscore the depth and complexity of love young men have, as an avenue of more than sexual intimacy: of emotional closeness. These are narratives of love that seldom surface in relation to young black men. Importantly, these narratives are a complete contrast to the public discourse of young masculinities, more invested in outward performances of intimate partner violence and multiple sexual partners (Gibbs et al., 2018; Gibbs, Sikweyiya, et al., 2015; Hunter, 2004; Ragnarsson et al., 2010), with whom connection and intimacy do not feature. These young men portray these aspects as tightly linked to their emotional lives.

Love is indeed a significant element of young men's daily lives; however, it circulates differently and surfaces different embodied experiences (Ahmed, 2004b; Waling et al., 2022). Such an exploration of love in the participants' lives moves away from inquiries focused on idealised notions of 'being in love' or what love 'means' (Ngabaza et al., 2013; Vincent & Chiwandire, 2013) and towards providing situated and embodied understandings of love informed by the rhythms, intensities and nuances of everyday life. These narratives suggest that among these young men is a desire for closeness and connection, which is established through the seemingly mundane daily practices and processes of their relationships. While their

experiences of love in real life are removed from the formulaic experiences of the television shows first referenced by Banzi, we can see how love produces relations between young men and their girlfriends that increase the possibilities and capacities for intimacy. Importantly, we see what love does in their lives and the feelings, emotions and vulnerabilities that it materialises in their bodies. This enables us to see and understand young men's lived experiences in different ways than research has enabled us to see so far.

5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I show how young men's understandings of love reflected expansive and diverse practices, feelings and experiences, which are often lost when we limit our attention to public health discourses that mainly focus on young men enacting hegemonic masculinities or hypermasculinities (Closson et al., 2020; Gibbs, Dunkle, et al., 2020; Gibbs, Myrttinen, et al., 2020; Stern et al., 2019) and, furthermore, townships as exclusively producing dangerous relations of love and heterosexual intimacies (Gibbs et al., 2015; Ngidi, 2022; Ragnarsson et al., 2010; Wood & Jewkes, 1997). I have focused on the discursive and material circulations that framed the young men's embodied experiences and practices of love, and how these inform the feelings, (inter)actions, situations and even spaces associated with love. Among all the participants, there was unequivocal consensus about the significance of love in the lives of young men in general, and then in relation to their own lives. If we are to reverse harmful stereotypes that hypersexualise young men, then we must also give due consideration to their thoughts on and experiences of sex and love. In this chapter, I have also paid attention to the situational definitions and expressions of love narrated by the young men. Instead of viewing love as a euphemism for sexual relationships, I have endeavoured to trace how emotions or feelings circulate in their daily lives and encounters of love. While love relationships can be sexual, studies have demonstrated that sexual relationships are not necessarily love relationships. In that vein, love relationships are not necessarily without sexual charge and desires.

CHAPTER SIX

Love is a doing word: Young men's negotiations of love (and) masculinities in a South African township

6.1. Introduction

The previous chapter outlined young men's investments in love and its embodied significance in their lives. In this chapter, I focus on the data as they relate to the research question: how are young black masculinities associated with the performance of love? The prominent themes that emanated from the data reveal the ambiguities that love affords young masculinities in their relationships; thus, while love produces emotional and embodied intimacies, it also enables their capacities to redefine themselves in ways that suggest heteromasculine subjectivities. Love, for these young men, is a twofold performance when being a boy/friend: achieving heteronormative success through being (hetero)sexually oriented towards acceptable love objects, thus aligning them with other heterosexually oriented young men (Ahmed, 2004c); and further drawing them emotionally and physically closer to their girlfriends. There is little research that explores the contradictory experiences of dominance and subjugation (Ratele, 2018). Ratele (2018, p. 97) has also called for research that explores young black men as simultaneously "dominant and insecure", as wells as for a "situated, critically empathetic, psychosocial, profeminist approach" that centres "meaningfulness, worth and recognition" in the lives (and loves) of young black men. This means fully responding to young black men's life questions and dismissing their concerns, pains and anxieties, even while challenging their complicit masculinities (Ratele, 2018, p. 100).

Research on young masculinities in intimate and relational contexts has mainly focused on the ways that love becomes a trope for young men to either establish or maintain power over their girlfriends (Allen, 2003, 2007; Korobov, 2009a, 2011; Korobov & Thorne, 2006; Robinson et al., 2019; Vogels, 2020a). Such research supposes that, for young men, love remains a discursive tool mainly in service of their gender projects, and which endorses a generally tenuous relationship with their own emotions, intimate relationships and practices associated with attachment. Although a small but growing body of research has begun to offer a more expansive understanding of young men's experiences with love (Forrest, 2010; Malinga & Ratele, 2012, 2016; Redman, 2001), scholars still maintain that young men "remain entrapped within dominant discourses of romantic love" (Singh, 2013, p. 28; see also Rule-Groenewald, 2013; Vincent & Chiwandire, 2013).

Despite this, there remains a relative silence on the other-than-violent experiences and expressions of love in the lives of young black men in South Africa. Therefore, in this chapter, I argue that young black men are more than deployments of force, violence and coercion; they have the capacity for love and progressive enactments of love. Furthermore, as the data will illustrate, young black men's subjectivities cannot be considered devoid of or separate from feelings of care and love, as well as the need for intimacy. In a world that increasingly requires all persons to be emotionally and affectively engaged (Holmes, 2010, 2015; Waling, 2019b), it is not only important to explore the implications this has for young black men in South Africa, but also how love might prove to be productive towards liberating black masculinities (Ratele, 2016).

6.2. Young men's negotiations of love (and) masculinities

The young men's experiences and expressions of love were conceptualised as relational and complex actions, often linked to their embodied performances of masculinity. In this study, the young men suggested that love is experienced as a force that produces new understandings of the self and thus gives different insights into love (Jónasdóttir, 2014). Most of the participants reflexively linked the development of their performance of love with their performance of masculinity, particularly as they were becoming men. In this section, I engage with how the participants reflected on their encounters with love, and how these were experienced as vital to their emerging personalities as they shifted from boyhood to being men. Thus, asking the young men to define or explain love meant drawing on their lived experiences to illustrate the complex ways that the forces of love circulated in their lives. In line with current literature on love and masculinities, the participants' explanations of love drew mainly on their lived experiences and embodied performances of masculinity (Edgley & Roberts, 2021; Forrest, 2010; Malinga & Ratele, 2016; Manyaapelo et al., 2019; Nasser El-Dine, 2018; Redman, 2001). As has also been noted in South African studies (Malinga & Ratele, 2012, 2016; Rule-Groenewald, 2013), asking the young men to speak about love, particularly in our initial encounters during fieldwork, frequently elicited tentative responses as they attempted to distil their subjective experiences and understandings of love.

6.2.1. Performing love and negotiating masculinities

> *Love is a verb, a doing word, you see… it's hard to explain what it is.* (JB, 18 years, FGD)

The above statement by JB was a response to my probing during a group discussion on the meaning of love. JB's response was instructive. He seemed to conceptualise "love as an action

rather than a feeling" (hooks, 2000, p. 13), and thus suggested that his subjective understanding of love drew from multiple experiences, situations, relations and embodied practices which were difficult to discretely define. For JB, and most of the participants in the study, the difficulty of explaining or defining love was not their limited knowledge and understanding of love. Rather, love for most participants was understood as linked to their performance of masculinity, which was equally difficult to define. Similarly, other participants said:

> *I can't explain [love] in one word… this question is hard! [laughs]* (Jabulani, 18 years, IDI)

For Jabulani, love and the experience of being in a relationship encompassed many aspects that go beyond discourse. It was difficult to capture the multiple expressions and performances he had experienced and navigated into words. In addition, what made the line of questioning difficult were the challenges that he felt young men had to negotiate as part of negotiating love. Giving an example of some the reasons why it was hard to define love, he continued:

> *We live in difficult times [and] young people get into relationships for the wrong reasons… because they want to have sex and for other reasons, like money. There are few people who get into relationships because of just love… Women even fear being in relationships now because men sleep with them and move on to the next girl and impregnate her, as a result women say "abafana bayafana" [boys/men are all the same] because of this reason.* (Jabulani, 18 years, IDI)

Countering the laughter in his previous statement, Jabulani suggests that part of the difficulty of explaining love has to do with the broader social realities that complicate young people's relationships. Here, he delineates between love relationships and sex-money relationships and problematises the social and economic issues that shape heterosexual embodiments of intimacy in the latter. For Jabulani, relationships that prioritise sex and money negate love and pose further life challenges concerning women. His observation echoes studies that have suggested that young women's vulnerabilities are structured by gender and socioeconomic status and that young men's behaviours are relationally structured by the same social realities (Bhana, 2018; Hunter, 2007; Jewkes & Morrell, 2018; Watt et al., 2012; Willan et al., 2019). Importantly, he not only separates sex and money from love, but aligns these to the male and female binary–- where young men mainly seek sex, and young women focus on money. This suggests that in his own relationship, one he established for the right reasons, his performance of love and masculinity are inextricably linked. Jabulani thus performs a love which involves him getting into a relationship mainly for love and performing a masculinity that resists prioritising money and sex. Love is a complex matter for most of the participants, as Vusi also explains:

> *[Love is] showing her my feelings. Ay, this question is a bit difficult. The problem is that there is a lot of things happening there.* (Vusi, 18 years, IDI)

In the above excerpt, Vusi struggled to define love and, like many other participants, reverted to his experience of love. He and his girlfriend had been together since primary school and all through high school. He explained earlier in the interview that, "she is the one person I have imagined myself with" – signalling a deep sense of attachment and commitment to his girlfriend. For Vusi, being in a relationship is about more than sex and money. In the above excerpt, he reflects on how the affective intensities experienced in the context of his relationship produce capacities to perform a masculinity that experiences and demonstrates feelings. However, as his caveat suggests, this is not a straightforward process. He acknowledges and problematises the showing of feelings against other 'things happening' and suggests here that the performance of love takes place within competing, discursive and material contexts. This relational context frames his subjectivity and how he performs the intimate heterosexuality of being a boyfriend. To demonstrate his love as a boyfriend, Vusi undertakes the balancing act of enacting a love masculinity that requires showing feelings, which is feminised, and simultaneously fulfilling the normative requirements of heterosexuality. Providing further proof of Jabulani's sex-money thesis, Vusi further explains his past experiences with relationships:

> *Girls have finished me, ay, they have used me too much. Whenever I had money or got paid girls would come where I stay and would spend all my money and we would finish it all… I realised that I will not do what I want to achieve in life if I keep entertaining girls.* (Vusi, 18 years, IDI)

Unlike most of my participants, Vusi lived alone and was casually employed on construction sites. This gave him access to money and the opportunity to 'entertain girls'. In the above narrative, as he traces his experiences of love, Vusi referred to *amantombazane* (girls) to explain his sex-money encounters. By suggesting that "girls have finished" him, he also refers to his performance of "youthful masculinity" which emphasised the demonstration of heterosexual competence and the ability to provide economically (Gibbs, Myrttinen, Washington et al., 2020, p. 537). When speaking about their relationships, the participants commonly used terms such as *intombi yami* (my girlfriend), *umuntu wami* (my person) or the phrase *umuntu engithandana naye* (someone I am in a love relationship with). Another common term among the young men was amantombazane which, unlike the others, did not acknowledge any significant relationship with a particular young woman. Although

heterosexual competence helped Vusi adhere to certain aspects of the normative gender script, as a young man who had casual employment, there were also other aspects, such as being able to provide, that he was unable to live up to. It is these experiences that informed his subsequent performance of love, as he continues:

> *I think love and respect is important in a relationship and you must both do something that will benefit you both in the future… [We] kiss each other… have sex and have a nice time together… and respect each other!* (Vusi, 18 years, IDI)

Here, Vusi conceptualises a love relationship that encompasses love, respect and being future-oriented. Being future-orientated challenges the sex-money structure of youth relationships, something also noted by Jabulani. Vusi suggests that within a love relationship, a young man must modify his performance of masculinity and reject the aspects that limit future possibilities. This is a love-inflected performance of masculinity that expresses feelings in more expansive ways than just prizing sex and providing financial support. The notion of respecting each other in this context refers to monogamy and ensuring that even when they do have sex, they take precautions against pregnancy, which would derail both their futures. Vusi suggests that, over time, being in a romantic relationship produces an alternative masculinity which resists dominant masculinities. This alternative masculinity challenges a young man's capacity for gender-inequitable behaviours and, instead, expands his capacity for mutual respect and future-orientated behaviours. Vusi's experience reflected the notion of thinking and doing things differently over time. As a young man, being in a love relationship also meant imagining a future and showing his feelings. This suggested that in his relationship was an individual and internal experience of emotions and a set of varied embodied practices of love. However, as he further clarified, his performance of love is complicated by the many 'things happening there,' suggesting the experience of love is constantly being negotiated.

Other participants also suggested that the emotional and affective intensities of growing up reworked their capacities to do love over time. While for Rinaldo, the doing of love could be restricted by the novel affective intensities of shifting from boyhood to young adult masculinities, others suggested that love also becomes an emergent experience, understood and experienced in line with physical and emotional intensities. Love is thus understood and experienced differently over time, as Thabang explains:

> *When you are [a boy], you take [love] as something to have fun with. When you are matured, you change because there is a difference between a boy and a man. As you grow, as you become*

> *a man, you think differently about love. You think about getting married or taking care of a household. A boy is someone. who does not have that much like in terms of like [a house] ... And then a man is someone who is able to take care [of] and watch over [a family], and also makes sure that the family grows… [When you are older], you are then serious and know what you want. [A boy] can never have enough. One day you see one beautiful girl and then the next day you see that the other one… we call that being isoka, a lover boy.* (Thabang, 16 years, IDI)

In the above excerpt, Thabang linked love and the related undertakings of love to maturing and becoming a man. His response suggests that growing up and shifting towards a more mature masculinity warrants new avenues for assenting love; that the doing of love shifts him from 'having fun' to being 'better.' By linking the idea of having fun with love, he suggested that not all relationships are love relationships, that some are about a doing that does not require the same measure of emotional engagement as part of the doing. Drawing on traditional discourses that normatively link masculinity with being providers, Thabang suggested that as a young man who is yet to achieve any of these, his capacities for accomplishing love are limited (Hunter, 2010; Morrell et al., 2016). In further explaining the social and material position of young men, he indexes the discourse of isoka masculinity to contextualise the way that young men justify having multiple girlfriends, and thus practice being 'lover boys' (Hunter, 2004, 2010). He contrasted this with growing up and performing a different form of matured masculinity that was more invested in relationships and developing a connection with someone. The suggestion here is that as young men mature and become men, they also perceive and do love differently. Another young man had this to say of his own experience with love:

> *[Relationships] are how you grow up as a boy [and] they are proof for the kind of person you ar'. Let's 'ay you've been in a relationship with someone for 3 years, you learn certain things in that relationship, in terms of how to behave towards a woman… When we started, we were more interested in finding out about each other and getting to know each other… [Then] we started becoming serious, we wanted to be people who made each other happy and who trust each other.* (Dingani, 18 years, IDI)

In the above excerpt, Dingani presents a perspective that was quite popular among the participants; a relationship demonstrates maturity and entry into masculinity, both biologically and socially. Inflected through Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity, this could be taken to mean that the young men understand relationships to be a signifier of successful heterosexuality. Yet, the rest of Dingani's narrative suggests more complexity, as his relationship seems to go beyond performative heterosexuality. Instead, he suggests a mutual

and progressive emotional and affective investment over time. Malinga and Ratele (2018) have argued that when positive emotions are experienced in intimate relationships they can provide a positive impetus for transforming young masculinities. Essentially, Dingani asserts that as the relationships became serious, he too became a serious young man. The fact that he makes an example of the passage of time and the learning that occurred within it, points to the significance of not just focusing on sexual desire, but also emotional intimacy which, as he further suggests, was the prerequisite of formally establishing his relationship as 'serious'. For Dingani, over time, being in a serious relationship seems to have resulted in growth and learning, which also facilitated the development of happiness and trust. From what Dingani suggests, we can understand that young men also invest in intimate relationships not just to fulfil the heteronormative gender script, but also to ensure that their and their partner's happiness (Malinga & Ratele, 2018). Importantly, this challenges stereotypes about young black men who, in South African research especially, overrepresent anti-social and risky behaviours that often result in individual and/or intersubjective harm (Dube, 2016; Ratele, 2013). As love came to matter differently for the young men, it cultivated a deepening reflexivity, making them more self-aware and reflective on their futures with their girlfriends. Although young black men may come to value and embrace love, enacting or embracing these emerging masculinities can also be challenging to navigate personally and socially (Langa, 2020).

