# Exploring Community Creation: Conversations of Young Black Women

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## Abstract

Exploring Community Creation: Conversations of Young Black Women

In order to showcase the significance of the often-trivialised act of women talking to each other, the purpose of this research project was to explore how young black women use talking to create community with each other. the purpose of this research is to explore how young black South African women talking to each other, having conversations with each other, work to create bonds and ultimately community with each other – or, in bell hooks' (2000) terms, a Sisterhood. This act of women talking – black women, no less – to each other goes against the grain, it is a revolutionary act that they have been conditioned against precisely because of its revolutionary nature and because of the power that lies in the unpredictability of it. Along with staying silent, women are conditioned into not having bonds or relationships with each other because they are natural enemies, because all that would come from such relations would be unimportant, because they would tear each other down – as such, women cannot and should not bond with each other (hooks; 2000:43). This is reflected in the literature, particularly literature on Africa. The literature available on the socio-linguistic study of language and language varieties is expansive on the embodiment of these varieties by young African men. This solidifies the notion that [young African] women are not talking – not to young men, not to each other, not to anyone. Due to the COVID-19 induced travel restrictions, the research used virtual ethnography principles applied to past synchronous one-one-one WhatsApp chats to collect data. Using a Speech Act Analysis on the emojis used in the chats, it was discovered that these play various roles in these conversations, including mitigating serious conversations, to contextualise seemingly negative messages and to convey emotions between the interlocutors. Additionally, focussing on and analysing the code switches that occurred in the conversations revealed that switches were also used to provide comedic relief in heavy conversations and/or to make the other person laugh and code switches did friendship maintenance work. From the WhatsApp conversations, one can therefore deduce that these young black women's use of language and linguistic matter – albeit in a virtual space – play an important role in creating community in that both emojis and code switches insist on the fragility of the people in conversation and create a community that is not only accommodates this fragility, but one that allows and accepts it.

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WE DID IT, JOE! 😭😭😭

# Table of Contents

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background

This research project is interested in the communication behaviours of young black South African women – in particular, their use of said communication behaviours to create and maintain community with each other. In other words, the purpose of this research is to explore how young black South African women are talking to each other, having conversations with each other, working to create bonds and ultimately community with each other – or, in feminist terms, a sisterhood. The concept of sisterhood in feminism is one that is fraught with debate with black feminists rejecting it due to its flawed foundations that emphasise a shared victimisation and a common oppression (see for example Sandelowski; 1990, Burton; 1991, Grey; 2004, hooks; 2004, and Lyshaug; 2006). Additionally, according to hooks (2004), this type of sisterhood, spearheaded by white women, feigns/ed unity by insisting on unconditional love, minimal [public] disagreement and criticism. In contrast to this understanding of sisterhood, this paper understands community, or sisterhood, to be an ongoing sustained bond that does not curtail difference but rather appreciates it, wherein constructive criticism is offered and considered, and emotional support is readily available (hooks; 2004 and Thomas & Harris; 2004).

These open lines of communication between women – black women, no less – goes against the grain. Women talking to each other is a revolutionary act that patriarchy has systematically discouraged and conditioned women against, as it teaches women that relating to and bonding with each other is a valueless endeavour (hooks; 2004). Along with not talking to each other, women are taught that they are natural enemies who cannot and should not bond with each other (hooks; 2004). Therefore, both hooks (2004) and Thomas and Harris (2004) argue that in order for the relationship between women, especially black women, to improve or to be rebuilt, open lines of communication need to be established and maintained. This line of argument necessitates an acceptance of Malinowski's concept of phatic communication – that is, communication whose purpose is to create bonds with those around us (Coupland; 2000). This research project lies precisely at this intersection between communication and community creation among young black women.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research project is to explore how young black women use talk as a vessel through which they are able to create community with each other. The study focused on natural talking, that is spontaneous conversations that are a result of social interactions, because it wishes to showcase the significance of women talking to each other – which has been trivialised as a result of institutionalised and systematic sexist oppression that not only discourages women relating to each other, but also does not want to hear the voice of women and therefore employs mechanisms to silence them, such as deeming their talk as unnecessary and unimportant chit-chat. The study focused on young black South African women's communication behaviours specifically because there is an apparent gap in the literature that reflects the abovementioned silencing when the reality is that [African] women have been talking, but their talk is drowned out by the talk of young African men using urban varieties.

This project's theoretical approach to 'young black women' involves critical recognition of class and also the oscillation between material forces of great violence and discursive constructions of their own 'power'. A critical approach to theorizing peer-group linguistics interaction comes from Wenger and Lave's (1991) thinking on communities of practices' because theorizing peer-group talk as community of practice strengthens this research by foregrounding shared linguistic practices as situated and powerful resources in the 'organic' creation of solidarity.

## 1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

Given the research's purpose – the objectives of the following main and sub-questions 1) to understand what constitutes as "talk", 2) to understand community making among young black women, and 3) to understand how language factors into community creation.

### 1.3.1 Main Research Question

How do young black women use talk as a resource to create community with each other?

### 1.3.1 Research Sub-questions

1. What forms of talk are used by young black women?
2. How do these forms of talk work to create community among young black women?
3. Why do these forms of talk create community in the way that they do?

## 1.4 Overview of Dissertation Chapters

Including this introductory chapter, this research has eight chapters. The following section is a brief overview of each of these chapters.

This first chapter introduced the topic generally – providing the contextual background and the purpose of the study. This is then followed by the research questions and their objectives.

Chapter 2 is the literature review that has been divided into four main sections – the broad concepts in relation to language, namely, Language, Gender and Power; Language, Identity and Style, and Speech Communities. The second section of the literature review is African Youth Languages, wherein youth, named urban varieties and stylects are explored. The third section is the conceptualisation of different types of talk. And finally, the literature focuses on the digital talk space.

Chapter 3 is the methodological considerations for the practical undertaking of the research. This chapters lays out the parameters of conducting meaningful feminist research. This chapter briefly outlines the feminist methodological framing that underpins this study and this is followed by an exploration of the use of WhatsApp as a data collection method – that is, conducting virtual ethnography on WhatsApp. This chapter also provides insight on the two analysis methods used to translate the data collected – namely, the speech act analysis and code-switching. Additionally, this chapter is divided into sampling, ethical considerations, and reflexivity sections.

Chapter 4 is the theoretical framework. As this research is interested in the natural language dynamics of a group, this chapter is a critical engagement with the theory of community of practice as this framework allows for the theorization of peer-group linguistics. Additionally, as young black women are a focus for this study, this chapter therefore also theorises said young black women as critical constituency.

Chapters 5 and 6 are analysis chapters. Chapter 5 is the first analysis chapter of the collected data using the speech act theory. Here the focus is on the use emoji, particularly their para-linguistic nature. In chapter 6 the data is analysed using code-switching – focusing particularly the function of code-switching.

Chapter 7 is the discussion chapter. Here the findings and analysis of the two proceeding paragraphs are linked back to the research questions and the literature. The analysis is placed in the context of community building in a virtual space.

Chapter 8 concludes the study and lays out the limitations of the study. This chapter also acknowledges future directions that this study could go in the future.

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# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## 2.1 Language, Gender and Power

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet have written extensively on language and gender relations – particularly foregrounding the manner in which these two broad concepts work to (re)construct or (re)produce power dynamics in men and women interactions in speech communities. They argue that gender cannot be understood as mutually exclusive attributes because femininities are connected to masculinities and these are connected to the different social groupings that individuals find themselves in (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 1992:484). As a result, social practices within these groupings are constructed around these abovementioned femininities and are therefore connected to power in various overt and subtle ways (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 1992:484). With this in mind, their 1992 offering was set out in an effort to encourage other socio-linguistic scholars to view the interaction of gender and language as rooted in the everyday social practices of particular communities and see them as jointly constructed in those practices (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 1992:462). They go on to make a call for these scholars "to think practically and look locally" – that is, to abandon several assumptions common in gender and language studies: that gender can be isolated from other aspects of social identity and relations, that gender has the same meaning across communities, and that the linguistic manifestations of that meaning are also the same across communities (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 1992:462).

Thinking practically and looking locally subsequently means centering difference – particularly on the gender identities front. It is, therefore, important to remember and avoid statements such as "women emphasize connection in their talk whereas men seek status" – which is argued by McDonald and her colleagues in their 2007 piece on friendship dyads – as they tend to be generalizations (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 1992:470). Another example of such generalizations can be found in a study conducted by Fisherman in 1978 (as cited by Freed & Greenwood; 1996) wherein she found an imbalance in the use of the phrase "you know" in cross-sex conversations and she went on to attribute it to the imbalance in power between the speakers because her study found that women used "you know" more frequently than men and she interpreted "you know" as a linguistic signal of the interpersonal powerlessness of the women. However, when Freed and Greenwood (1996), conducted the same study they found that the imbalance in the use of the phrase "you know" had very little to do with female

speakers' powerlessness, but rather reflected greater involvement or conversational effort on the part of one speaker over the other or it may reflect a personal speaking style of one speaker. They are adamant that because the use of "you know" fluctuated in the same way, regardless of the sex or gender of the speaker, associating it with female speakers is incorrect and, like Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992), they call for avoiding making generalizations when focusing on categories of sex or gender (Freed & Greenwood; 1996:7). It is clear to see that these generalisations are not only inaccurate, but they also work to re-inscribe women into positions of powerlessness. They also imply that there is a "normative" gender model – one in which men and women fit into perfectly and those who do not are simply outliers or deviants Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992). Another danger with such claims is that they invisibilise difference within gender identities and they transition from being mere generalizations to becoming the basis of definitions and prototypical characterizations of what it means to be "women" and what it means to be "men," thus inaccurately homogenizing both categories and marginalizing those who do not match the prototypes (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 1992:470).