6.3. Managing public performances of love (and) masculinities

This section explores another major theme which relates to the complexities and ambivalences of the young men's performances of love. Beyond navigating love in their private lives and at individual levels, some of the young men also expressed the challenges of having to balance their performances of love with the normative social expectations expressions and practices of love. From the perspective of demonstrating their heterosexual competence, being in love relationships did mitigate against being seen as *izishimane*[13] (Mvune, 2020; Zibane, 2017). However, their heterosexual success was further governed by local discourses which framed their embodied practices and expressions of love. Among most of the participants, what were broadly described as township masculinities were often experienced as being at odds with love masculinities, thus requiring the young men to manage their performances deftly. The

[13] Plural for isishimane, a masculinity that is unable to demonstrate heterosexual competence.

participants' narratives suggest that in addition to being perceived as heterosexually competent, most of them also experienced pressures to embody particular forms of heterosexuality. Love is not a simple experience for young men, as the narratives in this section suggest.

6.3.1. Abafana abafani: navigating and resisting township masculiities

> *[A]s a result women say "abafana bayafana" [boys/men are all the same]* (Jabulani, 18 years, IDI)

> *Boys are not the same… we have different ways of doing things.* (Lubabalo, 17 years, IDI)

In line with available research on young men in contexts of social and economic precarity, diverse forms of masculinities emerge, with some enacting risky and anti-social subjectivities and others relationally resisting these (Bhana, 2018; Bonner-Thompson & McDowell, 2020; Graham, 2014; Langa, 2010, 2020; Roberts, 2018). In my encounters with the young men, a significant portion of them participants were always keen to offer the caveat "*abafana abafani*" (boys are not the same). In the context of relationships, the young men were always keen to respond to discourses that they felt were commonly held in popular media and by young women that "*abafana bayafana*" (boys/men are all the same). Against the backdrop of #MenAreTrash, a popular social media campaign that created awareness around men's complicity in gendered violence (D'Avanzato et al., 2022), the participants frequently reflected on how gender-inequitable masculinities not only impacted young women, but also young men. In this section I explore the ways in which the young men in the study navigated their gendered subjectivities in their daily lives and in relation to their love relationships.

The prominent themes in the data generated were the discourses and embodiments that the young men variously associated with being *umfana waselok'shini* (a young man from the township). In line with research by Langa (2020, p. 61), the participants "characterised themselves and their peers according to self-generated and commonly understood typologies". As such, they demonstrated the diversity of young black masculinities in the township context and how these related to love and relations of intimacy; namely, as is further observed in Langa's (2020) study, the ways in which the young men in my study seemed to "accept and reject certain masculine practices in their daily lives, depending on [their] contexts". One of the questions I asked the participants during interviews, and in other informal encounters during my fieldwork, was about their idea or definition of a typical young man from their area and how they measured up to those descriptions. As demonstrated by the narratives below, being a young man from the township, umfana waselok'shini, was not a uniform experience

and it often meant negotiating different (township) masculinities (Graham, 2014; Richards & Langa, 2018; Pyke, 2022) while simultaneously negotiating performances of love (Bhana, 2018).

For instance, in further clarifying why and how he thought young men were not the same, Lubabalo continued thus:

> *The boys I grew up with are all associated with drugs… [they use] dagga, whoonga, they always [at] 'amabhadu'[parties]… [T]he difference is also if you as boy have a vision and a mission… I want to be different from the rest of the boys in this community.* (Lubabalo, 17 years, IDI)

Here, Lubabalo was resisting performances that defied discourses of being respectable and respectful. Through his rejection of drugs and partying, Lubabalo relationally constructs his own subjectivity as a young man whose life has a trajectory. In line with this, Lubabalo's narrative suggests active self-orientation towards alternative spaces, actions and affects. South African studies have identified as *tsotsi* masculinities, demonstrated by some young men who leverage violence and other anti-social behaviours to assert their dominance (Langa, 2016, 2020; Wood & Jewkes, 1997; Wood et al., 2007, 2008). For him, their behaviours not only foreclose their prospects, but also limit the kinds of relationships they are likely to establish. Similar to what Mvune and colleagues (2019, p. 2) refer to *inkwari*, *amabhadu* are highly gendered and sexualised social spaces in which young people socialise and party. As Lubabalo also suggests, in the township context amabhadu and inkwari intersect with copious use of alcohol, drugs and spontaneous sexual encounters (Mvune et al., 2019), all the elements and behaviours that erode young men's respectability and their futures. The suggestion here was that performing a particular form of township masculinity materialised embodied practices of love masculinities that bolster a young man's capacity to demonstrate his heterosexual competence, of which the socially recognised indicator is having 'many girls'. In this context, his capacity to realise this and have it experienced by his peers establishes a version of township masculinity.

> *That's the most important thing [for guys] in the township, k'fanele ugqeme [you must hit it], that's what they know.* (Okuhle, 21 years, IDI)

In the above excerpt, Okuhle reflects on the complexities of performing a township masculinity, which he experiences as being in tension with how he performs love. Okuhle describes an ever-present expectation for young men to demonstrate their heterosexual prowess

through having a girlfriend and, especially as they grow older, be perceived as (hetero)sexually competent. Similarly, Langa (2020) has observed the social, physical and psychological pressures that young men experience to perform heteronormative masculinities, which they must shore up through demonstrative sexual partnerships. In this study, it was a common theme in the data, as most of the participants noted experiencing increased expectations from their peers following their public demonstrations of heterosexual prowess. Young men who were in love relationships discussed these expectations as strong discursive forces which resulted in them experiencing some uneasiness, as they found themselves caught between the expectations of embodying love masculinity and the expectations of embodying a locally viable heteromasculinity. In the following narrative, Okuhle expands on his reflection about navigating the tensions between not wanting to pressure his girlfriend for sex, while also wanting to remain answerable to his friends:

> *[Laughs] Ah! [Sometimes] you lie to your friends because guys can be inconsiderate. [Laughs] Its easy for them to tell you to leave that person and go to someone who will let you hit. So, when they are pressuring you, you just say uyagqema [you're 'hitting that', meaning having sex with]. They wouldn't know any way, [because] it's only the two of you who know the truth. Until it eventually happens then you can relax because she has let you hit it… otherwise they will eat you alive!* (Okuhle, 21 years, IDI)

Here, Okuhle illustrates the intensities that accompany failing to live up to or challenging the heteronormative gender script, which he further underscores with his laughter and delivery. He suggests that, among his peers, a performance of masculinity that holds currency is one that demonstrates (hetero)sexual prowess through sexual encounters with multiple women, overlooking gender-equitable behaviours and downplaying emotional attachments (Closson et al., 2020; Gibbs, Sikweyiya & Jewkes, 2015; Gibbs et al., 2018; Gibbs, Myrttinen, Washington et al., 2020; Langa, 2020). By framing his peers as 'inconsiderate' and stating that they find it 'easy' to apply these discursive pressures, he highlights his own discomfort with his position and gives further insight into his reflexive negotiation. Being keenly aware of this and the repercussions that come with not living up to this idealised performance, he also suggests that revealing the truth about not having sex with one's girlfriend is tantamount to admitting that you are not 'man enough'. He implies that this would result in ridicule and loss of social status (Langa, 2020). This is especially pertinent as he admits to how he navigates local discourses that frame masculinity. His experience of the social pressure he encounters from his friends is also instructive. Although seemingly innocuous, we see how these decisions have deeper and

more complicated implications for him which go beyond the outward performance of masculinity. Okuhle is invested in his relationship and in the performance of masculinity, and he tries to find a middle ground which would keep him from losing his footing in either one. However, he does not completely deviate from the heterosexual script, as sex remains important.

By suggesting that he can only relax after he has adhered to the script by having sex with his girlfriend, Okuhle further brings to light the psychological and embodied tensions he experiences as he balances his performances of love and masculinities. While it appears that he resists the reductive discourses of masculinity, it is not an easy process. Rather, love enables him to navigate the pressures but not completely evade them. Importantly, he suggests that he performs this balancing act to avoid being 'eaten alive', referring to the ridicule and teasing he endures from his friends. However, for other participants, having to balance their performance of love and masculinity proved troublesome.

Love is not a simple experience for young men, as another participant suggested when I asked him how he expressed his love. This is evident in Wandile's reflection below:

> *Sometimes you approach someone only with the intention of ukugqema [just getting sex], then next thing usugaxele [you're entangled] . . . It goes both ways, it's a risk, if I can put it that way . . . I love her now, standard.* (Wandile, 19 years, FGD)

Wandile's reflection referred to his current girlfriend of eight months. His assertion supports the findings of studies that have articulated an ambivalence between sex and love for young men when it comes to their relationships (Bhana, 2017, 2018). This is also suggested by his use of the terms *ukugqema* and *ukugaxeka* that index local discourses about intimate relationships and young men. *Ukugqema* (literally: to hit) was described as a 'hit and run' among the young men, where there was little or no emotional attachment to the woman. The main aim of ukugqema is to have sex. On the other hand, ukugaxeka (becoming entangled) refers to how, while navigating ukugqema, a young man can develop feelings and become invested and attached to a particular young woman. Thus, ukugaxeka is described mainly in relation to ukugqema and describes a shifting subjectivity that alters the nature of the relationship from mainly sexual to a love relationship. In the context of ukugaxeka, the young men undertake a different approach that entails emotional attachment and the showing of feelings. This is the risk that Wandile referred to. Using himself as an example, he described how his current relationship had become a love relationship, which prompted different love

doings on his part. As he spoke, Banzi (16 years) interjected "*Udlisiwe!*" at which the other participants laughed. He was suggesting that Wandile had been given a love potion and was spellbound. The ukugaxeka discourse was often used by some young men to ridicule others who had seemingly become 'duped' by love. However, Wandile maintained:

> *Sometimes you have [compromise] in order for you to get what you want, right? So, in my case, there are things I am willing to sacrifice for her.*

By describing himself as a young man who has succumbed to ukugaxeka, Wandile actively resisted the discourse of ukugqema, which emphasises emotional detachment and a (hetero)sexual appetite. Wandile demonstrates how love can prompt a shift in masculine performance, thus producing a different enactment of love that is invested in an emotional connection beyond just sex. He also provides insight into the reactions that young men must navigate in the process of resisting dominant notions that are widely accepted by their peers. The discourses of ukugqema and ukugaxeka are indicative of the confused messaging that young men negotiate in their daily lives (Malinga & Ratele, 2016). On one hand, they are expected to demonstrate their masculinities through having girlfriends yet, on the other, they should not like them too much. The excerpts in this section suggest that, for some of the participants in the study, love is experienced as relational and mutually constitutive with their masculine performances; thus, approaching love differently also produced the capacity to approach their masculinity differently. Their narratives point to how love is imbricated in the complexities of young men's coming of age, and demonstrate how it also becomes an important consideration for young men; they not only approach love as part of their performance, but they also want to be loved. The narratives the young men offer in this section paint a more complex picture of how they negotiate love in their respective lives.

6.3.2. Ukushela: playing with words and speaking from the heart

Ukushela was a constant feature of the interactions I had with the young men throughout my fieldwork. It is a gendered and culturally laden process through which young men initiate a love relationship; a young woman's acceptance of this would be termed *ukuqoma* (Harrison, 2008; Hunter, 2004, 2010; Zibane, 2021). Despite researchers noting that the translation of the term *ukushela* denotes a burning for one's love or to burn with desire, little research has explored how young men navigate the intensities that are part of the experience of *ukushela*. In this section, I explore how the young men's doings of love were negotiated in and through the practice of *ukushela*. The participants' experiences reveal that this practice – which is

inclusive of power, gender and structural inequalities – produces particular love happenings. The narratives of the young men in my study suggest that they often drew on the repertoire of love doings of *ukushela*, depending on the nature of the relationship or the intensity of the love:

> *[It's] how you present yourself to a girl, your words, how you speak [to her], the way you are and your actions add to that. It's how you play with your words.* (Lubabalo, 17 years, FGD)

The above excerpt is Lubabalo's interjection during a group discussion as the participants debated how a young man could go about charming a young woman as they proposed love. *Ukushela* for young men takes place in different contexts, especially in the township. He suggested that the way a young man might go about presenting himself when charming a young woman is a complex interplay of the body, words, talk, tone and actions. Although studies have mainly highlighted enactments of *ukushela* as constraining young women's agency and even as coercive (Hampshire et al., 2011; Ngidi, 2022), the enactment that Lubabalo referred to resists this and presents an alternative love doing that is invested in passion and persuasion (Mvune et al., 2019). This resonates with the notion of *ukudlala ngenkotha* (literally: to play with tongue), which is a form of sweet-talking undertaken by young men as part of *ukushela* (Zibane, 2021). From this perspective, Lubabalo suggested that, among young men, one possible capacity is a particular kind of love approach that 'plays with words.' The play with words is an embodied approach that ultimately informs 'how you present yourself to a girl.' Thus, the negotiation of *ukushela* for Lubabalo involves the complex arrangement of bodies, words, talk, tone and actions that produce his form of love doing. Other young men also offered more insight into the complexities of *ukushela*:

> *There is an isiZulu proverb that goes "Induku enhle igawulwa ezizweni" – that is what I was taught. I was told that if I want a girlfriend, I must go out [of our community].* (Simba, 18 years, IDI)

The proverb to which Simba refers translates as "a beautiful stick is cut from country afar" (Mabaso & Liebhamer, 1998, p. 32). His reference to this proverb demonstrates his attempt to contextualise his own expression of *ukushela*. He elaborated that, during his childhood, his older brothers and uncles had always referenced the proverb and as he came of age, it came to inform his negotiation of love. Importantly, the proverb reinforces particular gender and cultural scripts that necessitate particular performances from young men. In addition to being the active proposer of love (Hunter, 2010), a young man also has, discursively and materially, to cultivate love (Mvune et al., 2019; Zibane, 2021). Through the proverb, *ukushela* as the

doing of love is thus further coded as the active (re)negotiation of a structural and gendered terrain, which produces a young woman's favourable response and thus, she becomes a girlfriend. For Simba, this required going to a different section of the township to ensure that he and his girlfriend were from different areas. Having described himself as quiet and introverted, he explained his experience thus:

> *I am the kind of person who writes poems, I shela [show my love] with poems. It must be something that comes from the heart. When the girl is in front of you, you will not be scared to tell her what is in your heart.* (Simba, 18 years, IDI)

Here, Simba presents a different approach to love – one that renegotiates the notion of ukudlala ngenkotha as described above. As an introvert, Simba found an alternative avenue through which he approached *ukushela*; his version of playing with words and showing his passion leveraged his talent for poetry. However, in contrast to Lubabalo and other young men whose 'presentation to a girl' emphasised outward, embodied practices, through poetry, Simba emphasised speaking from the heart. Again, this adds another dimension to existing literature which largely focuses on outward manifestations of love approaches. Thus, it becomes evident how love produces different capacities, and expands the practice of *ukushela* in new ways for a young man. The notion of speaking from the heart takes on deeper significance from the way that his poetic creativity enabled him to pull together his words, actions and feelings to enact masculinity in a way that he knew to be novel. Simba's narrative goes beyond limited framing of young black men as dominant, unfeeling and violent. Another young man, Dingani, articulated his experience of love:

> *I believe that love is something you can't control. Love is a feeling that comes at any time 'nd [it's] something that you can't prevent from coming to you when it comes . . . it's a feeling which comes from the heart for another person or someone that you love.* (Dingani, 18 years, IDI)

South African literature on youth sexualities has consistently highlighted the ways in which love is a site through which young men exercise control over young women (Wood and Jewkes, 1998; Wood et al., 2007, 2008). Wood and Jewkes (1997) have noted how young men unilaterally determine the terms and conditions of the love relationship and foreground sex as part of the arrangement. Recent studies, however, have provided more nuance and complexity to these findings and have demonstrated that, although young men may perform these versions of masculinities, they also value deep emotional connection (Allen, 2003; Bhana and Pattman, 2011). Dingani exposed the force of love in his life, how he experienced it as an uncontrollable

and intangible force, yet one with very tangible effects on his life and on his performance of masculinity. The characterisation of love as a force beyond individual control was common among participants. Interestingly, this challenges the notion of self-control and emotional infallibility associated with normative masculinities (Connell, 2005; Seidler, 2007). And this experience of love disrupts notions of masculinity, particularly among young black men. Departing from the narrative of control and dominance, Dingani was admittedly not in control of his feelings in ways that facilitate gender inequitable atmospheres within his relationship. His approach and the process of *ukushela* that he undertook are not necessarily buttressed by notions of violence and control. Rather, he suggested that he is guided by the intense feelings from the heart that drew him to someone. Overall, the narratives in this section suggest a connection between feelings of love and other-than-violent doings of love. For most of the young men, love enabled them to rework or expand the practice of *ukushela* in progressive ways.