The notion of "women's language" dates back to the times of Lakoff in the 1970s – she postulated that the gender differences in the use of the English language in white middle-class America maintained male dominance, giving rise to the so called "women's language" (as cited by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 1992:475). She framed this type of language as being different from the standard English standard set by men, in that it was polite, tentative, indirect, imprecise, noncommittal, deferential, closer to norms of grammatical "correctness" and less colloquial, emotionally expressive but euphemistic, to name a few (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 1992:475). She recognised that the existence of two types of English varieties – standard English and women's English – made the interaction of white middle-class American women in conversations difficult because they had prototypical expectations of speaking while gendered a woman to fulfil, they were constrained to using powerless language (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 1992:475; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2003:158-159). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003:159) found this work extremely important in the beginnings of important work focusing on the critical issues of power in the interaction of language and gender as it resulted in the scholars of the time writing on how women could move away from the positions of powerlessness in speech and become more assertive – thereby rejecting "women's language". However, according to Crawford (1995, as cited by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2003:159), these offerings viewed women powerlessness as their own (the women's) doing – ignoring the broader societal and institutional arrangements, such as women

earning far less salaries than men for doing the same job as men, that results in disproportional power.

Both Freed and Greenwood (1996:10) Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003:18 & 167) offer various mechanism that women apparently employ in an effort to attenuate their power in speech in order to keep in line with Lakoff's "women's language". These mechanisms include the use of different hedges, boosters or amplifiers, diminutives, being indirect, euphemisms and [tag] questions (Freed and Greenwood; 1996:10, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2003: 158). Tag questions, or tags, are questions that are attached at the end of clause that would otherwise be a declarative (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2003: 167). In contesting Lakoff's postulation that women are the primary users of tags, Dubois and Crouch (1975, as cited by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2003) found more instances of men using tags than women and they questioned Lakoff's claim that tags expressed speaker insecurity non-committal. Outside of their gendered functions, tags can be epistemic modal – meaning that they convey uncertainty and ask for confirmation from the other – facilitative, softening, or challenging (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2003:168). A facilitative tag invites the listener to make a conversational contribution and is often found at the beginning of an encounter or from those like teachers or talk show personalities who are trying to elicit talk from others; A softening tag attenuates or mitigates the potential negative impact of something like a criticism: ''you were a bit noisy, weren't you?"; Challenging tags often elicit defeated silence or reluctant admissions of guilt: think of an angry parent uttering ''you thought you could pull the wool over my eyes, didn't you?" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2003:168).

Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003:168) argue that there are reasons other than powerlessness or unwillingness to take a strong stand that might explain a particular use of a tag – stating that facilitating others' entry into the conversation or softening the impact of criticism have to do primarily with connections among people and social relations. While primarily epistemic modal uses came from both the powerful and the powerless, more often than not they come from the powerless: Cameron et al. (1989, as cited by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2003:171) found that the powerless tended to use epistemic modals to seek reassurance whereas the powerful tended to use them to sum things up (and often then to close off an exchange). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003:171) accept that statistically, primarily facilitative and softening uses of tags are associated with women in casual conversations among acquaintances and with the more powerful in asymmetric exchanges and they accept that primarily epistemic modal

uses of tags are statistically associated with men in peer exchanges and with the less powerful in asymmetric exchanges. They posit that there are many reasons why women might choose to position themselves as conversational facilitators – these reasons are associated with prototypical behaviours of being gendered a woman. Conversation facilitation is, on the surface, ‘‘nice” co-operative behaviour, thus offering a socially approved mode for women’s coping and resistance in particular social contexts or women might choose to adopt an apparently tentative stance toward content for primarily social reasons authoritative and to shy away from assuming authority upon oneself (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2003:172).

The potential reasons behind women’s choice of embracing or taking on the conversation facilitator through the use of facilitative tags given above by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2003:172 are reminiscent of some aspects of The Communication Accommodation Theory as presented by Dragojevic and his colleagues in their 2016 chapter entitled Accommodative Communication as Core of the Theory. The Communication Accommodation Theory (henceforth CAT) is a theory concerned with how, when and why people adjust or accommodate their speech during a social interaction (Dragojevic et al.; 2016:36). Accommodation occurs in various directions, including the converging and the diverging directions: the former refers to adjusting one’s communicative behaviour towards the communication behaviour of one’s interlocutor – to be more similar to theirs (Dragojevic et al.; 2016:36). People have been shown to converge not only toward human, but also toward computer conversational partners such as on online social media platforms (Dragojevic et al.; 2016:36). The latter refers to adjusting one’s communicative behaviour away from one’s interlocutor – to be more dissimilar to theirs. For example, Bourhis and Giles (1977, as cited by Dragojevic et al.; 2016:36) found that when an English speaker described Welsh as a “dying language with a dismal future,” Welsh participants overwhelmingly broadened their Welsh accents and some even introduced Welsh vocabulary into their responses. Converging communication adjustment itself can occur in different directions – it can be symmetrical or asymmetrical (Dragojevic et al.; 2016:38). Symmetrical adjustment occurs when an individual’s communicative behaviour is reciprocated by the listener (Dragojevic et al.; 2016:38). However, more often than not one’s communicative behaviour is not mirrored by the listener because convergence is usually directed towards those with greater power in the interaction – hence an asymmetric convergence (Dragojevic et al.; 2016:38). As mentioned above, data shows that women tend to employ primarily facilitative tags in casual social interactions among acquaintances and with the more powerful in asymmetric exchanges Eckert

& McConnell-Ginet; 2003:172) – this can be classified as an asymmetrical accommodation, particularly if the interaction is between a man and woman. Dragojevic et al. (2016:38) argue that women converge to men more often than men converge to women due to the power differentials – however, later, in such cases this asymmetrical accommodation may be more accurately described as "complementarity," and be perceived positively by both parties.

## 2.2 Language, Identity and Style

Language and identity cannot be thought of as mutually exclusive entities because, as Bucholtz (2009) has noted, one's use of a language variety, for example slang, creates and conveys a certain type of identity. Bucholtz's work on the interaction of language and identity did not start in 2009 – in 2004, in collaboration with Hall, they wrote a chapter on language and identity, aptly titled, "Language and Identity". They define identity as "sameness" (Bucholtz & Hall; 2004:370) – as a result, in this chapter, they are concerned with two major aspects of identity: sameness and difference – particularly how the former works to create group identities for individuals, while the latter works to create social distance between those who see themselves as unlike (Bucholtz & Hall; 2004:369). These academics argue that sameness and difference exist as a result of social interaction, as such they are they become categorised hierarchically in these social contexts – there is a process of marking that takes place, wherein normative and non-normative categories are established (Bucholtz & Hall; 2004:369-370). Bucholtz and Hall (2004:370) note the difficulty of having external observers impose identity categories onto social groups because these imposed categories tend to have very little to do with the group itself and plenty to do with the said observer's own identity and power stakes. For example, socio-linguists academics may choose to privilege linguistic terms to characterise the membership of a given speech community while ignoring the equally relevant social, historical, political and cultural criteria – it is therefore important to pay attention to the speakers' own understandings of their identities, which become salient through the ethnographic analysis of their actions (Bucholtz & Hall; 2004:370-371).

As noted above, Bucholtz and Hall (2004:369) are not just interested in the role that similarity plays in identity creation work, but rather also in the role that difference plays. They argue that in creating a group identity, in particular, there is a process of "inventing similarity by downplaying difference" (Bucholtz & Hall; 2004:371). This means that there is a manufacturing of differences within the social group, as well as those outside the group – there

has to be an ‘other’ that can be positioned against those that are considered the same (Bucholtz & Hall; 2004:371). According to (Bucholtz & Hall; 2004:371), some significant identities, particularly in the study of language and identity, have come out in the contexts of perceived heterogeneity rather than perceived homogeneity – that is the fundamental function of identity work: to deliberately eradicate difference on the ideological level, but recreate said difference into systemized social structures.

Bucholtz (2009) paper is a wholly technical linguistic paper that proved to be a bit more challenging to understand. They start off by tracking the changes in identity studies, noting that studying identity has transitioned into the study of style (Bucholtz; 2009:146). Naturally, this shift has had implications on how style has been understood in the social linguistic sphere: initially it was understood as a “unidimensional continuum between vernacular and standard” which manifested in different ways depending on the speaker, now style is understood to be multi-dimensional and is understood to be a display of multiple identities in interaction with each other (Bucholtz; 2009:146). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003:308) argue that individuals are continually engaging in stylistic practice – everything one does is a stylistic act that requires continuous (re)invention of oneself. Citing Dick Hebdige (1984), Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003:308) continue to argue that style is a process of bricolage: “People take already available elements and combine them to make something new.” It is from these elements that style draws its meaning, and it is these elements that modify old styles to create new styles (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2003: 308). This new theory of style, therefore proposes, or rather, requires a correspondingly more sophisticated theory of identity – as such academics, including author, draw either implicitly or explicitly on the concept of indexicality, or contextually bound meaning in their understanding of stylistic practice (Bucholtz; 2009:146). She argues that in an indexical theory of style, the social meaning of linguistic forms is not merely about typical of social categories such as gender, ethnicity or age, to name a few, but it is about the more subtle and more fleeting interactional moves through which speakers take stances, create alignments, and construct personas (Bucholtz; 2009:147). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003:308) note that these personas change social meaning as well as the social landscape through the intentional or unintentional populating of new style configurations that result in new style landmarks. This is because these personas are responsible for the interpretation of the stylistic landscape, giving meaning to stylistic elements by contrasting a variety of styles and the creation of new styles through the creative

manipulation and appropriation various pre-existing elements (Eckert &McConnell-Ginet; 2003:311).

Citing Och's work (1990-1996), Bucholtz paper relies heavily on the linguistic notion of indexicality – stating that the relationship between language and social meaning should be understood at two levels (2009:148). According to the author, the two levels of indexicality can be broken down into two - direct and indirect indexicality. The former refers to linguistic forms that immediately point to interactional stances like ongoing talk and the latter refers to the same linguistic forms are then associated with particular social types that take on these interactional stances (Bucholtz; 2009). To illustrate these two levels, inspired by Kiessling and Mous's (2004) study of the word "dude", Bucholtz (2009:149) applies Kiessling and Mous's arguments and theories to their own study of the word "güey" (which is Spanish for dude) in a different context. When applied to the word "dude", or "güey", at the level of direct indexicality, the word projects a stance of casual solidarity and at the level of indirect indexicality, the abovementioned stance is linked to masculinity (Bucholtz; 2009). In general, the indexical meaning of the word that exists in the social realm is a result of its various functions in the interactional realm – which include an exclamation, a marker of affiliation and connection, a mitigator of confrontational stance and an agreement marker (Bucholtz; 2009).