6.3.3. Embodying love and shifting capacities

> *[When you] reach puberty stage, you chase after girls, you go through a lot of stages… You [go through] a stage where you like girls… [Then] you want to have a person that you will be able to … grow [up] with and grow the love between you two.* (Rinaldo, 18 years, IDI)

For the young men in this study, the performance of love is linked with the development of their own emerging personality as they transition from boyhood to manhood. As Rinaldo's narrative suggests, as one outgrows boyhood, pursuing girls goes from being about going through the physical motions of adolescence to a more reflexive masculinity focused on other forms of growing. As with the other young men in the study, the discourse of *amantombazane* is used, which underscores the significance of the shift to manhood, as he begins thinking about a person to have a relationship with. Once again, it is significant that he thinks of this person in future-orientated terms, the idea of growth is significant; Rinaldo experiences growth relationally, which is also constitutive of his nascent masculine subjectivity. With the shift, Rinaldo suggests a love masculinity that not only foregrounds closeness but also makes him increasingly aware of the surrounding shifts in his life. Rinaldo further suggests that the onset of his physical and social shift of masculinity corresponds with the relations that frame his emotional and affective intensities. From this perspective, a young man's nascent masculinity and novel desires for intimacy are simultaneously embodied in that which becomes the performance of heterosexual love (Johnson, 2005; Monaghan & Robertson, 2012). Here, Rinaldo both confirms and challenges the typical understanding of young men's physical

growth and emotional maturation. Unlike some young men, whose sense of growth and maturation was defined mainly by their sexual encounters, for Rinaldo it is a recognition of a point in his life when a love relationship became more important. In this way, his growth is not just physical, but also emotional, which he understands to have more significant implications for his masculine subjectivity. He continues:

> *I think I'm on another level of growth now because life requires me not to rely on people. [As a young man], you must know where you are going in life. I want to go to varsity and study so that I can support my family.* (Rinaldo, 18 years, IDI)

Rinaldo's reference to 'stages' and 'levels' during our interview only affirmed his notion of a relationship being a marker of growth. However, Rinaldo's transition towards adult masculinity quickly reminds him of the structural implications of masculinity. Being an adult man means being able to maintain himself and develop independence, and this also frames his performance of love and masculinity. Here, Rinaldo's statement emphasises the notion of growth and suggests that, unlike the purely embodied experience of puberty, as he becomes a young man, he becomes progressively more reflexive. He suggests that other social and structural aspects that shape daily life are accordingly implicated in his doing of heteromasculinity and love. As he becomes a young man, his emotional life comes into focus as navigates his social and material growth, which expands beyond the biological. Thus, his reference to being able to enrol in higher education and secure employment suggests that his performance of masculinity and his doing of love are informed by normative discourses of provider masculinity (Hunter, 2010; Morrell et al., 2016). Significantly, Rinaldo further suggests that love for a young man is entangled in the social and embodied stages of growing up that a young man undergoes as his own masculinity materialises over time. During this shift, the body is reoriented towards girls' bodies, as he moves from chasing them to wanting much more of an emotional connection, thus suggesting that love is part of and productive of his development and maturation over time. In describing this shift in affective relations (Ahmed, 2004b), Rinaldo suggests that the emotional and affective intensities now circulate in ways that 'grow' love, as his own body grows into that of a young man. Seidler's (2007) seminal work has highlighted the very limited knowledge masculinities scholars have about the relationship men have with their bodies and their emotional lives, which he warns further obfuscates our understanding of the risks that diverse young men face (Forrest, 2010; Redman, 2001). Rinaldo's narrative confirms this. For him, establishing a love relationship is not only about

heterosexual performance; he connects chasing girls with boyhood. Rather, as he grows into a young man, he seeks to grow closer and to grow (in) love with someone.

The significance of these intensities is reflected in the narratives offered by Simba, as he expanded on his own experience:

> *I started [to be] aware around 2016 when I realized that I am growing, and I must be able to take decisions. I realized that my life is changing into another phase.* (Simba, 18 years, IDI)

In the above excerpt, Simba discussed the idea of becoming aware, he uses the term *ukuqaqeka*, which signals coming into an awareness of his subjectivity as a young man, and the social and material worlds he navigates. For Simba, this realisation marked his growth as he came to realise the material and discursive requirements of masculinity which determined how he related to his own body and the bodies of others. Here, Simba suggests that growing up meant becoming aware of his heterosexual subjectivity, understanding that this had implications for how he enacted his 'new' masculinity, as someone who was no longer a boy but not quite fully adult. This was also aptly captured in Jub-Jub's response, who explained his emerging personhood thus:

> *[I am realising that] I am growing and the more you grow certain things change, and you see things differently as you grow. You realize that there are certain things you should be doing but because there is school you see, but its [a sign of] growth… Your mind is growing and you see things in a certain way, your way of thinking will be different from the way a person who is in primary school thinks, you will think like a person who is in high school and sometimes you will have bigger thoughts, you will even go beyond "high school thinking"… sometimes I sit and think of what I would like to pursue after school and what I want to do in life.* (Jub-Jub, 16 years, IDI)

6.3.4. 'Cleaning up'

For many of the young men in this study, love was central to the shaping of their subjectivities and increasingly became a part of reimagining new masculinities. When participants described the impact of love in their lives, they suggested that love had changed their lives in profound ways (Malinga & Ratele, 2016). Importantly, while these personal shifts were reflected in their embodied love doings, the participants often suggested a deeper affective significance. As one participant explained:

> *Yesterday I was a young boy who got dirty, walking around with torn pants, playing soccer . . . when I started getting a girlfriend and tried speaking to her I didn't want her to see me looking dirty and then I started looking after myself . . . she basically made me aware of myself. . . It was something that made me have a different perspective and change the way I view things and do things.* (Anathi, 19 years, IDI)

In the above excerpt, Anathi described the first time he felt intense feelings, which he later understood as love. These feelings changed how he moved around in his community, hung out with his friends, and even determined if or when he would play a game of soccer on the street. In describing the process that led to him declaring his love (*ukushela*), he noted how his feelings changed in his actions and perspective. These new feelings and emotions demonstrate a shift from the 'young boy who got dirty' to a young man who 'started looking after' himself and also became 'aware of' himself. Because of this, he began to perform a 'cleaner', less playful masculinity that he felt was required if he were to become a boyfriend. On the surface, it may seem that Anathi's new aversion to being dirty simply indicated a developmental understanding of going through adolescence. However, I argue that his contextualisation of actions in relation to his feelings and his girlfriend signalled shifting emotional reflexivity in line with the shifting relations (Holmes, 2015). It is this emotional reflexivity that resulted in him having 'a different perspective' and changing the way he did things. Love is not just a concept for Anathi but a force that actively produced a different perspective and different actions in his life. This emotional reflexivity was also evident in other participants' narratives:

> *Love is also something that is very important because it inspires you and it can also change you. [It can] make you a better person . . . and become a clean person even in your mind. You think positively and also be gentle with people.* (Menzi, 18 years, IDI)

For Menzi, love inspired change and, once again, the discourse of becoming 'clean' is referenced in relation to love. He suggested that love is simultaneously a deeply personal and transformative project. Furthermore, it is significant that he suggested love makes one 'a clean person even in your mind.' Studies suggest a causal link between young men's experiences of trauma and their vulnerability to enacting violence and having multiple sexual partners (Gibbs et al., 2019). However, as Menzi suggested, being in a relationship prompted a shift away from the possibilities of violence making him 'think positively and also be gentle with people.' He suggested that his love relationship produced the capacity to resist enacting negative love doings and masculinities in general. Throughout my fieldwork, many participants also described how spending time with their girlfriends allowed them some respite from homosocial

spaces where violence, alcohol and drugs were currency. Significantly, the becoming 'clean' discourse provided a useful metaphor for these young men to position themselves in relation to the masculinities from which they sought respite. Another participant said:

> *There is someone I am in a relationship with.... It has shaped me in good ways. I often see the difference between me and other young men that I grew up with.* (Tito, 21 years, IDI)

Tito suggested that being in a relationship had shaped him in ways that made him different from other young men. As a result of his love relationship, he performed a different masculinity to those of his peers and credited the affectively engaging space that he and his girlfriend had created for this shift. It is particularly significant that he saw his relationship as responsible for his having a different trajectory from the young men around him.

As the young men established love relationships and became boyfriends, they negotiated new ways of approaching love. However, as the narratives in this section suggest, these new ways could have broader implications for how the young men enact other masculinities. The suggestion is that love relationships produce 'cleaner' masculinities, where love does not only prompt the doing of love differently, but further shapes how young men act in relation to normative masculinities. Love is experienced and understood as a disruptive affective experience that shifts their daily lives towards becoming boyfriends and enacting 'cleaner' masculinities. However, it is important to note that these shifts do not suggest a complete transformation of masculinities. What these 'cleaner' masculinities suggest is that love can produce progressive possibilities for young men to love differently. In continuing with the analogy of becoming 'cleaner', these narratives further suggest that the shifting and transforming of masculinities is not a once-off process that takes young men from one extreme to another. Rather, it is an ongoing process of transforming and transgressing restrictive heteropatriarchal norms – which is not linear. Thus, when participants describe love as making them 'cleaner', they are also suggesting that their daily enactments and experiences of love are iterative and incremental instances of making them 'cleaner'. To do love is to incrementally undo harmful scripts.

6.4. Conclusion

In *All About Love,* hooks (2000, p. 4) muses that the word 'love' is most often defined as a noun, yet more astute theorists of love acknowledge that we would all love better if we used it as a verb. For her, love has to be understood as more than an internal psychological state. Her thinking in this regard is instructive; love can only be understood as such when it is actioned

or practised. Love is about doing. Thus, love is not only about naming feelings, it is also about the related actions through which one does or enacts love. This study highlights the significance of exploring love in the lives of young men (Allen, 2007; Forrest, 2010; Korobov, 2009a) and, specifically, of exploring love as a positive effect among young black men (Malinga & Ratele, 2012, 2016). Love offers young men the opportunity to reimagine their masculinities (particularly in relation to their girlfriends), which might be a useful avenue to explore in the context of intimate partner violence. Love seems to produce progressive moments that occur in the seemingly mundane moments of young men's daily lives by prompting reflexive engagement with their own feelings and those of their girlfriends. The notion of love as a form of doing signals that love relationships are intimately tied to the ways young men understand and perform their masculinities. Although doing love does not necessarily mean a complete dismantling of hegemonic masculinities, these young men were able to resist in meaningful ways (Allen, 2007; Bhana, 2018; Forrest, 2010). The doings of love enabled further insight into the complexities of love in the ever-shifting terrains of being a young man in a township, which seemed to require different doings from these young men. Understood thus, we see that love was understood and experienced by the young men as producing the capacities to feel, act and be in new and different ways than before. To explore love doings thus enables us to trace other-than-violent possibilities and capacities among young men. Their reflections suggest that love was a central component of their transitions into adulthood; as they became boyfriends, so they also became men. Furthermore, through love, they became 'clean' and better young men – demonstrating the progressive possibilities of love.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Love is more than sex: Young men's conceptualisations of love and relationship dynamics

7.1. Introduction

In Chapter 6, the question of how relationship dynamics are configured in young men's daily lives was addressed. Specifically, it focused on the second research question on young men's performances of love masculinities. Beyond the performance of loving masculinities, the data suggest that their relational dynamics were of equal significance as affective encounters which transcended physical proximity. Therefore, in this chapter, I respond to the third research question: How do young black men conceptualise love relationships? Langa (2020, p. 75) has observed that among young men, it is important to "have a girlfriend, but expectations in terms of these relationships differed" between individuals. In line with Langa's observations, this chapter explores the affective capacities produced by heterosexual love relationships and how these inform the meanings of young men's intimate relationships. Bhana (2018) contends that focusing on love among young people unravels the complex and contradictory circulations of love and power, which inform daily embodied and affective practices. Hence, from the narratives of the participants, I explore complexities and contradictions that challenge heteronormative gender subjectivities. I draw on Archambault's (2016, p. 264) contention that "love emerges through contingent affective encounters [which] inspire novel ways of being and relating". I am interested in the new ways of being and relating that emerged in the young men's narratives of their love relationships. Moreover, I engage with their situated understandings of relationships as informed by the feelings, emotions and practices associated with love.

I engage critically with these as material-discursive conceptualisations to further gain a nuanced understanding of how these intimate encounters emerge in the daily lives of young black men (Archambault, 2016; Shefer & Hearn, 2022). Specifically, I focus on the mutually affective ways that the discourses shaped the material practices, feelings and embodiments that constitute their intimate relationships, further offering reflections on how these constrained or increased capacities in their intimate lives. I contend that love relationships, as affective encounters, enable young men to explore alternative subjectivities with capacities for the love and care. The data suggest that for most of the participants, love relationships progressively produce possibilities that either contradict or resist, with varying duration, locally dominant

regressive masculinities. Importantly, this should not be taken to mean that love relationships automatically generated new gender-equitable intimacies for young men (see Giddens, 1992). However, the majority of the participants' narratives suggest that affective contexts of love relationships enabled them to imagine and thus explore alternative, often less regressive, masculinities.