The following quote illustrates the entanglement of language, style and identity work – summing up this section perfectly:

> Inasmuch as people feel that their way of speaking defines them, the development of linguistic style is a central part of identity work. Style is about creating distinctions (Irvine 2001), and how people talk expresses their affiliations with some and their distancing from others. It expresses their embrace of certain social practices and their rejection of others -- their claim to membership (and to particular forms of membership) in certain communities of practice and not in others. And within communities of practice, the continual modification of common ways of speaking provides a touchstone for the process of construction of forms of group identity -- of the meaning of belonging to a group (as a certain kind of member). Stylistic practice is a resource for the orientation of the community and its participants to other nearby communities and to the larger society, a resource for constructing community members' relation to power structures. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003:315)

## 2.3 Speech Communities

From the preceding paragraphs, it is clear that social interaction is the fundamental pre-requisite for studying language in relation with other social phenomena such as identity, style, gender and power. In various offerings noted above, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet made

mention of the individuals being part of different social groups – groups that impact social behaviours differently, from the way one speaks to the way one embodies their prescribed gender. They adopt Lave and Wenger's ways of theorising and they call these social groups Communities of Practice (henceforth CoPs). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992:464), argue that there is a need for a concept such as CoP in sociolinguistics as it facilitates the exploration into the manner in which social practice and one's place in a community interact. CoPs are defined as:

> A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations-in short, practices-emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour. As a social construct, a community of practice is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992:464)

The scholars believe that using CoPs as sites through which to study language, gender and sexuality could result in a research programme that will show how day-to-day practice at the local level both feeds, and is structured by, larger social constructs and discourses (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2007:28-29). They propose that the incorporation of language and gender scholarship into CoPs, take the study of communities of practice in two directions: the comparative direction which is concerned with the examination of related communities of practice, and the relational direction which focuses on the articulation between the community of practice and other social configurations (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2007:29). The former allows for verification opportunities from multiple similar or completely different CoP sites – giving rise to the opportunity to make generalisations (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2007:29). This is illustrated in Ochs and Taylor's study of families at the dinner table (1992, as cited by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2007:29): The dinner table was central to this study because of its regularity, its categorisation of a site for the performance of gendered parental and work roles, and its status as one of the few occasions on which entire families gather with very little to distractions from sustained conversations; they found that mothers evoked evaluations from children by asking them how their days went, providing fathers with the opportunity to make authoritative pronouncements resulting in a practice that they called 'father knows best'. The results from this study can be verified through studying families that do not gather around the dinner table for dinner, or by investigating other incidences outside of the dinner table that 'father knows best' scenarios occur for example (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2007:30).

Participation within any community of practice assumes, and importantly, builds on and draws from a life outside the said community – therefore, the latter direction places the community of practice in the world at large (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2007:31). Placing CoPs in the wider world is important because people are members of multiple communities of practice – their families, workplace groups, sports teams, church groups, classrooms, friendship groups to name a few – as such, they participate differently as they move among these communities of practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 2007:31). These different forms of participation yield the use of different linguistic resources – making salient the connections between communities of practice and among linguistic resources. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2007:32) therefore argue that CoPs are sites for the construction of meaning, however they do not construct these meaning independently because they are part of complex social structures that connect members to each other and to the political economy. Similarities and differences among communities of practice are part of the fibre that holds the social order together, therefore Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2007:32) call for the studying of CoPs in relation to their place in the social order in order to learn how gender is constructed.

This notion of studying gender through CoPs is not a new postulation from Eckert and McConnell-Ginet – back in 1992 they had already postulated that a focus on language and gender as practice within communities of practice would provide a deeper understanding of how gender and language interact with each other and how those interactions matter. And the relation between gender and language resides in the modes of participation available to various individuals within various communities of practice as a direct or indirect function of gender – working to (re)produce gender relations (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 1992:473). For example, when a community of practice such as a family gets together for a meal and those gendered as women get up to serve and to clean up while those gendered as men watch television, gender differentiation (including differentiation in language use) is being reproduced within the family on an institutional level (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet; 1992:473). In their study of the use of the phrase "you know", Freed and Greenwood (1996) found that the requirements of specific verbal tasks elicit particular stylistic devices for speakers who are members of the same speech community; women and men of the same speech community, speaking in same-sex pairs, respond to the requirements of such verbal tasks and to various sociolinguistic contexts in equivalent ways; women and men of the same speech community, speaking in same-sex pairs in the same conversational context, with equal access to the conversational floor, do not differ

either in the frequency of the use of “you know” or in the number of questions uttered; women and men of the same speech community, speaking in same-sex pairs in comparable settings, not only utter equivalent numbers of you know and of questions, but use you know and questions to achieve comparable discourse goals; it is more accurate to associate a style of speaking with a particular linguistic task, or with a specific kind of speaking situation within a given socio- cultural context, regardless of the sex of the individuals participating, than to attribute a language style to any casually defined group of speakers. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992:473) continue to argue that women and men may also participate differently in single-sex communities of practice – for example, if all-women's groups do in fact tend to be more egalitarian than all-men's groups, as some current literature claims, then women's and men's forms of participation in such groups will differ.

## 2.4 African Youth Languages

This research project is interested in the communication behaviours of young black South African women – in particular, their use of said communication behaviours to create and maintain community with each other. The literature available on the socio-linguistic study of language and language varieties is expansive on the embodiment of these varieties by young African men. This solidifies the notion that [young African] women are not talking – not to young men, not to each other, not to anyone. There is a complete erasure of young women's engagement with the various language varieties that exist on the African continent – which this research project will attempt address.

The following section is divided into three parts – namely, An Overview of African Youth Languages, Youth Languages in Africa and Youth Languages in South Africa. In all three parts – but more prominently in the last two parts – the broader concepts that were outlined in the first section of this literature review (that is, language as it relates to gender, power, identity and style) will be engaged with to bring to the fore their physical or practical manifestations.

### 2.4.1 Overview of African Youth Language

The idea of being young – of being characterised or considered youth is central to this research project. As such, it is important to conceptualise, however briefly, what constitutes as "youth" in the African context. Mensah (2016) does just that – offering an understanding of youth beyond just age. Citing Tyyska (2005), Mensah (2016:1) states that in constructing the youth category in Africa, one has to consider the demographic structure, social status, social processes and the cultural influence that are the basis of this category. However, of utmost importance are the socio-economic dynamics – these create the boundary and determine who is a youth (Mensah; 2016:1). According to Frederiksen and Munive (2010, as cited by Mensah 2016:1) being a youth in Africa means one is uneducated, unemployed and having no expectations of a "meaningful future". They continue to argue that African youth occupy complex spaces wherein they are both security threats as well as victims of socio-political structures that block their aspirations (Frederiksen & Munive; 2010, as cited by Mensah; 2016:1). This double bind that African youth find themselves in is, according to Frederiksen and Munive (2010), a consequent of societal inequalities, social exclusion, economic marginalization and a lack of robust government policies to accommodate youth as social

actors and agents (Mensah; 2016:1). Civil wars on the continent are not unheard of, and Mensah (2016:2) argues that that coupled with violent politics, works to extenuate and aggravate the challenges that the youth in (urban) Africa face resulting in deeply entrenched alienation, marginalization and manipulation of African youth with terrible and devastating effects. This is illustrated by the Boko Haram in Nigeria whose modus operandi has been, and continues to be, recruiting as suicide bombers children, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone who use children and the youth as soldiers in the frontline to invade the capital city armed conflicts in Mozambique and xenophobic attacks in South Africa, to name a few (Mensah; 2016:2). These complex dynamics are the daily realities of African youth – these are the lived experiences that have propelled the envisioning and the reconstruction of social circumstances and has resulted in the mobility, complexity and diversity in youth linguistic practices (Mensah; 2016:2). However, it important not to have a myopic view of African youth language: "youth language in Africa is not merely nourished by conflicts and complex challenges but rather reflects how young people make agentive use of language" – they are a representation of social tensions, unequal power dynamics as well as the shifting socio-linguistic landscape (Mensah; 2016:2).

In their special publication, Nassenstein and colleagues warn against this exoticisation of African youth languages – seeing them as appendages of conflict and war. They note that this exoticisation tends to happen when these youth languages are commodified and used commercially in media such as advertisements and films (Nassenstein et al.; 2018:11). The most prominent and inherent problem with this is that in films such as Tsotsi, Kinshasa Kids and Nairobi Half Life wherein each film the local youth languages are showcased (South African's Tsotsitaal, the Democratic Republic of Congo's Yanké and Kenya's Sheng respectively) are not natural – they are merely stylized reproductions that tend to be decontextualized for the purposes of creating the "real" storylines of the respective productions (Nassenstein et al.; 2018:11). This exoticisation of African youth languages is not just a feature of popular culture but is also present in academia through what Nassenstein et al. (2018:11) call the "artefactualization of youth language". They argue that this process of artefactualization begins at the data collection phase as they note that the comments on the collected data on youth language, tend to be more reminiscent of a performed stage play than of natural speech and everyday interaction resulting the production of data that foregrounds a humorized language form that deviates from the standard (Nassenstein et al.; 2018:13).

In order to counteract this artefactualisation, Nassenstein et al. (2018:14) call for a change in the manner in which youth languages are studied: first and foremost, youth language must be understood and perceived as type of ordinary everyday language that is not restricted to a specific age group, or a resistance identity or for fulfilling "anti-language" purposes. This shift in the understanding of African youth languages is necessary because other work that Nassenstein et al. have produced indicated that youth languages are can be, and are, employed across all ages for any situation – bringing into question the deviancy of youth language when it used frequently by everyone; they also argue that the wide use and visibility of a variety of linguistic practices on advertisements, both on billboards and in the digital space, have resulted in these linguistic practices being labelled urban vernaculars and being enregistered as youth languages because digital communication is thought to be the feature of youth (Nassenstein et al.; 2018:14). Secondly, they call for more ethnographically informed methods that are based on deep immersion rather than the short fieldwork that results in general overviews rather than revealing the realities of speakers and their social interactions (Beyer; 2014-2015, as cited by Nassenstein et al.; 2018:15). An example of type work that Nassenstein et al. (2018) are critiquing is that of Mensah (2016) – understandably so, as Mensah's paper was published before the critique, making any edits to as suggested by Nassenstein and their colleagues impossible. Mensah (2016:2) understands African youth language as not only a tool for exclusion, disruption and resistance of mainstream linguistic order used by the African youth, but also as a tool for identity creation, creating and maintaining solidarity and foster group integration.