7.2. *Ukuhala and ukuthanda*[14]: Disentangling discursive embodiments of heteromasculine performances

Relationships are productive of sexual intimacies and love intimacies, which are understood by the participants as contingent and mutually constitutive. Despite my explicit focus on love, when the young men described their experiences of relationships, these were always mentioned in the context of the broader discourses which framed their intimate subjectivities. Their responses about intimate relationships suggest a proliferation of set ideas about how discourses materialise in the performance of gender, sexuality and love in the context of sexual encounters. However, it is the contingent and contradictory characteristics of these discourses which point to the significance of context and situatedness. In this section, I explore how participants approach love relationships as distinctive material-discursive encounters through which they experience novel intimacies (Archambault, 2016). The data suggest that intimate relationships are differentiated by the distinctions they establish between love relationships and sexual desire. In expanding on their understanding of what made an intimate relationship specifically a love relationship, participants referred to local discourses that could broadly be described as categories of sexual desire. This is validated by a participant who, during an interview, intimated:

> *The one you love [lo om'thandayo], you do anything for her because you just want to be with her, but with the one you desire sexually [lo om'halelayo] you just want to have sex… [you] have no feelings for her.* (Jabu, 18 years, IDI)

Here, Jabu's response suggests that among young men like himself, intimate relationships are framed in different ways, as either motivated by feelings of love that are materialised through intimacies of *ukuthanda* or motivated by sexual desires that materialise through intimacies of *ukuhala*. This framing further suggests that within sexual relationships, intimacy is expressed

[14] Throughout this chapter, these terms are used as in modified form as per their use in situ, as either verbs or adjectives. However, the root words remain, i.e., *thanda,* meaning love, can be *ukuthanda* or *om'thandayo; hala,* meaning desire, can be *ukuhala* or *om'halelayo*.

and experienced mainly as an embodied desire that requires a gendered performance of a heteromasculinity. Additionally, within this gendered performance, the young man is expected to 'have no feelings' for the young woman he pursues. Similarly, during a group discussion (FGD 5), the conversation focused on the significance of sexual prowess and emotional invulnerability in intimate relationships:

> Xolani (18 years): *You develop feelings for someone because there is something about her that you liked when you saw her, it's not because you want her sexually [uyam'halela] based on how she is dressed.*
>
> Melusi: *Is there a difference between wanting sexually [ukum'halela] and having feelings [ukum'thanda] for her?*
>
> Anathi (19 years): *Yes… If you're just sexually attracted to her, the way you 'shela is different. Even if she denies you, you don't care.*
>
> Shaka (16 years): *Like he is saying, wanting someone sexually [ukum'halela] and having feelings for someone [ukum'thanda] are two different things. When you want someone [sexually], you even brag about her and you even say to your friends, "ay, I want this girl, let's make a bet on how long it takes to 'get her'".*

For most participants, intimate relationships were discussed and represented through local discourses that highlighted material distinctions between sex, desire and love. During the group discussion, the two salient discourses mentioned were ukuhala and ukuthanda, which were used to illustrate the distinctions between intimate relationships. To speak of wanting or desiring someone [ukuhala] was to delimit the nature of the relationship as mainly sexual, thus further fixing or limiting its possibilities. For these young men, ukuhala mainly produced a (hetero)sexual relation, which realigned them with gender discourses that establish young men as active pursuers and women as conduits of sexual pleasure and masculine prowess (Graham & Mphaphuli, 2018; Govender & Bhana, 2022; Mphaphuli, 2015). They essentialise sexual attraction as a mainly physiological reaction that does not require any emotional response. For these young men, the notion of ukuhala produces masculinities that sexualise intimacy and restrict it to embodiments, practices, intensities and feelings that they understand as a sexual relationship. They maintain that, within this relationship, ukuhala intimacy is mainly in the service of heteromasculinity which is satiated and/or fulfilled through sexual performance. As Anathi and Shaka suggested, ukuhala further augments associated practices such as *ukushela*, which in different contexts produce effective sites for cultivating and sustaining emotional

attachments, but instead are limited to the duration of sexual encounters such as *ukugqema*[15]. This perspective aligns with Bhana's (2018, p. 94) observation that among young men love can operate as a "trope through which masculine identity is expressed". However, unlike in Bhana's (2018) work, which described love as being expressed through force, ukuhala reduces intimacy to the sexual encounter, where the young men's bodies, and those of the young women they pursue, reinforce regressive heteronormative performances of masculinity. Within this affective context, the young men's (hetero)sexual performance was foregrounded and their capacities to develop emotional attachments were limited.

However, most of the participants' narratives on the intimacies of *ukuthanda* suggested that they experienced an expansion of their capacities in terms of practices, intensities, feelings and temporalities. As Jabu suggests above, feelings of love motivate young men to "*do anything to be with*" a young woman, as opposed to the single-focused intensities of ukuhala that mainly produce sexual encounters. This aligns with the perspectives presented by Xolani, Anathi and Shaka, who framed *ukuthanda* as a progressive development of feelings that further infers notions of care and emotional investment. Such a perspective would thus imply that if they undertake *ukushela* as a relation of ukuthanda, a young woman's denial or rejection would inflict a measure of displeasure or discomfort because there is a degree of care in seeking to establish an emotional attachment. Collectively, the narratives of *ukuthanda* suggest that for young men intimate relationships are not unilaterally directed by hegemonic, heteromasculine imperatives of power, sexual dominance and social pressure (Clowes et al., 2009; Manyaapelo et al., 2019; Stern et al., 2019). While the notion of ukuhala suggests that within sexual relationships young men's heteromasculine performances are limited to social and cultural repertoires that foreground hegemonic ideals, *ukuthanda* suggests alternative possibilities. As Anathi continued:

> *A [love] relationship is when you meet someone, it can be someone you know or don't know. You find yourself in a situation where you have feelings for her, you want her to be closer to you. And then, from there on, as a boy*[16]*, because it's a boy who must make the first move, you*

[15] The discourse of *ukugqema*, which roughly translates as 'to hit', describes either a casual sexual encounter or an intimate relationship configured mainly around sexual intimacy. This is discussed in Chapter 5.

[16] Here, he used the term umfana which, strictly speaking, means 'boy'. However, it is used relatively and its meaning is contingent on context. Although I variously use the term throughout this dissertation, it should be taken to mean 'young man'.

start talking to her… until things are okay for you to declare your feelings, to tell her that you want to be her boyfriend. (Anathi, 19 years, FGD 5)

The young men's narratives suggest that the intimacies of *ukuthanda* were made distinct not only by the practices but also by the affective site they produced over time. It is within these affective contexts that feelings could develop and where the status of a love relationship could be cemented progressively. Clearly, temporality was evident here. As Anathi recounts the developmental stages of a love relationship, he provides insights into how the intimacies of *ukuthanda* produce new capacities over time. Here, Anathi details how a young man might progress from negotiating a friendship or any form of closeness that will position him to "declare [his] feelings" and eventually become her boyfriend. He suggests that even in approaching the relationship and within it, he continues to be guided by the normative forces of a heteromasculine script that dictates how a young man should behave. As he laboured the point of being "a boy", he moved his hand to his chest and pointed to himself. What was significant in this moment, as well as in his exposition, are ways that these discourses interacted with his own embodied subjectivity, how he was making sense of love relationships as simultaneously individual and social, as both discursive and material. Becoming someone's boyfriend, he suggested, was negotiated over time through careful development of emotional attachment and situational awareness. Thus, the love relationship produced new possibilities for him to deviate from the normative heteromasculine script, where relations of ukuthanda, made it "okay for [him] to declare [his] feelings". While Anathi admittedly tries to adhere to a heteromasculine script, he credits *ukuthanda* with producing the affective space, the capacity, to establish an emotional intimacy. He, therefore, suggests that in a love relationship, the new-found status of being a boyfriend emerges through the affective encounter of *ukuthanda* (Archambault, 2016). Although a love relationship remains entangled in the heteromasculine project, it produces new possibilities for Anathi, and young men like him, to navigate their emotional lives while navigating daily life and its attendant challenges.

7.2.1. Situating sex: Sex is great, but it's not a priority

Although sexual encounters emerged in the data as important aspects of cultivating closeness and demonstrating one's love among some participants, it was not experienced or expressed as a universal priority among all participants. For many participants, being in love relationships also meant that normative heteromasculine performances that emphasise sexual prowess over emotional connection were disrupted in different ways and to varying degrees. Essentially, the

place, role and significance of sexual intercourse within love relationships could not be taken as a given. Samora (16 years, IDI) suggests:

> Samora: *To others [sex] is important and to others it's not.*
>
> Melusi: *And to you?*
>
> Samora: *Eish, it is alright to me, not that I would want to have a relationship just to have sex with the girl, no! I'm in a relationship because I love her, and I see my future with her… To others being in a relationship, especially young men, they just want to have sex with the girl, but that's not what I want… Sometimes I wish I could [[laughs]], but it's not easy to tell a girl because she may end up breaking up [with you] … Relationships are good if you are not going to have sex, but you can sit together and get to know each other… I think being in a relationship means being together, supporting each other.*

In the above excerpt, Samora reflects on the tension between sex and love discussed in the previous section and noted by scholars who have explored gender and (hetero)sexualities among young men (Alldred & Fox, 2018; Bhana, 2018, 2023; Closson et al., 2020; Langa, 2020; Maina et al., 2022; Shefer et al., 2015; Vogels, 2020a, 2020b). For Samora, his relationship produces an ambivalence between the possibilities of "a future" with his girlfriend and desires for sexual intimacy that might destroy the relationship. Here, Samora navigates salient discourses about young who use young women only for sex. Despite establishing their relationship as one premised on notions of ukuthanda, it seems that the discourse of young men using young women retains significant purchase and shapes how young men negotiate their love relationships. Samora's balancing act thus sees him downplaying his wishes for sexual intimacy and emphasising emotional intimacy in order to ensure a future together. Furthermore, considering his emphasis on 'getting to know each other', it follows that his decision is based on how he understands his girlfriend and thus responds in a way that will not jeopardise their relationship. However, I do not take it as an outright rejection of hegemonic heteromasculinities. Rather, his narrative suggests that he attempts to negotiate this ambivalence by moving away from notions of ukuhala, which prioritise sexual intimacy, and, instead, reflexively foregrounds emotional intimacy, shifting intimacies towards *ukuthanda* between his girlfriend and him. This narrative suggests that a love relationship surfaces relations of *ukuthanda* that reject the pre-eminence of sexual prowess as a marker of successful heteromasculinities among young men. Samora's narrative demonstrates the productive possibilities of love relationships navigating the ambivalence of love and sexual desire. Another young man reflected Samora's sentiments:

> *For now [sex] is not a priority, but after finishing school. You cannot just have sex without getting to know each other.* (Khaya, 18 years, IDI)

Here, Khaya not only challenges the notion of young men as mainly seeking sexual intercourse but further suggests that this is shifted by other life concerns, such as the need to complete high school. In this instance, unlike our typical understanding of young black men's experiences and expressions of intimacy, Khaya suggests that for him these are ordered or prioritised in relation to the many other social and material concerns that punctuate his life. However, for Khaya, the opportunity to complete high school had become especially poignant, as he explained:

> *I have changed a lot. When I arrived here… I got used to [the environment] and when I joined high school, I started doing bad things… I started smoking, I went back home late and when I started grade 10, I realised what I was doing was wrong. I even failed grade 11 because of my behaviour.* (Khaya, 18 years, IDI)

Khaya moved to the township from a rural area and initially found it difficult to adjust to township life. Reflecting on his journey, he shared some of the challenges that shaped who he felt he was at the time of our interview. He suggests that, in trying to 'fit in' with his peers, he performed a locally idealised hegemonic masculinity that rebelled against salient forms of authority, namely school and familial, what Langa (2020) describes as a *tsotsi* masculinity (see also Morrell, 1998, 2001). This masculinity, Langa (2020) contends, foregrounds sexual prowess, which is also evident in Khaya's narrative. However, as Khaya highlights, his failure, coupled with his family's intervention, prompted "a wakeup call, I had to stop". This further resulted in Khaya re-evaluating his life and even his subjectivity. Therefore, Khaya reflected on his "behaviour", which he subsequently shifted. This perspective aligns with Bhana's (2018) observation of young men's resistant masculinities that prioritise the future possibilities they negotiate through education. His failure resulted in Khaya withdrawing from his previous friends and modifying any other 'wrong' behaviours, which also shaped his approach to his relationship. During our interview, Khaya shared that both he and his girlfriend had been together for two years and had taken the decision to have sex a year into their relationship.

> *In our relationship it has happened already… I [told] her that I was ready, and she also said she was also ready… she just emphasised was that she did not want to get pregnant because she was still studying… [so] we used protection.* (Khaya, 18 years, IDI)

As he explains, at this point in their relationship, they both felt that they were ready for sex. For Khaya, because the relationship is based on love, it was important not to pressure her and why he chose to wait. This behaviour contrasts with the heteromasculine performances researchers have observed among young men in the township, further suggesting the adjustment of his subjectivity. He continued:

> *As a couple, you need to give each other time… we do it occasionally, we are not focused on it.* (Khaya, 18 years, IDI)

Here, Khaya suggests that although the relationship afforded him sexual intimacy, its significance is modified over time by other concerns, namely the need to complete high school. For Khaya, it was increasingly important for him to distance himself from 'wrong' behaviours, which could derail his prospects. Therefore, central to this was Khaya reflexively shifting his own subjectivity away from foregrounding sexual prowess. It is instructive that Khaya does not completely denounce sexual intimacy but notes possible negative outcomes if it becomes the focus. Similarly, another young man said:

> *Let me talk from my own view, as [she] is doing matric this year, let say we have sex and she ends up being pregnant, this will disturb her from finishing her matric… We did start [having sex], but sex is not important in our relationship.* (Nkonzo, 19 years, IDI)

Nkonzo described his intimate relationship as characterised by ukuthanda, cultivated over the length of his relationship. Although he had been with his girlfriend for almost three years, over time the role of sex was consigned to the reality of her being in the final year of high school. Although they were the same age, Nkonzo had finished the year before and had enrolled at a local tertiary institution. The hope was that she could join him there the following year. It is in this context that the capacities and significance of their practices of intimacy then shifted; for Nkonzo and his girlfriend, relegating sexual intimacy was experienced as producing future possibilities. Similarly, for Khaya and his girlfriend, sexual intimacy was not prioritised, which they had established two years prior. Like Nkonzo, for Khaya the pressures of high school had shifted the dynamics of intimacy in their relationship as both he and his girlfriend were in matric and were focused on achieving good marks for tertiary applications in the year to follow. In line with Langa's (2020) observation about academically inclined young men, the pursuit of education seemed to serve as a predictor of sexual delay. To a certain extent, love helps these young men "make imaginative sense" of the transitions underway in their lives (Redman, 2001, p. 198). The data generated in this study suggest love relationships produce an effective context

in which young men like Nkonzo and Khaya may rework modes of being and relating to their girlfriends as they all seek opportunities beyond high school. The shifting position of sexual intimacy is also instructive when considering the levels of pregnancies among young women and the growing numbers of young men becoming fathers (Mgwaba & Maharaj, 2018; Morrell et al., 2012; Swartz & Bhana, 2009). The narratives of these young men and the shifting place of love, sex and desire in their lives reflect the significance of social, economic, spatial and even temporal factors in their lives. These narratives further highlight how, as young people come of age, their intimacies are not driven only by biological bodies. Instead, they increasingly negotiate their intimacies in relation to their other concerns.

7.2.2. Ukulinda (waiting): Love relationships and waiting masculinities

Another central theme in the data, in the context of love relationships, was waiting. Generally, all participants agreed that one could wait, meaning delaying a sexual encounter in a love relationship because it was understood that it was not premised on the availability of sex. Therefore, the young men suggested that in the context of a love relationship, they often felt they did not deem it necessary to demand sex from their girlfriends, nor did they feel compelled by their girlfriends to perform sexualised masculinities. When discussing these instances, it was common for the young men to speak of *ukulinda* (to wait or waiting). In this section, I thus explore how, in the context of love relationships, waiting emerged in the participants' narratives as they recounted their daily lives. During a group discussion, waiting emerged for one participant mainly through intimacies of *ukuthanda* as a new capacity in relation to his girlfriend:

> *Waiting depends on how deep the feelings are. If you have entered the relationship with the motive of loving the girl [ukuthanda] and not only to sleep with her [ukuhala], but you are also able to be patient… You can wait for her.* (Wandile, 19 years, FGD 4)

This suggests that for different young men, in different relationships, equally distinctive intimacies were possible, and thus produced alternative states of feelings and embodiments within their love relationships. Namely, as Wandile boldly reiterates the distinction between love and sexual desire, the capacity to wait was only produced through the intimacies of ukuthanda, as it is through such a relationship that young men can temper those sexual desires. Wandile suggests that within this intimate encounter, young men's subjectivities are reworked in ways that decouple masculinities, even if temporarily, from the active embodiment of heterosexuality to a waiting masculinity. Such masculinity, Wandile suggests, can reassemble

his heterosexual subjectivity anew as a waiting masculinity. Once again, the notions of love and sexual desire were evoked in the narratives about waiting. As Wandile argues, waiting as the choice to delay sexual intimacy was understood by most participants as a heteromasculine prerogative, one that a young man would undertake depending on the nature of the intimate relationship and the intensities it produced over time. Wandile suggests that in-love relationships are most likely to generate the profound feelings that move young men to divert from gendered requirements of demonstrating their embodied heterosexual prowess. In response, another participant opined:

> *If she explains that her family want to perform umemulo for her, then you know that after she turns 21, uyagqema [you're in]! [[others laugh]] People you can wait for are those who are waiting for umemulo… you can wait because it has a timeframe.* (Qhamani, 17 years, FGD 4)

Here, Qhamani further highlights how cultural discourses and practices of *umemulo*[17], which serve as sociocultural markers of young women's passage from girlhood to womanhood, indirectly impact young men. Although in the context of Zulu culture and practices young male subjectivities are not shaped through similar practices, we see how the practice of umemulo may indirectly materialise waiting subjectivities. In other words, a waiting masculinity may be mobilised by virtue of a young man being in a love relationship with a young woman who wishes to remain chaste until she undergoes *ukumula*[18]. Yet, Qhamani's stipulations for waiting are instructive. First, he suggests a young man may only wait for his girlfriend if is she is obligated by her family to undergo ukumula*;* second, through highlighting the age of umemulo, he implies the temporality of waiting masculinity. This suggests that a waiting masculinity is relational and contingent on the nature of the intimate relationship, the social and cultural context, and the temporalities and discourses that inform the lives of young men and their girlfriends. How young men experience their love relationships, and the feelings, intensities and embodiments that are produced in these, is always in flux and cannot be taken for granted. Giving insights on his experience and performance of a waiting masculinity, Anathi said:

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[17] A ritual that marks a young woman's passage into womanhood and it is typically performed by the young woman's family when she turns 21. Traditionally, for a young woman to undergo this ritual, she was required to remain a virgin. After she has undergone umemulo*,* a young woman is free to have a boyfriend, and may marry. However, over time, the requirements have shifted, especially as young women have stopped going for umhlanga (virginity testing). Although the requirement of being a virgin is still implied, falling pregnant or having a child is considered evidence one's sexual activity; this can be damaging for the young woman, and her family. For more on this, see Bhana (2016, 2018).

[18] Verb for umemulo*.*

> *[Waiting] depends on the person, she may ask you to wait for two years or until after she is finished with school; because [my girlfriend] told me she would like to finish school first… even though I didn't fully agree, I went along with it because I loved her.* (Anathi, 19 years, IDI)

In the above quote, Anathi offers a personal perspective of a waiting masculinity. In line with Qhamani's idea about time, he too highlights the significance of time, although in his case, it was the completion of high school. It is also significant that he highlights his displeasure at his girlfriend's request, as if to reinforce the notion of young men always anticipating and ready for sexual intercourse (Meenagh, 2021). Significantly, he agrees to wait because he loves her. Here, Anathi further supports the idea that a love relationship can become an affective site where new capacities emerge. In this instance, Anathi's heteromasculine performance is productively altered and a waiting masculinity materialises. However, performing a waiting masculinity is not without its challenges, as Anathi would soon discover:

> *The boys would ask "why don't you have sex with [her]" and they would say I'm a fool. I would tell them that we are still chilling because I didn't want to tell them the truth, that [she] said I should wait… because they would think I'm an idiot and can't convince a girl to have sex with me.* (Anathi, 19 years, IDI)

Anathi was aware of the social discourses that framed local masculine subjectivities among young men. As the above excerpt suggests, he would withstand inquiries from his peers about his sexual performance. Scholars have highlighted how a hallmark of hegemonic masculinities is being able to assert publicly one's heteromasculine subjectivity through demonstrating a high aptitude for sexual exploits and a low emotional attachment (Allen, 2007; Bhana & Chen, 2020; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Monaghan & Robertson, 2012; Montemurro & Riehman-Murphy, 2019; Mphaphuli, 2015; Ratele, 2014). Therefore, being fully aware of these expectations among his own peers, Anathi navigated their questioning by withholding the truth, lest he appear even more unproductive at performing a publicly endorsed masculinity. He suggests that, among his peers, performing a waiting masculinity was perceived as a failure because it was deemed as his inability to exercise control over his girlfriend. Here, Anathi reveals that intimacy and waiting could become a highly charged issue among young men because of the shame and ridicule that often came with it. He was not alone in this, as Okuhle would also point out:

> *Guys are insensitive, they don't mind telling you to leave that person and go to someone who will agree to sleep with you. So, you might as well just lie to them because they wouldn't know. [[laughs]]* (Okuhle, 21 years, IDI)

In the above narrative, Okuhle reflects on his experience of navigating the intensities generated by discourses that framed ideal masculinities as those with multiple girlfriends and sexual encounters. During our interview, he further contended that for many young men *"*in the township, it's very important to have sex*"* and this retained much purchase among his peers. Yet, he found himself in a position of waiting:

> *Some girls want you to prove to them that you can wait for them, before you even have sex with them… Others wait for their [umemulo] ceremony for them to be able to start having sex… It took years for us to start [having sex]. It also depends on how much you love a person and whether you will be able to wait for her or not… I dated [her] for two years without having sex… at the end of the day, I loved her, and she was just respecting herself in that way.* (Okuhle, 21 years, IDI)

For Okuhle, a waiting masculinity enabled him to demonstrate his love for his girlfriend while saving face with his peers. By lying to his friends about his and his girlfriend's sexual encounters, he demonstrated his proficiency as a hegemonic heteromasculine subject, thus maintaining his footing as one of 'the boys' (Connell, 1995). However, as he notes, this public performance was not necessarily a true or a full reflection of his subjectivity. Rather, in private and for his girlfriend, he performed a waiting masculinity, which required him to reconfigure the intimacies and embodied practices typically associated with the public masculinity he presented to his peers. The waiting masculinity restricted his ability to experience sexual intimacy while increasing his capacity to experience other forms of intimacy and attachment.

> *We were speaking and I asked her if she has had sex before, she said no and [explained that] according to her family's culture, she goes for virginity testing [ukuhlolwa]. I then asked her if she would break her family's rules and have sex, she said she can't because she respects her family.* (Spijo, 18 years, IDI)

In this quote, Spijo suggests that within his relationship, relations of love produced the affective space and attendant capacities for him and his girlfriend to discuss the terms of their intimacy. He suggests that because it is a relationship that foregrounds feelings of love and connection, they were able to establish the place of sexual intercourse in both of their lives. Namely, through their love relationship her virginity and the cultural practice of *ukuhlolwa* shifted the affective economy (Ahmed, 2004b) in a way that modified his heteromasculine performance

as her boyfriend. This means that instead of drawing on the hegemonic masculinity script which calls for young men like Spijo to be heterosexually active, he reconfigured his subjectivity towards a waiting masculinity. Such masculinity, in Spijo's case, defers to cultural notions which warrant that young women should remain chaste and that young men should venerate such chastity as an important aspect of cultivating pure love (Bhana, 2016, 2018; Chisale, 2016; Harrison, 2008). Therefore, through adopting a waiting masculinity, he not only respects his girlfriend's wish to maintain her virginity, but he also further reinscribes cultural discourses that frame youth sexualities. Yet, while this relation of *ukuthanda* seemingly produces culturally inflected waiting masculinity, it does seem to deviate from the heteromasculine discourses that frame and promote the embodiment of heterosexual prowess, particularly among young men like Spijo (Zibane, 2021). Although he did not ultimately admit to being a virgin himself, throughout our interview when discussing his relationship, he had hinted at his limited sexual experience and had conceded that he "had no problem with [waiting] because I was not in a hurry [to have sex]". Of course, his sexual reticence was not received well by his peers, who felt that he had a beautiful girlfriend who would be taken by someone else if he did not move quickly to secure her (sexually):

> *They do ask why I have not had sex with her and then I explain to them that she still undergoes virginity testing, and they say, "there's no such!" ... I tell them they must stop it and they need to understand.* (Spijo, 18 years, IDI)

The above excerpt suggests that Spijo's waiting masculinity was met with very little patience and understanding from his peers. While with his girlfriend, he seemed to be doing the important work of respecting her wishes to value her family's cultural practices at the cost of losing face with his peers. Spijo's narrative highlights the direct and indirect social pressures young men experience, even in their private lives. In this instance, he highlights how the decision to respect his girlfriend's virginity met with disdain among his peers. Spijo's account suggests that in addition to the venerated heteromasculine function of either having a girlfriend who is chaste or being able to demonstrate heterosexual prowess (Bhana, 2016; Bhana & Pattman, 2011), there is much more emphasis on having sex with or 'taking the virginity' of such a girlfriend. Considering they were both of age and defined themselves to be in a love relationship, Spijo's friends did not accept his decision to wait for her. He highlights that, despite the derision, he challenges their pressure because he does not wish to pressure her to disobey cultural norms. Furthermore, he demonstrates the contested position that young men in relationships must negotiate, between external discourses that police young men's intimacies

and call for hegemonic masculinity-informed subjectivities. Yet, this must be balanced with the need for sensitivity for one's girlfriend and her wishes regarding feelings towards sexual intimacy. There was also another young man who was in a similar predicament, but he explained his situation thus:

> *What I love about [her] is that her family are also amaNazaretha[19], which means that I do not want to destroy her life… it is good to [be] with someone whose story you know and [when you are] sure that the person you are in a relationship is a virgin. It's not easy for me to ask for sex because she is virgin and goes through virgin test at church (uyahlolwa) if I could destroy her, I will obviously have to pay. I do not want to cause expenses that is why I love telling her that she needs to focus on her goals, and I will also focus on mines because I do not want to destroy her life... Yes, love teaches me to be patient.* (Menzi, 18 years, IDI)

For Menzi, although he had met his girlfriend outside of his church, he was glad to realise that they went to the same church and held similar views on important issues, such as sexual intimacy. During our interview, Menzi explained that, as young people in their church, they had to follow strict rules about sexual chastity. Perhaps because of the church's strong African traditional underpinnings, Menzi further explained interlinkages between his church and African cultural practices like *ukuhlolwa*. Not only was she expected to remain a virgin, but as her boyfriend, he was expected to protect and respect her honour and failure to do so would incur shame to her, himself and their families, which were part of the church. As a result of this, new capacities emerged within their relationship, namely his adoption of a waiting masculinity, thus emphasising both of their abilities to focus on their respective goals. For Menzi, love produces patience and a waiting masculinity that foregrounds respect and care for his girlfriend; as he said to her, *"*I will wait for you, and you will also wait for me." As Menzi suggests, his intimate relationship produced an affective space for him and his girlfriend to perform waiting subjectivities, thus determining what emotions and embodiments were possible during this time.

In her study on love among young people, Bhana (2018, p. 42) maintains that "waiting to have sex [is] a demonstration of love in which a woman use[s] delaying tactics before agreeing to have a sexual relationship". While the findings outlined in this section align with Bhana's

[19] amaNazaretha are an African traditional inflected Christian religious group that emerged in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, particularly among AmaZulu in the 1900s (West, 2007). They enjoy prominence in the INK area, where this study was undertaken.

(2018) assessment of young people's intimate lives, by foregrounding young men's performative love doings (see Chapter 5), she overlooks how the embodied and affective practices of waiting produced reflexivity for young men (see also Manyaapelo et al., 2019; Rule-Groenewald, 2013). Similarly, Hunter's (2010) concept of provider love hints at masculinities that emerge through the intersections between discourses of providing and attachments of care. Yet even here there is an omission of the men's inner lives as they navigate the functions of providing and loving in their daily lives.

7.3. *Having a girlfriend helps me*: Love relationships as alternative sites for navigating daily life

In this section, I further explore how love relationships enabled young men to navigate normative heteromasculinities.

> *Some of our parents are strict… so we are scared of them because when they talk to us about pregnancy, they tell us that we will feed those babies ourselves and they will chase us out of home "if you think you're a man now".* (Thabang, 16 years, IDI)

In this excerpt, Thabang suggests that he experiences intimate encounters with his girlfriend as a negotiation between fear and love as he toes the line between respect for his family and love for his girlfriend. Although the stern warnings of his family are related to pregnancy, they reflect the general position most young men suggested their families took on young people being in intimate relationships; their relationships were mainly understood as sites of irresponsible and risky sexual behaviours. The intensities of fear produced by the stern warnings he received at home acted to prevent what was possible between him and his girlfriend. However, for most participants, love relationships were narrated and understood as affective spaces that enabled them to connect emotionally with their girlfriends in ways they would not in a solely sexual encounter. As such, narratives about love relationships suggested that when trust and loyalty had been established, most participants considered them to be key avenues for navigating their social, material and emotional worlds (Hunter, 2010). During a focus group discussion (FGD 01):

> Zozo (18 years): *For some parents [relationships are a] no, no… [they] say "if you have a girlfriend you will sleep with her and impregnate her", and "who will pay inhlawulo [the damages]?"*
>
> Philani (16 years): *Having a girlfriend helps me.*

King (17 years): *If you have a problem, you have someone you can talk to.*

Melusi: *Talk to about what?*

Zozo (18 years): *Let's say, for instance, I have a problem at home and I tell her my story and then she [can] tell me what to do… and I [take her advice] and it all becomes alight.*

Above, the participants present and problematise tensions between prevalent public discourses about their behaviours in intimate relationships and their own private lived experiences of relationships. Zozo and his peers highlight notions that frame young men in reductive ways that portray them as irresponsible, uncaring and impulsive, as is suggested by the emphasis on sex, pregnancy and damages. Importantly, they further illustrate how these discourses not only circulate in public spaces but further circulate in the private spaces of their homes, as they share parents' and elders' warnings about them enacting these irresponsible and uncaring masculinities. Yet, Zozo and his peers challenge these notions by expanding the contours of what they understand to be the significance and consequence of being in a relationship. The young men resist discursive characterisations of their relationships that reduce them to sexual pursuits, devoid of meaning and with detrimental outcomes. Instead, they present themselves as holistic beings whose daily lives expand beyond sexual encounters, thus suggesting that their intimate relationships factor into their daily navigations of broader concerns, challenges and feelings. Although these difficulties challenged the young men's abilities to live up to the heteronormative expectations of providing masculinity (Hunter, 2010, 2015), their intimate relationships also provided the emotional and affective space for the young men to navigate these challenges by being able to talk to their girlfriends.

When two people love each other, there is understanding between them and they grow each other's thinking… it's when as individuals you [both] decide that "my problem is your problem and your problem is my problem". (Liseko, 18 years, FGD 5)

The above excerpt, which emerged during the group discussion, relates to *ukuthanda* and *ukuhala*. For Liseko, a love relationship produced emotional intimacy beyond sexual encounters and left both partners more reflexive of each other's inner lives. The notion of sharing problems was particularly significant in this study as the young men often elaborated on personal challenges at home, in the neighbourhood, at school or even within their relationships. Their lives were characterised by varying levels of hardship brought about by poverty and the associated implications. This is also evident in recent studies conducted within the INK area of eThekwini (Bhana, 2018; Gibbs, Dunkle, et al., 2020; Gibbs et al., 2022;

Sikweyiya et al., 2017; Willan et al., 2019), as some of their participants were either orphaned or had lost one parent (see Ngidi, 2020). Many lived in households with limited resources or where parents and guardians had experienced extended periods of unemployment, which further impacted their own lives. Several of their participants described their lives as either hard or difficult in reference to the limited resources and opportunities they contended with in daily life.