On the other end of the spectrum is Atanga (2012) and their colleagues who are concerned with the importance of studying language and gender in, particularly, Sub-Saharan African contexts. This is not to say that Sub-Saharan Africa is special, they are aware that "the various theoretical deficit/dominance/difference/discourse approaches to the field are no less relevant to African contexts than elsewhere" and should, and can, be explored in other parts of Africa (Atanga et al.; 2012:5). They are adamant that this type of research should not only be conducted by African academics but should also be rooted in gender and language topics that are related to Africa so that this body of work can gain momentum through the development of local theories that can be spread internationally (Atanga et al.; 2012:2). This is driven by their opinion that the field of gender and language lacks diversity and in order for the field to grow, it needs said diversity in all aspects: context, understandings of gender, manifestations of gender (roles, relations, identities and representations) and gender and language research priorities (Atanga

et al.; 2012:2). They continue to argue that African languages have no shortage of proverbs about gender – therefore are rich linguistic resources (Atanga et al.; 2012:4). They note that in order for the critical study of language and gender in Sub-Saharan African contexts to work, one needs to recognise and acknowledge that African contexts are not uniform, and the notion of a context exists at many different levels - extending well beyond geography and space (Atanga et al.; 2012:13). Relying on Ruth Wodak (2008; 2009), the authors continue in this vain stating that any exploration into language and gender need to take the different context levels that are provided by Wodak – including the broad socio-political, the historical and the immediate social context of the speakers in question – into consideration (Atanga et al.; 2012:13).

### 2.4.2 Examples of Named Youth Languages in Africa: Sheng

The following section of the literature review provides examples of some the African youth languages that have been named and extensively covered in work on youth language on the continent. However, it is important to note that this research will not be dealing with a named African youth language, rather with an unnamed language or style that is used by a community of practice.

**Sheng**

Literature on Sheng is readily available and quite extensive – where it has whole papers dedicated to it, like the ones that will be used in the following sections, or it is mentioned or acknowledged in a sentence or paragraph, such as in Mensah (2016) and Nassenstein et al. (2018). According to Githiora (2002:159), Sheng is a language practice that emerged from the complex multilingual situation of Nairobi City in Kenya – one of the fastest growing cities in Africa, thanks to the rate of the rural–urban migration. This has resulted in the rise of a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual population (Githiora; 2002:161). Despite there being a multitude of local languages, English is still the preferred and privileged language – it is the medium of instruction at school – as it is a signifier of prestige and upward social mobility (Githiora; 2002:161). Despite English being preferred, there are still strong ties and an allegiance to Kenyan ethnic languages – as a result, Swahili earned its official language status due to it being the most common spoken language across ethnicities.

According to Githinji (2008:18) Sheng is street-based language that is a variation of Swahili – hence its name being the acronym of Swahili and English. Sheng is primarily spoken by the youth – from preadolescents to young adults and has a major presence in the discourse of primary and secondary school children outside their formal classroom setting (Githiora; 2002:159). Spyropoulos (1987, as cited by Githoria; 2002:159) posits that it was perhaps the early immigrants who went to Nairobi, along with their families and extended families, after national independence in 1963 who coined the new code using the linguistic resources that were available to them in the new multilingual urban context. From their findings, Githiora (2002: 160) observed that pinpointing the exact location where Sheng first emerged is difficult for three main reasons: firstly, there are a plethora of competing claims about its origins, secondly, there exists plenty of variations of Sheng, making it difficult to identify the specific diffusion points of the respective variations and thirdly the use of Sheng is no longer geographically bound to the Eastlands.

Githinji (2008) is concerned with the interaction of Sheng and gender, specifically sexism. The main arguments of this paper are that Sheng has sexism encrypted in the word structures as well as word connotations and that women are not just passive recipients of male produced labels but are also agents who participate in self-definition (Githinji; 2008:15). Sexism in language is not a new Sheng feature – it dates all the way back to the times of Lakoff, even beyond that. There are many mechanisms that convey sexism in language, including ascribing connotations to female words such as 'woman' that result in the perceptions of unpleasantness and embarrassment (Githinji; 2008:16). Another way to convey sexism is structurally – through adding suffixes that indicate gender, including -ess, -ett and -in, to name a few or threw quite literally attaching the word lady, woman, girl or female to professional words such as female professor, salesgirl, cleaning lady, and policewoman (Githinji; 2008:18). In Sheng, the words for female genitalia are used to refer to women so excessively that the women become that sexual organ – their entire being is defined by that sexual organ (Githinji; 2008:24). For example, the buttocks, which are held to high regard and take to represent beauty, is used as euphemism for female genitalia. This is achieved structurally through the addition of the prefix ma-: this prefix works in such a way that not only increases the negative connotations of the word that is its attached to, but it also forces women to be seen as not having individual personalities (Githinji; 2008:25). For example, a woman with big breasts becomes *matuzo* or *ma-earphones*, a woman with a large posterior becomes *ma-tyre*, *manyuma* or *manyeke* – these

words used to refer to women work to bring attention to the size of the appendages, implying that they are too big and are therefore undesirable, thereby humiliating women who have them.

### 2.4.3 Youth Languages in Africa: The Case of South Africa

Before exploring the types of youth languages that are present in South Africa, this section will first cover the concept of anti-language. This concept appears so late in this literature review because the researcher found it more appropriate to include it in the section of South African youth languages, firstly, because this concept is written about heavily by South African socio-linguists (Brookes; 2014, Hurst & Buthelezi; 2014, , Hurst-Harosh; 2019 and many others), secondly, because this concept is written about extensively in relation to South African youth languages – perhaps because of the first reason. Although this concept was coined by Halliday in 1978, these offerings tend to be responses to Kiessling and Mous' 2004 article entitled Urban Youth Languages in Africa.

The concept of anti-languages has to do with the relations of language and identity – as such, in Kiessling and Mous' (2004) article, it first makes its appearance in the section about urban youth languages functioning identity creators. They argue that urban youth measure successful identity through the distance that they created between themselves and the older generations, from the rural population that represents a tradition through their lifestyle, from the upper social classes and society at large (Kiessling & Mous; 2004:313). It is this characteristic that earned youth languages the label of anti-languages. In relation to argots, Halliday defined anti-languages as:

> In an antilanguage, language exists primarily to create group identity and assert group difference from a dominant group .... The meaning at the core of the metasign of antilanguages is hostility and rejection of the dominant order. Where possible, antigroups usually draw on other semiotic systems – such as the use of black clothing, by many outlaw groups – to express the same basic set of meanings.
>
> (Hodge & Kress; 1997:53, as cited by Kiessling & Mous; 2004:313)

Another characteristic of anti-languages, that is, urban youth languages, is that they are parasitic – this means that anti-languages rely on the dominant language of the context in which they are developed (Kiessling & Mous; 2004:313).

Connected to the idea of youth languages being anti-languages, Castells (1997; as cited by Kiessling & Mous; 2004:313) put forward three identity types that are constructed as a response to power relations – only two are relevant here, namely the resistance identity and the project identity. The former is created by those who are stigmatised and devalued by the dominant

social order who then have to create means of resistance that are in opposition to this social order so that they can survive (Castells; 1997, as cited by Kiessling & Mous; 2004:313). The latter is about individuals who, through the use of "whichever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure" (Castells; 1997, as cited by Kiessling & Mous; 2004:313). Therefore, in Castell's terms, as anti-languages, youth languages express resistance identities.

In response to the idea of [African] youth languages being anti-languages, Hollington and Nassenstein (2017) refute the idea that they are "parasitic", stating that linguistic practices building on each other is a completely normal process that exists in the field of linguistics and not just bound to youth languages. While they do not agree with the use of this word, they do accept that it represents "a reciprocal relationship and makes it clear that such practices are not in binary opposition" (Hollington & Nassenstein; 2017:393). Therefore, they argue that in African urban contexts particularly, the framing of language vs. anti-language and mainstream identity vs. resistance identity do not exist, but they continue to be maintained (Hollington & Nassenstein; 2017:393). In order to illustrate and defend this argument, they state that:

> While it is true that youths in Africa and elsewhere often have a desire to set themselves apart from others (especially from the older generation) as they seek to find their place in the world and to build their identities, while finding out and playing with who they are, these practices (which include language, clothing, hairstyle, music, art, sports, and other activities) are not necessarily in a strong opposition to the normal society, whatever the latter may actually be. Rather, the youths build on existing signs and redefine them, forming a creative bricolage. This bricolage, while expressing meanings in opposition to the so-called mainstream, draws heavily on resources precisely from mainstream linguistic repertoires. Furthermore, the mainstream also reacts to the linguistic practices of the youths themselves, which may be ambiguously perceived as offensive, different, or anti, yet also exciting, new, and attractive. Therefore, at a certain point mainstream discourse and mainstream language practices take over and appropriate youths' practices. (Hollington & Nassenstein; 2017:393)

In her 2019 paper, Hurst-Harosh problematises the term 'anti-language' itself, saying that simply applying to the study of youth languages, particularly tsotsitaal, runs the risk of ascribing "criminal and subcultural tendencies on all young people in Africa's urban areas" (Hurst; 2016:172, as cited by Hurst-Harosh; 2019:114). She continues to problematise this term, this time calling for it to be reconsidered due to the socio-linguist shift from understanding language as "clearly bounded homogenous units," to understanding language as "practice in which people draw on a range of resources," – therefore calling for a theoretical approach that accommodates the multi-lingual realities of African urban centres (Hurst-

Harosh; 2019:114). The concept of anti-languages is premised on the existence of a standard language and an anti-language, as noted by Hollington and Nassenstein (2017). Citing Makoni and Pennycook, Hurst-Harosh (2019:115) reinforces the idea that this dichotomy does not, or rather, should not exist in Africa because such categorisation of language is reminiscent of colonialism because African languages were never based on a "standard form."

### 2.4.4 Tsotsitaal & Iscamtho

Thanks socio-linguists such as Brookes, Buthelezi, Calteaux, de Klerk, Hurst, Mesthrie, Ntshangase, Rudwick and Shange, to name a few, there is a multitude of journals, books, chapters and articles on South African youth varieties – particularly the two abovementioned varieties. The following section is a showcase of what some of these scholars have to say about Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho. It is important to note that these scholars rely heavily on each other when they write – this is evidenced in the fact that they cite each other quite often, particularly Ntshangase in relation to Iscamtho and Hurst and Mesthrie as far as Tstotsitaal is concerned.

Brookes and Lekgoro (2014) start their article off by giving broad outlines about the current academic understandings of urban varieties, stating that academics are either of the opinion that these varieties are distinct codes that are rooted in gangs but found life outside of said gangs and have become widely accepted as emerging languages or they are of the opinion that urban varieties are actually not distinct codes, but they are "generational and gendered performative slang styles or stylects with anti-language intentions." This idea of a stylect is very important when it comes to understanding Tsotsitaal. It was first introduced into the socio-linguist realm in 2013 by Hurst and Mesthrie (cited by Ditsele & Hurst; 2016:2-3) to convey that thinking about Tsotsitaal – and other African urban youth varieties – as a mere language was a gross misrepresentation because it is more than that: it is a style of speaking. The term 'stylect' covers the complete embodiment of Tsotsitaal – both the linguistic, such as the use of lexical items as part of a style performance in identity construction, and non-linguistic aspects of it such as gestures, clothes, music as well as lifestyle choices (Mesthrie & Hurst; 2013, as cited by Ditsele & Hurst; 2016:3; Hurst & Buthelezi; 2014:186, Hurst-Harosh; 2019:113).

According to Brookes and Lekgoro (2014:149), in their belief that the two abovementioned varieties developed from gangs, Ntshangase (2002, as cited by Brookes & Lekgoro; 2014:149) belongs to the first school of thought described above. The idea I opened this section with

regarding the socio-linguists mentioned citing each other, is illustrated clearly by Brookes and Lekgoro (2014) in their reliance on Ntshangase's 1993 and 2002 thesis and article entitled The Social History of Iscamtho and Language Practices in Soweto respectively, to give the historical background of Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho. In his master's thesis, Ntshangase (1993, as cited by Brookes & Lekgoro; 2014:149) argued that the Afrikaans-based and Zulu-based varieties are distinct linguistic codes that emerged from distinct social contexts that housed distinct social communities. The latter developed from Shalambombo, which was the secret language of the Amalaita gangs in the 1920s – which then spread to the prisons and to other criminal gangs in the 1930s, and thirty years later, it was adopted by the male youth of Orlando, Pimville and Soweto and became Iscamtho (Ntshangase 1993: 45, as cited by Brookes & Lekgoro; 2014: 149). The former developed from Flaaitaal (loosely translated 'clever language') spoken by gangs in freehold townships, such as Sophiatown in the west of Johannesburg and, like Shalambombo, Flaaitaal gained traction with male youth in these areas and became Tsotsitaal as it was used by juvenile delinquents Ntshangase (2002: 409, as cited by Brookes and Lekgoro; 2014:150).

From the onset, this article emphasises the argument that youth languages are generational – this is important for this article as it deals with tracking the shift in the urban variety use of young men, therefore demographic information such as age and year of birth are significant (Brookes & Lekgoro; 2014). The apartheid era of forced removals from, in this case, Stirtonville to Vosloorus were a major factor in this shift – affected by this removal was male youth that was born in 1947 and earlier (Brookes & Lekgoro; 2014:154). This group had already developed and used an Afrikaans based variety, that they called Tsotsitaal to outsiders but remained unnamed to each other, that was common in Stirtonville and reported that the move to Vosloorus resulted in a shift towards a Zulu or South Sotho based variety (Brookes & Lekgoro; 2014:155). This shift in variety was the culmination of different reasons, the significant reasons included a loss of contact with Afrikaans first-language speakers that were the majority in Stirtonville, male social structures were broken up and there was an influx of other Bantu language-speaking people in Vosloorus (Brookes & Lekgoro; 2014:156).

In another offering, also in 2014, Brookes' main argument is that urban youth languages are for identity creation as well as social status. According to Brookes (2014) there are four, albeit essentialist, township identities and subsequent social ranks that can be achieved by young men through activities, dress style, language and attitude. One of these four township social levels

is occupied by the young men that went to school and managed to complete their high school career and, if their family financial situation allowed, went on to college or university – although it is not uncommon for these young men not to pursue further tertiary education due to financial constraints (Brookes; 2014). The latter often become entrepreneurs focusing on creative outlets that can move them out of the township sphere, such as music, photography, and fashion to name a few (Brookes; 2014). Their desire to have lives beyond the township, as reflected by their interests, have resulted in them being perceived as more mainstream – subsequently, the young men that occupy this space, both those who go to university and those who become entrepreneurs, have been given names that reflect this desire: *cheeseboys*, *softies* and *bhujwas* (bourgeois) (Brookes; 2014). The second level is that of the *authi* or 'guy': young men that occupy this space have a much larger township presence as compared to the cheeseboys – Brookes (2014) posits that this is because the township *authi,* despite having reached high school, and in some cases completed high school, is usually unemployed and therefore has time to be part of the social scene. On the other hand, there are young men that have dropped out of school and are unemployed and subsequently spend their time in the township streets (Brookes; 2014). Nonetheless, these young men "have some sort of income through various ways: they become street vendors selling fruit, vegetables, sweets and cigarettes; gambling; criminal activities such as breaking and entering, selling stolen goods and robbing other township residents" (Brookes; 2014:365). These young men are referred to as *pantsula*, which is a word reserved for young men who are rough, disrespectful and are the delinquents of the township who take pride in the fact they are able to make money outside of employment and see themselves as the direct opposition to mainstream society (Brookes; 2014). Young township men understand and identify two types of *pantsula*, the one explained above that has successfully attained the prestigious streetwise identity – whereas the second type of *pantsula*, which is the fourth and final township social rank, are seen as losers as they have little money, and they engage in low level activities such as drinking excessively or taking drugs (Brookes; 2014). Although Brookes (2014) presents these identities and social levels as stratified entities that do not interact, she acknowledges that there is some superficial interaction across all the levels for the purposes of urban variety dispersal – although, creating new phrases or words remains in the *pantsula* level. It is important to emphasise here that Brookes' work focuses solely on the speech of young men.

## 2.5 Different Types of Talk

Rather than focusing on a named variety like the youth language research described above, this researched is interested in and focuses on the unnamed language practices – particularly those practices that might draw on resources typically ascribed to stylects such as tsotsitaal. It is, however, important to note that this research does not focus on a specific stylect. When using the term "talk", this research quite literally means people talking to each other – having conversations with each other that can happen at any time and anywhere, whether en-route to one's destination or in line at the bank, during a lunch break or after watching a film, around the dinner table or at social gatherings. It is clear from these examples that the type of conversation or talking that is foregrounded here is the natural or spontaneous kind – that is, it is unplanned and occurs through social interaction. This research is interested in the conversations shared between a peer group of young South African women as this research is interested in the manner in which such conversations work to create community or solidarity between group members. The purpose of this section of the literature review is to conceptualise what the research means by "talk" – particularly naturally occurring talk. As such, the following section will be an outline of some expected types of talk or natural language that are likely to occur spontaneously in group settings and their function – while it is also likely to come up, the focus here is not what is considered "standard" language, rather the so-called informal language in the form of slang, small talk and gossip.

### 2.5.1 Slang

In an attempt to conceptualise what slang is, the tensions within the linguistic discipline regarding how to define slang became abundantly clear, firstly because some of the writers engaged with during the course of reading seemed to rely heavily on old and outdated "experts" for their definitions (see de Klerk; 1990, de Klerk; 1992 & Grossman & Tucker; 2007). Secondly, as noted by de Klerk (1990), these tensions are driven by the fact that attempts to define slang are often fuelled by emotion, therefore making it difficult to articulate in a way that reflects fact – hence the few and far between definitions of slang. In her 1990 piece, de Klerk, focuses a large portion of her article on slang – mainly the varying opinions of slang from which definitions tend to flow. According to both de Klerk (1990) and Rezaei (2017), theorizations of slang are not only majority negative, but they are also very classist. These opinions include: slang use being predominant in the contexts in which "lower life" exist; slang use is an indicator of poverty; slang is thought to belong to the criminals of society; slang use

is an indicator of stupidity as a result of the user's brain wasting away, resulting in a lack of intellect (de Klerk; 1990 & Rezaei; 2017). Naturally, these negative opinions also pit slang against standard English in that they are implicit of the fact that slang is likely to eradicate the latter and as such, those that are of this opinion reject it vehemently in formal pedagogical spaces because it indicates laziness – a characteristic that does not belong in such spaces (de Klerk; 1990).

Despite the sea of negativity, there exist linguists that theorize about slang in a positive manner – granted, they are few and very far between (de Klerk; 1990 & Rezaei; 2017). These scholars view slang as: a tool with which its users articulate their daily life experiences vividly and much more easily – from what they feel to what they encounter; slang as an escapism from the standard structure of language; slang as a way to enrich language and slang is an indicator of intrinsic human creativity (de Klerk; 1990 & Rezaei; 2019). de Klerk (1990) continues to argue that even the most relevant or correct definitions of slang are often just satisfactory: they are either too broad, as in the case of Flexner (1975; vi, as cited by de Klerk; 1990) – classifying every word except highly formal words as slang; or refers to the dynamicity of slang, as in the case of Gleason (1961:6, as cited by de Klerk;1990) – resulting in the labelling of old slang terms as new. It can therefore be concluded that there is no universal definition of slang – different writers that attempt to define it, focus on different aspects of it.