Contrary to perspectives shaped by popular discourses, these young men suggest that love relationships provide an opportunity to establish different forms of communication that they otherwise cannot experience. Their love relationships are conceptualised as alternative spaces for communicating what they perceive as the heteromasculine script. Thus, the young men suggest that their love relationships provide alternative affective spaces in which they emotionally and effectively navigate life's challenges in ways they cannot with other people. Therefore, as Philani exclaims, love relationships are more-than-sexual. Within these alternative affective spaces, depending on the connections they have developed with their girlfriends, the young men can communicate a range of emotions that they are otherwise expected not to acknowledge, let alone express (McQueen, 2017). Importantly, the data suggest the entanglement of the material bodies with other forces which shape the young men's subjectivities profoundly. Clearly, love and relationships cannot be reduced to an epiphenomenon, but in their own right are "one of the moving forces" in the lives of the participants (Jónasdóttir, 2014, p. 22).

7.3.1. Shaka's story: Life's problems and love's productive potential

In reflecting on how they perceived the significance of their own relationships, participants maintained that it created a space to speak and share their burdens with someone. In this section, I engage with Shaka's narrative to demonstrate how, over time, young men recognise and practice various forms of emotional expression and support (Holmes, 2015). Shaka's narrative provides a powerful illustration of how a love relationship can produce capacities, spaces and moments to offer and receive emotional support from a girlfriend. During our interview, he explained how his girlfriend had provided emotional and material support in a moment of personal crisis. In providing context into his life, Shaka explained:

> *My life is very hard because… I [do] everything for myself. I started working at an early age to buy myself clothes, [through] getting myself piece jobs… I cut grass for people in my area, clean their yards, those kinds of things.* (Shaka, 16 years, IDI)

As the eldest, Shaka understood the dire circumstances at home. He was aware of the limited financial resources. Hence, he began seeking sources of income on the weekends. He explained further:

> *I told myself that I need to take care of myself… the school pants that I have, I was given by another boy…[even] these pants are old, and it will be torn anytime… Ay, nobody cares for anybody at home, everyone lives their own life.* (Shaka, 16 years, IDI)

Shaka's narrative is like that of many young men living in South African townships, as contexts that are characterised by endemic levels of unemployment and precarity (Hunter, 2010; Qambela, 2021). In township contexts, young men are frequently subjected to various forms of marginalisation and violence; however, these often go unannounced because of the regulatory force of gender discourses (Bantjes et al., 2018, 2020; Ratele, 2010, 2013). Of course, as a young man wanting to live up to local notions of masculinity that dictate to him that he should be emotionally impervious and that he should be able to handle these setbacks, he often felt like he could not talk to anybody at home or his peers about the challenges he was experiencing. For him, it was embarrassing enough that his friends could identify his struggles enough to give him their old clothes. Therefore, his relationship with his girlfriend created a space for him to communicate these feelings. He shared another experience, validating why his relationship was unequivocally a love relationship:

> *This one time I went to a friend's house, playing his Play Station and his joystick just stopped working. So, his dad made it seem like I had broken [it], when there were other people there… he just hated me. Then my friend's dad kept on going around community saying that I broke his son's Play Station. This even got around to [her] family. So, she came to tell me about it and asked if I could buy it. I told her that I don't have the money to buy it, then she said she would buy it but I had to be the one who takes it there. Then she bought it and I returned it, after that there was peace and no stories... [she] rescued me from the Play Station incident, she solved my problem.* (Shaka, 16 years, IDI)

For Shaka, his relationship provided the affective space where he could be vulnerable about his challenges in ways he could not be with others (see Holmes, 2015). Even in recounting the incident, he admitted that perhaps for any other young man, this ordeal would have been insignificant. However, he was concerned about the implications for his family. In addition to feeling self-conscious about his life circumstance and how they located him in relation to his peers, this incident was particularly distressing for him; because it involved his friends, he felt that it isolated him from them. For Shaka, this incident was deeply distressing and he

increasingly felt helpless, especially not being able to pay R500. As an affective encounter, his relationship enabled him to rework his gendered subjectivity, thus materialising his increased capacity to show vulnerability and accept his girlfriend's financial assistance. These are gendered actions that are mainly associated with notions that are aligned with hegemonic masculinities, such as provider masculinity (Hunter, 2010). Furthermore, studies often suggest that such incidences of poverty, particularly in the township context, produce harmful masculine performances as the young try to recover their standing (Gibbs, Sikweyiya & Jewkes, 2015; Hodes & Gittings, 2019). However, Shaka's narrative suggests alternative possibilities. Through this particular incident, he challenges notions about young men only being interested in relationships for sex and being emotionally unavailable. Furthermore, he also shared how he had endeavoured to be emotionally present for his girlfriend. Their relationship enabled them to co-navigate the challenges that each had encountered in their relatively young lives. Here, Shaka suggests that having a girlfriend with whom he can communicate honestly about his challenges offers emotional relief he otherwise could not access. For his girlfriend, it was the death of her father that demonstrated the mutual benefits of their ability to communicate authentically:

> *[Her father] passed away in 2019, I think that made us to be close… she felt that I was a person she could trust as well… I would do anything for [her]… For me, love is when you deal with your own problems and those of your person you love together, both of you sit down and solve what you can. You will never find someone without problems, everyone has their own.* (Shaka, 16 years, IDI)

Here, Shaka directs us to the internal lives of these young men. Having 'problems' and 'problems at home', makes us aware that young men, and specifically young black men, are not impervious to the world around them, that they too are constantly wrestling with various issues and concerns. In her work on heteromasculine emotional reflexivity, Holmes (2015, p. 183) concedes that "it would be possible to use the data I have gathered to confirm ideas about heteromasculinity as involving emotional closure and an unwillingness to reveal their problems to others". Similarly, this study did also generate data that seemingly conform to the narratives of unfeeling young men whose intimacies are more aligned with discourses of sexual desire. Yet, a closer examination of Shaka's love narrative reveals a willingness to reflect not only on his deepening emotional engagement within his relationship but also on how their problems seem to strengthen their intimacy over time (Holmes, 2015). Significantly, Shaka's narrative reveals the ways that a love relationship enables him to deviate from the typical prescripts of a

heteromasculine subjectivity that is considered typical of township masculinities (Ngidi, 2022; Swartz & Scott, 2013). Shaka's narrative demonstrates a significant theme in the data. For most of the young men, such vulnerability was only made possible by developing trust over time. When this form of trust was established, the young men could embody different heteromasculinities in relation to their girlfriends.

7.4. Conclusion

A key interest of this study was to explore how love and related intimacies produced affective spaces for young men to challenge deleterious performances of masculinities (de Boise & Hearn, 2017; Mvune & Bhana, 2022; Reeser & Gottzén, 2018; Stahl & Keddie, 2020). Compared to a considerable body of literature that details the propensity of South African men to leverage force and violence within their intimate relationships (Christofides et al., 2020; Janak et al., 2022; Jewkes et al., 2010; Ngidi, 2022; Shamu et al., 2016; Stern et al., 2019; Zembe et al., 2015), there is limited literature that explores how intimate relationships among young people can be productive of non-violent and equitable gendered subjectivities. Therefore, in this chapter I have explored the capacities and moments of non-violence, equity and care that emerged in the young men's narratives about their love relationships. To explore their conceptualisations of love relationships was to trace further how these discourses constrained or increased certain capacities in the intimate lives of the participants. There continues to be limited engagement with the situatedness and nuance that is produced in everyday life. As demonstrated above, the young men's narratives on love not only suggested that their understandings of relationships are intricately entangled with local discourses that frame love, gender and (hetero)sexuality, but further demonstrated how these discourses determine the possible configurations and embodiments of intimacy. Love, as a heterosexual relation of intimacy, produces new capacities for young black men to challenge and contradict the mores of hegemonic masculinities. Love relationships produce opportunities for transgression because they create spaces for mutual dialogue, in which the young men learn the 'emotional rules', give and receive support, and collectively imagine futures. Therefore, to be in a love relationship is to remake/rework their heteromasculinity, even as they become men.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Young men negotiating love: Conclusions and implications of the study

8.1. Introduction

This thesis examined how young black men living in a township in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal navigate their daily experiences of heterosexual romantic love and intimate relationships. Specifically, I investigated how love intertwines with everyday life and the ongoing processes of becoming masculine. This study was framed by the argument that young men are more than deployments of violence – a common trope that associates race, class and violence, often lumping young men together as violent and unfeeling. Instead, I have illustrated how romantic love produces moments of ambivalence that hold the potential for the transformation of masculinities. When expressing love within their intimate relationships, the young men were contradicting and resisting heteronormative scripts which necessitated dominance over their girlfriends. Yet, for most of participants, these moments offered the affective impetus to simultaneously express love and perform masculinity differently, as other-than-violent. Negotiating love provided opportunities for them to renegotiate masculinities. In the preceding three chapters, I presented the key themes that emerged from empirical data generated with 34 young men in the townships of Durban. Informed by critical feminist approaches to love and masculinities (Beasley, 2012, 2013; Gunnarsson et al., 2018; Holmes, 2015; hooks, 2000; Jónasdóttir, 2011; Morrison et al., 2012), my methods included individual interviews and focus group discussions. Through these methods, I explored how they understood, experienced and expressed love, in addition to other material and discursive negotiations. In this concluding chapter, I reflect on the key findings as they have responded to the key research questions outlined in Chapter 1:

- First, how do young black men located in the township define and understand love?
- Second, how are young black (hetero)masculinities associated with the performance of love?
- Finally, how do young black men conceptualise romantic relationships?

8.2. Key findings of this study

Throughout this study, I explored the place of love in young men's lives as they come of age and navigate new life worlds. I aimed to provide alternative understandings of young black men, masculinities and their emotional lives, which are still marginalised in South African

literature. In specifically exploring the lives of young black men in urban South Africa, the aim was to demonstrate the value of situated understandings of the discourses and materialities that inform young men's subjectivities, their experiences and understandings of heterosexual love, and their daily lived experiences. In this way, I sought to counter reductive understandings of young men and explore their lives in ways that allowed for the complexities, contradictions and ambivalences that emerged in the data. Through my engagement with the participants and the data generated, I found that young men understood their own lives, futures and relationships as defined by the ongoing social, emotional and corporeal changes they were currently navigating in their respective lives. Thus, in this study, heteromasculine subjectivities were informed by more than the need to achieve dominance, which made feelings of love and establishing intimate relationships significant beyond being a marker of heterosexuality. While gender inequitable discourses remained pervasive, a critical feminist understanding of masculinities and love enabled alternative capacities and possibilities to emerge.

In this section, I link the various findings established in each chapter to the study's overall argument. I focus on how these findings demonstrate the transformative value and potential generated through relations, practices and embodiments of love in the lives of young men. This study has demonstrated that the understandings and conceptualisations of love that inform their daily subjectivities have profound implications for how young men maintain dominance over their girlfriends and peers, and further revealed the often unobserved and understudied intimate and emotional lives that young men navigate within their love relationships. Below, I present the main themes which emerged and offer associated conclusions. However, it is also imperative to highlight that although the data in the preceding chapters were presented in relation to each of the separate research questions, this was mainly for the practical necessity of operationalising the study. This chapter presents the main findings, which are inextricably linked.

8.2.1. Young men's understandings of love

It was significant that, throughout the findings, love was not narrated or experienced as antithetical to the heteromasculine project. Instead, love emerged in diverse and profound ways in the lives of the participants, with many suggesting its omnipresence in their public and private lives. In relation to this research question, three key findings emerged: the significance of emotional intimacy, everyday expressions of love, and the more-than-physical dimensions of love.

For the participants in this study, love is decidedly real and shaped by the same materialities that frame their daily lives. As such, their understandings of love were informed by their experiences and expressions of love as relational and contingent. While the participants recognised the discourses of love that circulate in the media, in their communities and in homosocial spaces, they also recognised the significance of the contingency of their individual subjectivities in their experiences and expressions of love. They recognised that love was a unique experience for each of them and could not be assumed to be a unifying remedy for life's challenges. Instead, love was shaped by the challenges each young man had encountered or currently navigated. The participants' narratives suggested they were aware of the intersecting social and gendered discourses that circulate through popular media and the local gender scripts that frame normative heterosexual subjectivities. On the surface, these narratives were informed by the common contemporary tropes of young men who are invariably focused on achieving 'provider' status and thus demonstrating 'provider love' (Hunter, 2010). The participants laboured to demonstrate how their lives were removed from the popular tropes that circulated through media. Like Malinga and Ratele's (2016) observations that portrayals of young black men positively navigating love and intimate relationships in popular media and dominant discourse are severely limited in South Africa, the data demonstrated how participants' understandings of love diverged from the notions of heteromasculinities.

For many participants, the discourses were always further inflected through the temporalities, bodies, spaces, feelings and other materialities that marked their daily lives. This is how participants seemed to establish a separation between the dictations of discourse and their embodied negotiations of love. As I argue, using Banzi's phrase, 'TV love' represents what the young men experience at the discursive level, that which emerges through intersecting racial, social, cultural, economic and gendered discourses that are often thought as productive of the violent intimacies prevalent in South African scholarship (Gibbs, Sikweyiya & Jewkes, 2015; Willan et al., 2019). Instead, this study's findings demonstrate love as unfolding 'in real life' in complex and contradictory ways that also produce positive feelings and intensities in the lives of young men. Furthermore, it was evident from the data that violence and force were not inevitable intensities, as evidenced by the everyday expressions of love that also emerged as a salient finding. Among the young men in this study, love was more of a focal point in their daily lives than previously alluded to in foregoing studies, and intimate relationships are more than occupational hazards of negotiating sexual encounters.

Narratives about relational practices such as *ukuchecka* evidenced how such practices could productively disrupt normative township masculinities and thus give way to new or different affective capacities. *Ukuchecka* emerged as a key component of young men's love practices. Although among the participants *ukuchecka* was understood as a quotidian gendered practice, narratives describing love encounters further suggest its significance in the establishment and maintenance of intimate relationships. Although *ukuchecka* was a gendered performance through which other young men often demonstrated their proficiency and desirability as (hetero)sexual subjects, the data emphasised alternative possibilities. Paying attention to salient emotions and intensities in young men's lives enabled me to enquire meaningfully about these experiences. Conceived conventionally, the practice of *ukuchecka* remains an essential site through which heteronormative tropes are reproduced, with them as active pursuers of heterosexual encounters, often with multiple girlfriends and with little thought of emotions (Morrell et al., 2012; Ragnarsson et al., 2008). Yet, as the findings of this study have demonstrated, *ukuchecka* was described as a decidedly public performance of an intimate heteromasculinity that is less invested in ensuring adherence to discourses of dominance and control.

The participants' narratives also suggested that *ukuchecka* could have a different form and significance in their lives. When premised on feelings of love, *ukuchecka* could also provide young men with opportunities to cultivate closeness and affective connections with their girlfriends. The participants also suggested that these opportunities were produced mainly in private encounters, away from friends and the disapproving gaze of elders. While this finding confirms the significance of such practices in negotiating heterosexual intimate relationships (Qambela, 2022; Sofika & van der Riet, 2017), it reveals the alternative possibilities of practices such as *ukuchecka*, thus demonstrating how, in the context of romantic love, young men can subvert the dominant heteronormative script. For some of the participants, the practice of *ukuchecka* went from a public performance of masculine sexuality (Flood, 2008) to a private experience and expression of love, defined by emotional reflexivity and embodied intensities (Archambault, 2016; Keddie & Bartel, 2020). Although social discourses framed *ukuchecka* as a heteronormative practice of dominant masculinity, the data suggest that it also produced new affective possibilities for most participants. *Ukuchecka* was also described by participants as affording them opportunities to develop new capacities for love, care and vulnerability in ways they had not been able to explore. Romantic relationships, as noted by participants, are key sites through which they not only make sense of their sexual subjectivities but also their inner

emotional worlds. Thus, these findings direct attention towards the nuances of love among young men in townships. For most participants, physical and emotional closeness with their girlfriends was a vital marker of love. Consequently, this study revealed that, for young men, love is understood as an equally physical and emotional experience. Surprisingly, the participants did not consider emotions and emotional labour (Holmes, 2010) to be their girlfriends' responsibility. Rather, young men admitted, in the company of peers and in interviews, that their love relationships afforded them affective spaces in which they could flout normative gender rules and express their vulnerabilities. Thus, love affords young men the opportunity to negotiate their social and emotional lives. Love produces private moments that enable them to develop emotional and embodied capacities to express and experience love with their girlfriends.