The irony of this inability to define slang but being able to recognise a word or phrase as slang is not lost. However, de Klerk (1990) notes that the defining criteria for recognising slang terms provided by Dumas and Lighter in their 1978 piece is the most comprehensive and clear. This criterion includes the fact that slang can be recognised through its ability to make light of formal speech or writing, its use signifies familiarity with either what linguists call a referent or other users of the slang term, and it is usually a taboo to those that occupy spaces of high status and power. Finally, slang according to Dumas and Lighter (1978, as cited in de Klerk; 1990) can be recognised through its function as a euphemism in order to avoid the discomfort that comes with the use of the conventional term. Therefore, while defining slang might seem to be an uphill battle, these abovementioned criteria provide a tool with which one can recognise and understand the function of slang even without a definition of what slang is.

It is clear that the use and the innovation of slang cannot be prohibited – except in pedagogical or other formal spaces as noted above. Therefore, the next logical step is to understand, or at

least attempt, to understand how slang terms function. Some of these functions were touched on by Dumas and Lighting (1978, as cited by de Klerk; 1990). Writers such as Kiessling and Mous (2004) Buchlotz (2009), Brookes (2014) and Rezaei (2017) cover substantially more functions and they expand on them. In their paper, Rezaei's (2017) main objective is to understand slang in three main categories, namely, familiarity with slang, formality of slang as perceived by its users and the frequency of slang use in relation to three different situations in which they have identified slang that functions: describing people, humiliating people and expressing feelings. They found that their participants were more familiar with slang that described people, these participants considered slang that humiliated people as a formal type of slang and they called upon slang frequently when they had to express their feelings (Rezaei; 2017). The author concludes that slang can, and is, used for a variety of reasons – including addressing people, talking about people, to be polite, to create a certain type of identity and to facilitate social interaction (Rezaei; 2017). With regards to the latter, Rezaei (2017) very briefly speaks on the Communication Accommodation Theory – which is also referred to as downward convergence. This theory exists against the backdrop of the assumption that slang use indicates an acquaintance between the speaker and the listener where they come from a similar world and share similar interests, and states that the listener and the speaker do not have to come from a similar world, nor do they have to share similar interests in order to interact – it is possible for them to intentionally adopt each other's speech in order to facilitate communication and close the social gap between them (Rezaei; 2017). In other words, the Communication Accommodation Theory is "a move towards a more stigmatized and less socially valued ways of communication" (Rezaei; 2017:106).

Concerning slang use and gender, papers are often interested in the comparing indexes such as who knows more slang, who uses slang the most and what kind of slang is used by whom – contending that men know more slang than women and this slang tends to be derogatory and sexist when used in connection to women (see Grossman & Tucker; 1997, Bucholtz; 2009 & Rezaei; 2017). The African socio-linguists – namely Rudwick et al. (2006), Githinji (2008), Maribe and Brookes (2014) and Hurst-Harosh and Erastus (N.D) – highlight the significance of women using slang as a communication device. In their paper, Rudwick et al. (2006) focus on how the use of isiTsotsi, that is Tsotsitaal, is associated with homosexuality in South Africa. They argue that the masculine history of Tsotsitaal is the main reason why there is a widely held assumption that women who make use of the language variety are lesbian – therefore, the use of Tsotsitaal is understood to be a marker of sexuality or sexual orientation (Rudwick et

al.; 2006). The authors put forth that while it holds valid that lesbian women use isiTsotsi, "isiTsotsi does not represent an exclusively homosexual register, but rather a context-dependent sociolect that African streetwise women employ to empower themselves" (Rudwick et al.; 2006:57). This paper juxtaposes *isihlonipho sabafazi* (women's language of respect) with isiTsotsi by stating that *isihlonipho* is a linguistic tool intended to subordinate women, while isiTsotsi functions in direct opposition to it (Rudwick et al.; 2006). On the other hand, Maribe and Brookes' (2014) paper argues that, actually, black lesbian women do not speak Tsotsitaal – instead, they draw on male ways of talking in order to convey their lesbian identity. They defend this argument by stating that their participants, who were black lesbians from Kwa-Zulu Natal, have a limited knowledge and use of lexical terms that would be considered part of Tsotsitaal and by stating that they do not use Tsotsitaal in a unified way. Hurst-Harosh and Erastus (N.D.) agree with both Rudwick et al. (2006) and Maribe and Brookes' (2014) arguments in that in their paper they also argue that the use of Tsotsitaal (and Sheng) by women is closely linked to the construction of an urban streetwise identity. They postulate that this streetwise identity is necessary for survival in urban and peri-urban contexts wherein women are most likely to participate in risky financial and social activities – such as owning and operating shebeens, and sex workers (Hurst-Harosh & Erastus; N.D.).

### 2.5.2 Small Talk

According to Coupland (2000:1) small talk is used to refer to gossip or chat or time-out talk both in academia and society in general. From these labels, one can deduce that small talk is a "minor, informal, unimportant and non-serious" communication device (Coupland; 2000:1) – which is perhaps why Bickmore and Cassell (1999:87) refer to it as a "non-task-oriented conversation". However, they go onto contradict themselves when, in the same sentence, they acknowledge that small talk works to establish an interactional style and rapport – two tasks (Bickmore & Cassells; 1999:87). Both Bickmore and Cassells (1999:89) and Coupland (2000: 2) illustrate the function of small talk even further by introducing the concept of "phatic communion" – the idea that people use small talk to create bonds with each other. This concept was first introduced by Malinowski in 1923 who defined it as "a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words" (Bickmore & Cassells; 1999:89, Coupland; 2000: 2). Malinowski goes on to describe phatic communion as aimless gossip and "purposeless expressions of preference or aversions, accounts of irrelevant happenings, comments on what is perfectly obvious" because create bonds and having people in one's life

is “one of the bedrocks of aspects of man’s [*sic*] nature” (1972:150, as cited by Coupland; 2000:2). This concept is relevant to this research as it validates that community with other people can be created through talking to each other – it does not have to be serious conversations. However, this concept emphasises the aimlessness of this type of talk, implicit of the unimportant-ness that Coupland had noted as a characteristic of small talk earlier. The talk of women, particularly black women, has long been ignored and cast aside as “unimportant” – this research wishes to not re-inscribe this notion by bringing light to the fact that salient aspects of young South African black womanhood come out of these seemingly “light” and “perfectly obvious” moments.

Coupland (2000: 7) continues to foreground the importance of small talk in private domains which women tend to find themselves in. She argues that women’s talk has the ability to resist the urge to talk about facts and material gain – that is apparently only a characteristic of men and men’s ‘big talk’ and this big talk versus small talk is a mythological construction by men to reflect their own obsession with size (Coupland; 2000:7). Even in the moments of silence during small talk conversations are important – they are opportunities for meaning making and any negativity towards them are a reflection of the belief that language is for the exchange of ideas and information (Coupland; 2000:9, Jaworski; 2000:113). She then posits that thinking in this manner, allows the understanding of gossip as part of the “female identity and power […] and enjoyment” (Coupland; 2000:7).

### 2.3.3 Gossip

According to Dunbar (2004:100) the reputation of malice and disruption that gossip has gained, is a far cry from its original meaning – which was “the activity that one engaged in with one’s “godsibs,” one’s peer group equivalent of godparents” (Dunbar; 2004:100). At the turn of the nineteenth century, gossip had gained its bad reputation and it went from referring to both men and women comraderies, to referring to women (McDonald et al.; 2007: 383). They argue that this reputation came to be due to linguists seeing gossip, in Malinowski’s terms, as aimless because language use that does not result in the exchange of factual information is understood to be aimless (Dunbar; 2004:103). They argue that good gossip is an integral part of human social relationships – and this is echoed by McDonald et al. (2007) in their study of girl child friendship dyads. Through Gottman and Mettetal (1986), McDonald et al. (2007:385) state that knowing how to gossip is an important step in childhood development and important for

making friends because through gossiping with each other, children discover similarities and differences between each other. What further cements this view that gossip is essential for social relationships, is its ability to communicate trust and security because there is a level of risk when gossiping therefore it tends to happen between people who trust each other (McDonald et al.; 2007:383).

Wert and Salovey (2004:123) argue that gossip stems from evaluation and as such, it involves social comparison. They state that there are six comparisons of, but relevant to this research as it will be working with a peer group, is the comparison of in-group with outgroup (Wert & Salovey; 2004:124). This type of comparison is based on the Social Identity Theory that posits that "when individuals can claim membership in a group, they feel better about themselves and feel less uncertain about the world (Wert & Salovey; 2004:126). As Eckert mentioned in preceding paragraphs, people are part of multiple communities of practice, as such, they have different ways of being in each CoP – and, according to Wert and Salovey (2004: 126), all of this works to create a social identity. In order for one to comfortably claim and maintain membership within a group, one needs to know who they are and who they are not (Wert & Salovey; 2004:126). This results in people differentiating their in-group from other outgroups- creating an 'us vs. them' dichotomy (Wert & Salovey; 2004:126). The newfound and marked differences are brought together to create prototypical in-group and outgroup members respectively – survival in the group hinges in knowing these prototypes and acting accordingly (Wert & Salovey; 2004:126). Gossip is essential in building these prototypes – naturally, it is unflattering towards the outgroup to create stark contrasts with the in-group (Wert & Savoy; 2004:126).

Gossip and small talk can take part in different modalities, not only in spoken talk. As such, this study focuses on gossip, small talk and other unnamed language practices in digital spaces, as further explained in the next section

## 2.6 The Digital Talk Space

This research project is interested in the communication behaviours of young black South African women – in particular, their use of said communication behaviours to create and maintain community with each other. Initially kind of communication that this project was interested in was what Deumert (2014) refers to as body-to-body communication – where interlocutors would be together in person and talking. However, due the Covid-19 pandemic, observing body-to-body communication was no longer possible and the project had to pivot. As such, the next best way to address the research interest, was to look at computer mediated communication or CMC and how language is used in this kind of communication in order to create and/or maintain community. This section starts off very broadly by looking the internet and its development – particularly as far its functionalities that allow users to generate content. This is then followed by a focus on social media: what is it and what it is not. Next is the virtual versus real debate, followed by a theorisation on being sociable in the virtual world. This is then followed by a focus on e-language – particularly what it is and what it looks like.