What might we infer from the data reported on how young men understand and define love? Notions of love are more than dominant gendered performances. Young men's contemporary subjectivities resist the typical and static narratives that dominate popular and academic discourse. The key aspects of these findings are the ways in which young men's lived experiences, especially as they relate to love and intimacy, diverge from conventional understandings of how masculinities relate to love. For the young men in this study, love and care are essential and inextricably linked aspects of their daily lives, aspects that remain under-researched in the literature on masculinities in South Africa. They valued love as an effective site for negotiating emotional disclosure and vulnerability. These findings reveal progressive moments of complexity in which young men may contradict the dominant discourses of heteronormative masculinity. Although these findings suggest that young men still understood love as having physical dimensions that made sexual intimacies possible, they simultaneously demonstrate the ways in the young men expanded their understandings of love to include the affective aspects of love. In fact, the findings suggest that love is a central component of township masculinities, which I address in the next section.

8.2.2. Doing love in the township

In this study, I emphasised the significance of love in the lives of young men not only as a trope of control and dominance but also as a site of navigating what I conceptualise as love masculinities. I explored the significance of love in how the participants negotiated their intersecting subjectivities as young men and boyfriends, whose daily encounters were increasingly being shaped by, and in turn shaping, township materialities. Here, all the

participants were united in their perspective of love as an essential experience for young men. It was particularly vital for most of them as they were coming of age. Thus, the processes of negotiating love and masculinities were understood as relational, but it was also understood that love could be experienced as contesting some normative tenets of township masculinities, such as being perceived as invulnerable and having the potential for violence, having multiple sexual partners, and demonstrating sexual prowess (Langa, 2020).

It is evident that love prompts a shift in how young men enact masculinities and is thus implicated in their daily negotiations of regressive township masculinities premised on control, substance use, sex and violent intimacies. These findings suggest that being in loving relationships, as opposed to sexual relationships, prompted productive adjustments in young men's gendered performances associated with relational practices in the township context. Thus, for participants 'doing love' was an essential process of becoming young men, of approaching nascent masculinities. However, this did not imply a total undoing of masculinities. Rather, the data suggest that love and masculinities are mutually constitutive; thus, the differently situated doings of love relationally materialised alternative masculinities in the township context. Significantly, the findings relating to this research question emerged through situated explorations of the participants' reflections on their lived experiences and embodied expressions of love. Broadly, the themes generated suggest that young men's actions of love are inextricably linked to their doings of masculinity.

In exploring the daily negotiations of love, I encountered discourses that framed how young men approached intimate relationships and the associated practices of love. While previous studies have suggested that young masculinities hybridise love to either maintain or bolster their power (Allen, 2007; Vincent & Chiwandire, 2013; Vogels, 2020a, 2020b; Willan et al., 2019), the findings of this study established that love is actively implicated in instances where young men either resisted or reworked dominant discourses. The emergence of the discourses ukugqema (to hit, meaning to have sex) and ukugaxeka (to become entangled) is evidence of how love, in relation to dominant township masculinities, was discursively positioned as a threat to masculine power. Consistent with other studies, ukugqema was promoted as an ideal of township masculinities and ukugaxeka was to be avoided as it implied 'being whipped', essentially being controlled by one's girlfriend (Bhana, 2018; Gibbs et al., 2018; Graham and Mphaphuli, 2018). However, the findings of this study suggest that among young men, love materialised new ways of performing masculinities that resisted these framings despite the probability of being ridiculed by their peers. These findings provide evidence of the subtle

ways in which love introduces contradictions in the daily lives of the participants. Moreover, these contradictions were accompanied by growing reflexivity among the participants regarding their intimate relationships, the significance of love and what it means for their gendered subjectivities.

By further exploring how love was negotiated through local gendered discourses and practices associated with intimate relationships, the practice of *ukushela* emerged as a related and crucial finding of this study. Previous studies have explored and outlined *ukushela* mainly as an incidental practice of youth sexuality, a scripted performance by young men to establish sexual relationships which, in some instances, could prove violent for young women (Hampshire et al., 2011; Manyaapelo et al., 2019; Zibane, 2021). These studies suggest that *ukushela* was practised by young men in ways that reflected notions of domination, control and power in establishing intimate sexual relationships. However, in this study, the findings established that in the context of love, *ukushela* could also be practised in ways that disrupt and challenge dominant masculinities. Specifically, when premised on feelings of love, *ukushela* was a decidedly diplomatic practice aimed at demonstrating one's affection. Furthermore, for participants, *ukushela* was about forming emotional attachments, as opposed to being a practice of heterosexual prowess.

Young men's thoughts and feelings are channelled productively in their lives. Thus, the conceptualisation of alternative masculinities in this study relates to the expansive aspects of masculinities situated in the township. The data suggest that township masculinities and love are not oppositional. Rather, as the participants' narratives demonstrated, love productively reconfigures township masculinities in ways that reduce occurrences of violent and hypersexualised intimacies. This finding is significant in that it extends the findings of other studies exploring young masculinities and love in South Africa (Malinga & Ratele, 2016; Manyaapelo et al., 2019; Mgwaba & Maharaj, 2018; Ngabaza et al., 2013; Vincent & Chiwandire, 2013). These findings suggest that young men negotiating love is not only about negotiating gendered subjectivities; rather, through love, they can negotiate their emotional lives. Notions about ukuqaqeka as a form of coming into (an affective) awareness about how they related to love and intimate relationships was another significant finding. Among the participants, love materialised forms of doing masculinities that they identified as progressively linked to their nascent adult masculine subjectivities. Consequently, the young men in this study also described love as making them 'cleaner', an important aspect of imagining new futures and masculinities. For instance, young men who actively avoided substance and drug

use reflexively drew on their 'vision and mission' for their futures, which included negotiating love relationships in the present. Alternatively, other young men resisted the normative social discourses of ukugqema (mainly sexual encounters) and productively balanced the private commitments of loving relationships with the public pressures of adhering to dominant township masculinities. Thus, another key finding emphasises the possibilities of love in the lives of young men. The data reviewed above suggest that in the context of love relationships, normative masculinities were frequently challenged, contradicted or momentarily suspended as the participants enacted 'cleaner' love masculinities.

This relates directly to the importance of approaching love as a centrifugal force in the configuration of subjectivities, as opposed to approaching it as an epiphenomenon (Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2014; Gunnarsson et al., 2018). The participants further averred that to reach the locally desired masculine ideals, they had not only to be experts at being men but also to be experts at loving; thus, these projects were inextricably linked. Consequently, they were not only doing masculinities, but they were also simultaneously doing love. As mentioned above, this conceptualisation was especially helpful in exploring the subtle and nuanced ways in which love reconfigured masculinities and how it was relationally reworked. For example, the trope of township masculinity as contextual hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Langa, 2020) frequently surfaced in the data. However, participants' descriptions of love as an embodied practice were crucial in guiding the study's focus on how, where, when and why the performances of love were linked to the performances of masculinities.

8.2.3. Conceptualising love, sex and masculinity: Ukuhala and ukuthandana

From these findings, it became apparent that having a girlfriend was not the same as being in a loving relationship. The participants conceptualised their intimate relationships as either a relation of *ukuhala*, which materialised performances of normative masculinities that foregrounded sexual conquest and emotional detachment, or the relations of ukuthandana, which extended the capacities of participants to perform masculinities that foregrounded feelings of love and practices of ukuhloniphana (mutual respect). The data suggest that the relations of *ukuhala* produced mainly sexual relationships, which the participants did not consider to be 'real love'. Here, gendered and intimate performances mimicked love, although there was minimal emotional attachment, whereas the relations of ukuthandana were conceptualised as 'real love' relationships. For the participants, being in a relationship informed by notions of ukuthandana was a testament to the capacities and possibilities that

emerged in these relationships, as opposed to those of *ukuhala*. Significantly, while the masculinities performed in *ukuhala* relationships are comparable to the sex-jaro masculinities observed by Langa (2020) among his participants in Alexander township, the masculinities performed in the ukuthandana relationships suggested material and discursive resistances. The findings of this study reaffirm that young men who were in love relationships actively invested in establishing and maintaining intimate relationships characterised by a mutuality of love (ukuthandana) and respect (ukuhloniphana). Among young men, the experiences informed their conceptualisations of loving relationships as affective sites that, over time, materially and discursively surfaced new ways of being boyfriends and intimately relating to their girlfriends (Archambault, 2016). As the central organising component of how participants experienced love and loving in their intimate relationships, ukuthandana thus significantly informed the findings related to the third research question.

Akin to previous studies that have explored gender and sexual subjectivities among young people in South Africa (Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Harrison, 2008; Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013; Shefer et al., 2012; Willan et al., 2019), the differences between *ukuhala* and ukuthandana also surfaced the sex-love dichotomy. As mentioned, in the *ukuhala* relationships, young men enacted dominant township masculinities that positioned sexual intercourse as a bodily function of intimacy. From this perspective, the capacities of a young man's body are mainly directed towards sex as an embodied performance. Therefore, data about *ukuhala* were frequently punctuated by narratives about ukugqema (to hit and run) and cultivating the skills for *ukushaya-shaya*[20] (sweet talking), while limiting one's emotional attachment towards the sexual partner. However, among the young men, intimacies of *ukuhala* and the associated masculinities were perceived as pursuits of boyhood, as games boys played because they did not know or understand love or the responsibilities of becoming men. The participants suggested that they were coming into an increased awareness of themselves and life, which in turn shifted their sensibilities towards loving relationships and away from sexual relationships. This finding is significant considering the recent calls in the literature to challenge notions that pathologise young masculinities in South Africa (Dube, 2016; Graham, 2014; Motimele, 2021; Ratele, 2018; Shefer, 2021; Shefer & Hearn, 2022). The data suggest that, as they evolved, they were, in their own ways, actively negotiating new relational subjectivities; they resisted

[20] A colloquial equivalent to *ukudlala ngenkotha*, which I addressed in Chapter 5.

the dominant performances of township masculinities underscored by sexual prowess and were, instead, reconfiguring their masculinities in line with ukuthandana relationships.

There are two aspects that characterise how most of the participants conceptualised ukuthandana relationships, and both relate to the place and significance of sexual intercourse in their relationships. The first aspect is the resituating of sexual intimacy. Although the participants maintained that sexual intercourse remained an important dimension of intimacy, the consensus was that, in the context of a love relationship, its significance had shifted. Instead of the relationship's intensities mainly emanating from sexual intimacy, a loving relationship has other dimensions, such as emotional connection, from which the intensities of love could be derived. This was apparent in some participants' assertions. Although they have engaged in sexual intercourse within their relationships, through becoming serious about each other and knowing more about each other's hopes and ambitions, the significance of sex gave way to the importance of completing high school. The second aspect is that of *ukulinda* (waiting), which is related to delaying sexual intercourse. It differs from the first aspect in that it deprioritises sexual intimacy and, instead, requires the delay of sexual intimacy until the completion of high school or after the girlfriend had undergone umemulo. In this relational context, the absence of sexual intimacy produced the capacity to wait as a demonstration of love and the performance of a waiting masculinity. In both cases, young men were aware of how their relational subjectivities diverged from the normative performances of masculinity. In fact, most participants suggested that being in ukuthandana relationships inferred having to navigate and resist pressures from their peers who did not endorse or perform masculinities based on romantic love. In navigating homosocial spaces, young men in ukuthandana relationships could sometimes encounter teasing from their peers, especially while waiting. However, the lack of sensitivity encountered in public is contrasted with the sensitivity and care they encounter within the private affective space produced by their loving relationships. An important finding relating to how young men conceptualised their relationships is that as intimacies of ukuthandana, their relationships enabled new capacities of deprioritising sex and reworking their relational subjectivities.

In the literature, the common discourse about young men is that they prioritise sexual intercourse and that they pressure their girlfriends, in various forms, to accommodate their 'needs' (Gibbs et al., 2014, 2018, 2022; Hamlall, 2018; Hill et al., 2020; Willan et al., 2019). However, this study revealed that for most participants and their girlfriends, the shared goal was to finish school and explore future prospects, which could be thwarted by pregnancy. As

has been identified in other studies (Mvune & Bhana, 2022; Swartz & Bhana, 2009), when a young man impregnates a young woman, he is expected to pay inhlawulo towards his girlfriend's family, as an acknowledgement of damaging her honour. In addition to avoiding pregnancy, which would disrupt their girlfriends' schooling, the young men were mindful of not getting themselves in situations where they would be expected to pay inhlawulo, especially because this would have to be financed by their families. The young men suggested that these decisions were communicated and thought through during intimate moments, as illustrated by the practice of *ukuchecka* in Chapter 6. Unlike *ukuhala* relationships, which participants perceived as casual and transient relational configurations, ukuthandana relationships were more focused on the future and the possibilities that current affordances could create. This finding correlates with studies that have observed resistant and ambivalent masculinities among young men in townships (Bhana, 2018; Langa, 2020). Among the participants, these relational subjectivities and the related capacities meant that they developed new sensibilities about being boyfriends; now, intimate relationships were about more than sex, as they foregrounded communication, demonstrations of care and support as crucial features of love. Therefore, this finding illustrates the intricacies of the decision to deprioritise sexual intimacy; it is not a rash decision or a response to the fear of possible repercussions. Rather, alternative masculinities, defined by romantic love, emerge as relational subjectivities that diverge from the hypersexual and violent tropes associated with young township masculinities.

Although sex is not completely deemphasised, it is displaced from its place as the ideal of township masculine performance, thus surfacing alternative, loving masculinities characterised by forethought, empathy, care and support. In this study, it is evident that the conceptualisation of ukuthandana relationships is not only determined by rejecting sexual intimacy as the central component. Another key finding in relation to the third research question is the role that intimate relationships of ukuthandana played in young men's lives. Most participants suggested that their relationships served as alternative sites for making sense of their lives and futures; this significance was often underscored in discussions as reactions to perceived dismissals by adults and other elders who interpreted such a relationship to be of little consequence. Young men frequently challenged these notions and highlighted ways in which their girlfriends provided support that they would not otherwise have received. Their girlfriends, and thus their loving relationships, play a pivotal role in helping them navigate the challenges of daily life. Most participants pointed out that life in the township could be difficult and challenging. For instance, among the participants, these challenges ranged from grappling with the final years

of high school, being orphaned, living in a low-income household, and having to care for parents and/or siblings. Thus, the implication of being in a relationship of ukuthandana is the ability to demonstrate love through giving and receiving support, which emerged as a vital process. This process was illustrated by the narratives of reciprocal giving of emotional and financial support from their girlfriends. Love was thus conceptualised as a vital everyday process through which young men and their girlfriends co-navigated hardships in the townships of Durban.