### 2.6.1 Web 2.0 and Beyond

It is no secret that access to, and the use of the Internet has had, and continues to have, quite the impact on our lives – infiltrating daily routines, practices and social interactions (Kaufmann & Peil; 2019). The Internet, and its accompanying online services, has on average, 30 million global users daily and they attribute this to rapid globalisation – specifically increased access to portable Internet technologies such as smartphones – that has led to considerable advancements in the field of information technology as far as Internet applications are concerned (Olojede et al.; 2018 & Kaufmann & Peil; 2019). These advancements resulted in something called Web 2.0 – which is the interest of this section.

Web 2.0 is a term that was coined in 2004 to mark the shift in the manner in which software developers and Internet users engaged with said Internet and its applications: from simply being consumers of content and applications that were produced by other people, to becoming active participants in the continuous and collaborative production and re-production of these applications and content (Kaplan & Haelein; 2010 & Obar & Wildman; 2015). Prior to Web 2.0, using the Internet, that is the World Wide Web, meant one was most likely reading what was written by someone else – for example the Encyclopaedia Britannica Online – or listening to and watching videos that were created by someone else (Kaplan & Haelein; 2010 & Obar &

Wildman; 2015). With the arrival of Web 2.0, this passive consumption was replaced by blogs, wikis, and other collaborative projects (Kaplan & Haelein; 2010). Naturally, this shift led to the development of Web 2.0 Internet-based applications.

Web 2.0 applications are understood to be Internet applications, sites and services that rely mainly on user content generation – making Internet use more interactive (Obar & Wildman; 2015 & Newman et al.; 2016). According to Obar & Wildman (2015), the sole purpose of these sites and applications is for their users to be able to connect, produce content, and collaborate in the production of that content. Kaplan and Haelein (2010) agree with this argument, and expand on it by providing specific functionalities of A Web 2.0 application/site/service:

> Among them are **Adobe Flash** (a popular method for adding animation, interactivity, and audio/video streams to web pages), **RSS** (Really Simple Syndication, a family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated content, such as blog entries or news headlines, in a standardized format), and **AJAX** (Asynchronous Java Script, a technique to retrieve data from web servers asynchronously, allowing the update of web content without interfering with the display and behavior of the whole page).
>
> Kaplan & Haelein (2010:61)

True to the nature of the Internet, these Web 2.0 functionalities became widespread and evolved so quickly that some have argued that Web 3.0 is not only imminent but has arrived (Newman et al.; 2016 & Burger et al.; 2017). Newman et al. (2016) posit that Web 3.0 is characterised by what they call the smartphone era, wherein smartphones and other portable devices – namely smart watches, laptops, and tablets to name a few – are used to connect to the Internet thereby giving users access to a variety of internet-based applications, services and communication platforms. Another marked characteristic of Web 3.0 is the progression and proliferation of the social component of web use: social media websites and applications have become a phenomenon that has allowed users to not only get updates about news and current events, but to also stay connected to their peers via the sharing of images, videos, audio, and other formats (Obar & Wildman; 2015, Newman et al.; 2016 & Burger et al.; 2017). This is not to say that prior to these two *functionalities* the web did not facilitate social interactions, Webs 3.0 simply highlights the recent prevalence of these social forward internet-based platforms – this can be seen in Kaplan and Haelein's (2010) definition of social media:

> Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.
>
> Kaplan & Haelein (2010:61)

### 2.6.2 Social Media

Despite having provided a definition of what social media is, Kaplan and Haelein (2010) agree with Obar and Wildman (2016) that attempting to provide a clearcut definition and characterisation of what constitutes social media is quite the undertaking. The main reason for this is twofold: first, the technology upon which social media relies is extremely dynamic – there is a constant production and re-production of social media technologies that are "launched, re-launched, abandoned and ignored" – and second, social media allows for different kinds of communication that are nevertheless similar to those allowed by other technologies (Obar & Wildman; 2016:746). An attempt to define social media should start by understanding and accepting Web 2.0 as the platform upon which social media developed, which means accepting that social media is fuelled by user generated content (henceforth UGC), which is the main characteristic of Web 2.0.

According to Kaplan and Haelein (2010:61), as the name suggests, UGC refers to various media forms that are publicly available and are created by users. Examples of UGC include personal information filled in on a social media profile, adding friends on Facebook, uploading videos on YouTube, writing tweets on Twitter, adding photographs on Instagram and even one's high score on Candy Crush – without this content, social media sites would become obsolete (Obar & Wildman; 2016). In order for content to be considered UGC, it needs to be available on a public website or it needs to available to a specific group of people on a social networking site, it needs to showcase a level of creativity, and it needs to have been produced without any professional interventions (Kaplan and Haelein; 2010). Practically, this means that content cannot be considered UGC if it is sent via email or if it is simply a copy of content that already exists or if it was created to fulfil commercial purposes (Kaplan and Haelein; 2010). As alluded to in the preceding section, the principle of UGC that has made social media what it is today was not a Web 3.0 phenomenon – however, there has been an amalgamation of factors that can be found in Web 3.0 that have fundamentally changed Web 2.0's version and understandings of UGC. These factors include technological drivers such as increased access to broadband and hardware capacity, economic drivers such as increased access to resource that make creating UGC possible, and social drivers such as an increase in young people's inclination to engage online (Kaplan and Haelein; 2010:61).

We now know that social media has its foundations rooted in the Web 2.0 space, as a result, we know that UGC is a fundamental aspect of social media, and we know the criteria for content to be considered UGC. However, it is still unclear what Internet-based applications, websites and services can be considered social media. What all the scholars agree on is that at its core, social media technology allows and encourages the creation of connections between people (Kaplan & Haelein; 2010, Newman et al.; 2016, Obar & Wildman; 2016 & Olojede et al.; 2018). The process of creating these connections has a different name from site to site, for example 'adding a friend' on Facebook or 'following' someone on Twitter and Instagram or 'connecting' on LinkedIn, and it is a necessary part of social media as it enables those who are connected to share multimedia content about themselves and/or current events, to engage with each other's content by liking or commenting – which fulfils the criteria of UGC content (Kaplan & Haelein; 2010, Newman et al.; 2016, Obar & Wildman; 2016 & Olojede et al.; 2018).

Obar and Wildman (2016) and Kaplan and Haelein (2010) both argue that much like defining social media, it is difficult to classify what applications and websites can be considered social media and what cannot be considered social media because the cyberspace is constantly influx, with new applications and cites appearing daily. It is for this reason that Kaplan and Haelein (2010) propose the creation of a classification scheme that not only systematically categorises applications and websites already exist and are thought of to be social media, but that also takes into account forthcoming applications and websites that have the potential to be considered social media should they fall into these categories at some level. In order to do that, they suggest using theories stemming from media research – particularly social presence and media richness – and social processes such as self-presentation and self-disclosure (Kaplan & Haelein; 2010).

The social presence theory states that media allows different levels of social presence between interlocutors – social presence being "the acoustic, visual and physical contact that can be achieved" (Kaplan & Haelein; 2010:61). Social presence is influenced by the immediacy and the intimacy of the medium – that is, whether the presence is synchronous or asynchronous and interpersonal or mediated (ibid). As such, mediated and asynchronous communication will have a lower social presence compared to an interpersonal synchronous communication – for example, emails will have a lower social presence than a live chat conversation and a face-to-face conversation will have a higher social presence than a telephone conversation (ibid). It is

important to note that an increase in social presence is directly proportional to the influence that interlocutors have on each other (Kaplan & Haelein; 2010).

Along with the social presence theory comes the media richness theory that has to do with the reduction of ambiguity and uncertainty in communication: "It states that media differ in the degree of richness they possess – that is, the amount of information they allow to be transmitted in a given time interval – and that therefore some media are more effective than others in resolving ambiguity and uncertainty" (Kaplan & Haelein; 2010:61). It is, therefore, because of these two theories, social presence and media richness, that Kaplan and Haelein (2010) argue that the first classification category of social media should be contingent on richness of the medium as well as the level of social presence it allows (Kaplan & Haelein; 2010).

The processes of self-presentation and self-disclosure play pivotal roles as far as the social dimension of social media is concerned (Kaplan & Haelein; 2010). The former is concerned with one wanting to control how one is perceived by others in a social interaction and therefore one presents oneself in a certain way in order to either, a) make a good impression that could lead to some reward in the future, or b) create an image that aligns with one's personal identity (Kaplan & Haelein; 2010). The latter is the vehicle that drives the former in that in order to present yourself, you need to disclose personal information about yourself that speaks to the image you would like to present – whether through sharing your thoughts and opinions or simply liking and disliking "things" on social media (Kaplan & Haelein; 2010). Kaplan and Haelein (2010) therefore go on to propose that the second classification category for what can and cannot be considered social media should be based on the degree of self-disclosure it requires and the level of self-presentation it allows.

From the categories provided by Kaplan and Haelein (2010), it is clear that all the mainstream social media applications that already exist, for example Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Wikipedia, LinkedIn, and virtual game worlds, are and should be considered social media as they all fit into these categories – however, they fit into these categories at different levels. For example, Wikipedia has a low social presence and media richness count and a low self-presentation and self-disclosure count because it is only text-based, and it focuses on specific content (ibid). On the other hand, virtual game worlds have high counts on both these categories as they tend to replicate interpersonal interactions in a virtual world (Kaplan & Haelein; 2010).

Of importance to this research project is WhatsApp and how it qualifies to be considered a social media application.

At only 14 years old, WhatsApp is a fairly new internet dependent instant messaging application for smartphones whose main purpose is to make digital communication faster (Jere, et al.; 2019 and Dahdal; 2020). Since its inception, WhatsApp has become widely popular and its user base continues to grow exponentially – with approximately 500 million users globally in 2014, and approximately 2.266 billion users in 2022 (Ahad & Lim; 2014 and Ceci; 2022). Sutikno et al. (2016:910) argue that this growth is due to three main reasons: 1) word of mouth promotion by its users, 2) it is does not have any advertisements and 3) it can be used on a desktop. This application is easy to use, and registration is not complicated – users simply download it onto their phones, register using their phone number and the application automatically identifies other WhatsApp users from the saved contact list and adds them to the application (Seufert et al.; 2016). Beyond allowing users to exchange texts, it allows for WhatsApp phone calls and video calls, and the sharing of documents, images, videos, location data, voice notes and contacts (Ahad & Lim; 2014, Sutikno et al.; 2016 and Jere et al.; 2019). As such, WhatsApp should, and is, considered a social media application: according to Kaplan and Haelein (2010) UGC is the cornerstone of social media and on WhatsApp, content generation lies in registering for the application, the ability to share media files and the ability to create and upload a status. Additionally, WhatsApp also fits into the categories that Kaplan and Haelein (2010) proposed: due to its synchronous nature, social presence on WhatsApp is high; self-presentation and self-disclosure count is also high due to the ability to create and comment on other users' statuses; and the application has a fair media richness.