8.3. Contributions of the study

Throughout this thesis, I have located my work within critical masculinities scholarship, drawing on the work of scholars who have called for a shift in the way masculinities, especially young men, are conceptualised in research (Ammann & Staudacher, 2021; Bhana, 2018, 2023; Graham, 2014; Langa, 2020; Malinga & Ratele, 2016, 2018; Shefer, 2014). Writing from and situated in the global South, these scholars have increasingly called for equally situated approaches to theorising Southern masculinities. Moreover, this scholarship has concerned itself with explorations of alternative and nonhegemonic masculinities. Consequently, researchers have focused on developing epistemologies that are situated in African ontologies and, while considering the intersecting histories of violence that contemporary masculinities navigate daily, are committed to transforming men and masculinities (Boonzaier et al., 2020; Dery, 2021; Mfecane, 2018, 2020; Ratele, 2016, 2018). I contributed to this research by rendering love visible in the lives of young men. Using methods that were guided by pro-feminist praxis, this study focused on the affective and embodied ways that young men expressed and experienced love. This further enabled me to reveal how participants' subjectivities resisted dominant narratives in their daily practices and demonstrations of love. Departing from existing notions of love and intimacy as a site of violence, this study surfaces new narratives and embodiments of love as a site of care and support, and a vital resource in navigating the challenges of emergent masculinity in the township context. Relatedly, by navigating the township from the perspectives of young men, this study contributes new narratives of the township. Although the participants acknowledged the challenges of violence and precarity in the township, they focused mainly on the positive aspects of being situated in the township and how this situatedness shaped their experiences of love. These findings indicate the need for a critical shift in the theoretical approaches currently used to explore township subjectivities.

This study contributes a unique perspective on the link between men, masculinities, love and emotions in the African context. In addition to the scholars mentioned above, I drew on the work of critical scholars who have explored the concepts of affect (Ahmed, 2000, 2004a, 2014; Archambault, 2016; Keddie & Bartel, 2020; Morrison et al., 2012; Pease, 2014; Stahl & Keddie, 2020). A small but growing body of work on affective masculinities has demonstrated the value of affect in expanding how masculinities are theorised and studied, especially for transforming masculinities (de Boise, 2018; de Boise & Hearn, 2017; Gottzén, 2019; Gottzén & Reeser, 2017; Reeser & Gottzén, 2018). However, apart from Archambault's (2016) study in Mozambique, all the studies which have used this approach are in the global North. Therefore, this study contributes to the growing critical literature on masculinities by demonstrating how love and affect can disrupt young men's investments in dominant masculinities and produce progressive capacities that have the potential to transform masculinities. Importantly, by conceptualising the material and discursive as mutually constitutive, this study uncovered moments of contradiction and ambivalence which otherwise remain hidden in constructivist theorising. Therefore, this study contributes to the work of scholars calling for equal consideration of men's embodied and emotional lives (de Boise & Hearn, 2017; Edgley & Roberts, 2021; Hearn, 2014; Holmes, 2015; Oliffe et al., 2022; Seidler, 2007).

Despite its diverse embodiments, love has seldom been explored as a relation of attachment and intimacy in the African context (Cole & Thomas, 2009). When it has been explored, scholars have approached love as an epiphenomenon to structural relations of power, poverty and disease (Bhana, 2013, 2018; Hunter, 2010), thus overlooking its productive power, especially in the lives of young people. Alternatively, feminist love scholarship challenges this reductive reading and conceptualises love as a productive (material and discursive) force (Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2014; Ferguson & Toye, 2017; Gunnarsson et al., 2018; hooks, 2000; Jackson, 1993; Jónasdóttir, 2011; Lanas & Zembylas, 2015). This study contributes to these related but disparate fields of literature by linking critical approaches to exploring love and masculinities. To the former body of scholarship, this study contributes an alternative conceptualisation of love that reveals the contested and multiple ways love shapes alternative performances of gender and (hetero)sexualities. The emergence of alternative masculinities defined by love demonstrates the vital role of love in the participants' daily lives. In the latter body of scholarship, this study contributes an empirical and situated application of perspectives in feminist studies of love. As a relatively new field, most scholarship has focused on

establishing epistemological foundations, and empirical studies are limited. Therefore, this study makes an empirical contribution to this subject matter.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER SEEKING CONSENT FROM PARTICIPANTS FOR PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW THEM FOR THE STUDY

Dear Participant

Request for permission to participate in a research study.

My name is Melusi Dlamini. I am a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am doing research on teenage men and how they negotiate love relationships. Considering the vulnerability of young people to violence, poverty, dropping out and HIV/AIDS, it is important understand how young men see/experience the world around them. I wish to invite you to participate in my PhD research project.

The study will focus on the experiences of young men in the INK area. It aims to get a better understanding of how young men understand love, how they express it and even talk about it. This is important because I would like to understand how these actions contribute to your ideas about manhood or being a man. For example, in most cases boys and men are taught not to show emotion and to be 'tough', they are also expected to have girlfriends and wives. I am interested in how young men like you see and experience these things. I ask the question: How does love, which is linked with ideas around sexuality and gender, inform the ways in which young black men construct and perform their masculinities in Durban.

I am looking to work with young men in your area. The young men will be interviewed and participate in focus group discussions. All participants will only be recorded if they agree. All participants will be kept anonymous and real names will never be used. The participants are free to withdraw from the project at any time. Everything discussed in the study will be kept confidential to protect the young men. Participants will be informed that they cannot discuss any information shared in these groups outside. Your permission will be requested before all activities.

If you are below 18, you will first need your parents' or guardians' permission before signing this. A letter will also be written to your parent/guardian to ask for their permission for you to participate.

DECLARATION

I…… (full names) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I free to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interviews / focus group discussion YES /NO

Use of my photographs for research purposes YES /NO

SIGNATURE DATE

Sincerely

Mr. Melusi Dlamini

[redacted]

macdlamini@gmail.com

My project supervisor is:

Professor Deevia Bhana, PhD

School of Education

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Private Bag X03

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Ashwood

3605

South Africa

Tel: +27 (0) 31 260 2603

Fax: +27 (0) 31 260 3793

Email: bhanad1@ukzn.ac.za

You can also contact the Research Office through:

Mariette Snyman

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Research Office: Ethics

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X54001

Durban

4000

Tel: +27 31 260 8350

Fax: + 27 31 260 3093

Email: snymanm@ukzn.ac.za

APPENDIX B

LETTER SEEKING ASSENT FROM PARTICIPANTS FOR PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW THEM FOR THE STUDY

Dear Participant

Request for permission to participate in a research study.

My name is Melusi Dlamini. I am a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am doing research on teenage men and how they negotiate love relationships. Considering the vulnerability of young people to violence, poverty, dropping out and HIV/AIDS, it is important understand how young men see/experience the world around them. I wish to invite you to participate in my PhD research project.

The study will focus on the experiences of young men in the INK area. It aims to get a better understanding of how young men understand love, how they express it and even talk about it. This is important because I would like to understand how these actions contribute to your ideas about manhood or being a man. For example, in most cases boys and men are taught not to show emotion and to be 'tough', they are also expected to have girlfriends and wives. I am interested in how young men like you see and experience these things. I ask the question: How does love, which is linked with ideas around sexuality and gender, inform the ways in which young black men construct and perform their masculinities in Durban.

I am looking to work with young men in your area. The young men will be interviewed and participate in focus group discussions. All participants will only be recorded if they agree. All participants will be kept anonymous and real names will never be used. The participants are free to withdraw from the project at any time. Everything discussed in the study will be kept confidential to protect the young men. Participants will be informed that they cannot discuss any information shared in these groups outside. Your permission will be requested before all activities.

Because you are below 18 years, you will first need your parents' or guardians' permission before signing this. They must give their permission by signing a letter of consent, before you can sign this one.

DECLARATION

I…… (full names) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I free to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interviews / focus group discussion YES /NO

Use of my photographs for research purposes YES /NO

SIGNATURE DATE

Sincerely

Mr. Melusi Dlamini

[redacted]

macdlamini@gmail.com

My project supervisor is:

Professor Deevia Bhana, PhD

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University of KwaZulu-Natal

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Fax: + 27 31 260 3093

Email: snymanm@ukzn.ac.za

APPENDIX C

LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Dear Parent/Guardian

Request for permission for your child/ward to participate in a research study.

My name is Melusi Dlamini. I am a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am doing research on teenage men and how they negotiate love and relationships. Considering the vulnerability of young people to violence, poverty, dropping out and HIV/AIDS, it is important understand how young men see/experience the world around them. I wish to invite your child to participate in my PhD research project.

The study will focus on the experiences of teenage men who are in high school in the INK area. It aims to get a better understanding of how young men understand love, how they express it and even talk about it. This is important because I would like to understand how these actions contribute to their ideas about manhood or being a man. For example, in most cases (young) men are taught not to show emotion and to be 'tough', they are also expected to have female partners. I am interested in how young men see this and how they react to it. I ask the question: How does love, which is linked with ideas around sexuality and gender, inform the ways in which young black men construct and perform their masculinities in Durban.

The young men will also be interviewed and participate in focus group discussions. All participants will only be recorded if they agree. All participants in the school and the names of your school will be kept anonymous, their real names will never be used. The participants are free to withdraw from the project at any time. Everything discussed in the study will be kept confidential to protect the young men. Participants will be informed that they cannot discuss any information shared in these groups outside. Your child's permission will be secured before even commencing with the study.

DECLARATION

I…… (full names) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to my child participating in the research project.

I understand that my child is at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should they so desire.

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my child's interviews / focus group discussion YES /NO

Use of my child's photographs for research purposes only YES /NO

SIGNATURE DATE

Sincerely

Mr. Melusi Dlamini

[redacted]

macdlamini@gmail.com

My project supervisor is:

Professor Deevia Bhana, PhD

School of Education

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Private Bag X03

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Email: snymanm@ukzn.ac.za

APPENDIX D

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself.
    a. Who do you live with?
    b. Parents, siblings – their ages? What do they do? Are you like them or different from them?
    c. Who are you close to at home? Why?
    d. How old are you? What does that mean for you?
    e. What school do you go to? Grade? How do you feel about that grade/school?
    f. Where do you live? Easy/hard to make friends?
    g. How do you think you have changed over the years?
    h. How would you describe how you grew up?

2. What is it like to be a young man in INK?
    a. If you were describing a young man from INK, how would you describe him?
    b. What things are important to you? What things are not important to you?
    c. What do you do in your spare time? What do you like about it? How does it make you feel?
    d. Where do you and your friends like doing? Why?
    e. `What things do you talk about?
    f. Would you say all young men are the same?

3. What are good things about being a young man here?
    a. Are there people who remind you of these good things? What things do they do/not do?

4. What are the bad things about being a young man here?
    a. Are there people who remind you of these bad things? What things do they do/not do?

5. Do you think that relationships are important for young men? Why?
    a. Are all your friends boys? Why?
    b. Do you spend your time with boys or girls? Why?
    c. Is being with girls different from being with boys? How?
    d. Are the things you discuss with boys different from the things you discuss with girls? Explain.

6. Are you in a relationship? Tell me more about your partner(s)?
    a. How old are they? How long have you been together?

1

b. What do you like about them? Is there anything you would want to change about them?
c. Are there things you would discuss with your partner that you would not discuss with your friends?
d. Are there things you would do with your partner that you would not do with your friends?

7. What is your understanding of love?
    a. Who do you love in the whole wide world? What does it feel like?
    b. Why this person? What do you love about them?
    c. Is this love different from the love of a partner? How?
    d. Can you tell me of a time when your partner showed you love/that they love you? How did they show you this? How did it make you feel?
    e. Can you tell me of a time when you showed your partner love/that you love them? How did you show them this?
    f. What is the most important thing in a love relationship? What is the least important thing?

8. What do you wish for yourself or partner in the future?
    a. Do you want to get married? Do you think love will be different in marriage than now/youth? How?

9. Anything else?
    a. How did you find the interview?

APPENDIX E

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

04 February 2019

Mr Melusi AC Dlamini 207506208
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Dlamini

Protocol reference number: HSS/1897/018D
Project title: Young men negotiating masculinities and romance in township in South Africa.

Full Approval – Full Committee Reviewed Application

With regards to your response received 28 January 2019 to our letter of 05 November 2018, the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

[redacted].....
Dr Shamila Naidoo

/px

cc Supervisor: Prof Deevia Bhana
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Simon B Khoza
cc School Administrator: Ms S Jeenarain, Ms M Ngcobo, Mr SN Mthembu and Ms H Shezi

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
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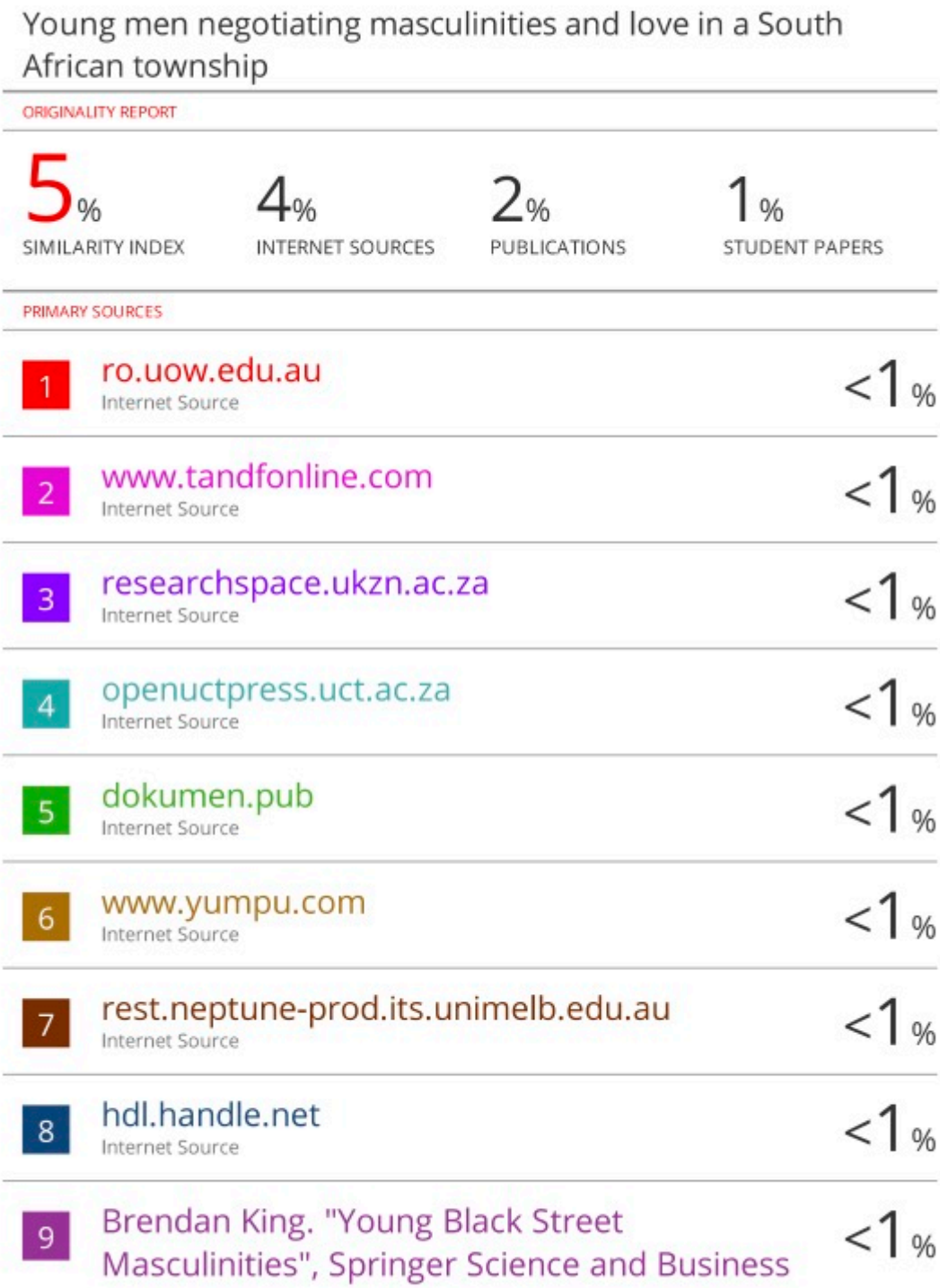
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 **Facsimile:** +27 (0) 31 260 4609 **Email:** ximbap@ukzn.ac.za / snymanm@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za
Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

APPENDIX F



Young men negotiating masculinities and love in a South African township

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