### 2.6.3 Virtual vs. Reality

In her book, Sociolinguistics and Mobile Communication, Deumert (2014) conceptualises the virtual versus reality dichotomy as far as digital communication is concerned extensively. This is important work as Burger et al. (2017) have noted that people communicating and connecting via social media through the sharing multi-modal content is widespread and has resulted in the blurring of the lines between what is online, that is virtual, and what is offline, what is real life – particularly as it relates to communication spaces. They argue that digital communication norms have become so intertwined with "everyday banal practices" and that has led to this blurring of the boundaries (Burger et al.; 2017:24). Examples of these include tagging people

and places, updating statuses and media posts about one's life and leaving and entering virtual worlds (Burger et al.; 2017). In the same breath, Burger et al. (2017) recognises that because of the deeply embedded digital communication practices into real life, contrasting the virtual and the real conceptually is no longer a straightforward task – which is an argument that Deumert made back in 2014.

To make this argument, Deumet (2014) draws from various sociolinguists and philosophers of the past such as Jacquemet, Deleuze, Baudrillard and Shields. First, Deumert (2014) notes that communication technologies, are the driving force behind the reorganisation of space and time as these technologies enable us to hear about natural disasters in other parts of the world within seconds and we are able to watch them unfold in real time for example. This duality that we then find ourselves in results in what Jacquemet (2005; as cited by Deumert; 2014:10) calls transidiomatic [sociolinguistic] practices, which are practices that "transcend traditional local norms and combine translocal – often global – linguistic and semiotic resources." This is because when we hear about natural disasters in other parts of the world for example, we are engaging in two contexts with different sociolinguistic norms – the physical context, that is, where we are and the translocal context, where the natural disaster is – resulting in an overlap in the communicative frames (Deumert; 2014).

Following this, after accepting that the abovementioned translocality belongs in the virtual sphere, Deumert (2014) speaks directly to the virtual vs real conundrum asking what is real in the first place. Drawing from philosophers such as Deleuze (1977) and Baudrillard (1983), Deumert (2014) posits that the virtual should not be contrasted with the real because it has its own reality, but should rather be contrasted with the actual, that is, the concrete. To illustrate this, an example of raising a virtual glass to celebrate someone is provided: the fact that there is not concrete physical glass does not diminish the validity and the reality of the celebration (Deumet; 2014: 10). According to Shields (2003; as cited by Deumert; 2014), metaxis explains why we are able to intertwine our everyday living with the virtual – accepting its reality, while simultaneously accepting that it is different from the concrete physical world around us. Metaxis, which is used to describe in betweenness, aptly describes this dual orientation that we find ourselves in between the virtual and the physical worlds: "we are neither here nor there, or there but not here; we are both here and there," (Deumert; 2014:12). For example, when we are chatting on WhatsApp, we are present in a physical place, while simultaneously being present in the virtual place with the person we are chatting to (Deumert; 2014).

As shown by the previous example, metaxis is an essential part of all mediated communication and shapes how translocality and its accompanying transidiomatic practices are experienced. These accompanying practices include co-temporality or synchronicity wherein the rapidness of responses intensify the experience of a shared presence, despite being physically apart (Deumert; 2014). Synchronicity creates an interaction that mimics body-to-body interaction in its immediacy and therefore requires a close mutual monitoring and a shared focus of attention (Deumert; 2014). This is not to say one cannot step out of a synchronic interaction, one can delay their responses and simply offering an explanation for stepping out – Baron (2008; as cited by Deumert; 2014:35) calls this volume control. Volume control is beneficial as it allows us the opportunity to think carefully before responding, reduces the face-threatening potential of a rejection and allows tighter control of how one presents oneself (Deumert; 2014).

### 2.6.4 Sociability, Bonding and Community Building Online

As alluded to in the different places in the preceding sections, social media can and is used to create and maintain relationships with others despite physical distance (Zappavigna; 2014 & Olojede et al.; 2018). Deumert (2014) writes extensively about being sociable online and thereby using social media as a space to create bonds based on both the good (plaisir) and the bad (jouissance).

Deumert (2014) starts off by arguing that social media can be a platform for conversational enjoyment. They draw from Oldenburg's (1989; as cited by Deumert; 2014:146) work on "third places", which are [public] places where "social interactions occur" and argues that hanging out can occur in these third places – going against the general perception of hanging out being something that can only occur privately between insiders. Further characterisation of third places reveal that these places are not connected to the seriousness of work where interactions are meant to serve practical purposes, rather, they are places wherein conversational enjoyment, delight in being with others, and a friendly atmosphere are emphasised and make the fabric of these places, and finally, interactions here are said to be fun and pleasant and therefore result in creation of bonds and companionship (Deumert; 2014). In the physical, example of third places are taverns, coffee shops and markets to name a few and in the virtual, third places are chat applications such as Facebook, Twitter and Second Life to name a few (Deumert; 2014). This conceptualisation of third places draws directly from the notion of sociability, which is

defined as “a special type of public and semi-public association and togetherness, where interactions are playful and pleasurable rather than useful and serious,” (Deumert; 2014:149).

Much like third places, a core feature of sociability is enjoying being in the company of others and a fun and conversational atmosphere (Deurmert; 2014). Sociability is further characterised by very specific etiquette:

> talk should be interesting and entertaining; participants need to be willing to change topics quickly and smoothly in order to keep the conversation flowing; for one person to dominate the floor is not acceptable – there should be give and take, a multiplicity of voices; everyone has equal access to the floor; talk should be ‘light’, never too heavy or too serious, too personal or too intimate. What is required is a commitment to conversation and engagement: not to respond, to just drop off, is not acceptable. The aim is to keep the conversation flowing.
>
> (Deumert; 2014:150)

Understanding sociability as pleasurable and as it relates to a marked type of conversation as described above, one can therefore deduce that there will be those who are considered good talkers because of their conversational abilities (Deumert; 2014). This also translates to “interactive digital writing” (Deumert; 2014:150), for example when instant messaging, wherein textual linguistic dexterity – that is, typing fast for a quick back-and-forth that allows for the conversation to flow, combined with the clever use of language – is held to a higher regard as it results in turns that are enjoyable (Deumert; 2014).

Sociability and third places, as they manifest both in the physical and in the virtual, speak to creating and maintaining bonds and friendships based on “plasir” – which is a type of pleasure that is uplifting, compliant, and that does not go against what is socially acceptable (Deumert; 2014). However, social interactions are not all pleasurable: while social media can be spaces of wholesomeness, they can also be spaces for unmonitored self-expression – which can give rise to sexists, racists and other anti-social groups (Deumert; 2014). The same can be said for social interactions in the physical, wherein crude, vulgar and offensive jokes are told and resulting in a mixture of nervous laughter and shock (Deumert; 2014). Deumert (2014) argues that this kind of laughter marks a kind of enjoyment that is considered wrong and inappropriate – vastly different the laughter of plasir. The laughter elicited by these kinds of jokes, for example, is a characteristic of a second type of enjoyment called jouissance which is defined as “a type of enjoyment that lies at the border of pleasure and displeasure,” (Deumert; 2014:147). Jouissance is considered the opposite to plasir as it is transgressive enjoyment that

works to disrupt the social order; and just like bonds being created based on plasir, bonds can and are created based on jouissance (Deumert; 2014).

In conjunction with this, Deumert (2014) briefly argues for the validity of virtual communities – going completely against Putnam (2000; as cited by Deumert; 2014). Putnam (2000; as cited by Deumert; 2014) believes that community, which is defined as an experience of fellowship and togetherness, has completely disappeared in the wake of media consumption which they argue has resulted in social isolation and disconnection. However, according to Deumert and Zappavigna (2014), this argument has been disproved by social and socio-psychological research as this research illustrated that, "a sense of community and a feeling of belonging can develop online" and arguments such as the one brought forward by Putnam are "dated" (Deumert; 2014:148). Deumert (2014) stated that modality and physical presence does not have an impact on us having feelings of trust, mutual obligation, security and belonging, instead, mobile media presents new ways of being together – a good example of this is WhatsApp.

Agreeing with Deumert (2014) and Zappavigna's (2014) above argument, research conducted by Church and de Oliveira (2013), Karapanos et al. (2016) Ofusori and Kariuki (2017), and Madge et al. (2019) show WhatsApp as a social media application that allows for virtual social engagement and the creation of a virtual community. One of the main reasons behind this possibility is WhatsApp's user-friendliness as it allows for effective and regular communication that allows for the maintenance of close relationships that already exist and, to a lesser extent, the creation of new ones (Ofusori & Kariuki; 2017 and Pindayi; 2017). Additionally, because the application uses minimal internet data bundles it is affordable for most people, therefore making it cheaper to communicate and therefore easier to maintain interpersonal relationships (Ofusori & Kariuki; 2017 and Pindayi; 2017). WhatsApp also has a feature that allows for group chats, and this quite literally mimics being part of a community – where group members can connect and communicate to many people more conveniently and at the same time (Church & de Oliveira; 2013 and Pindayi; 2017). Due to its synchronicity, WhatsApp allows for near real time communication and sharing of life events beyond geography which speaks directly to the idea of metaxis and translocality that Deumert (2014) speaks of above.

### 2.6.5 e-Language

Many linguists argue that the prevalence of social media has had quite the impact on the English language: causing the evolution and adaptation of the language (Lee; 2011, Das & Gambäck; 2013, Olojede et al.; 2018 & Yunis; 2019). According to Crystal (as cited by Yunis; 2019), these changes in the English language manifest in changes in the vocabulary, orthography, grammar, pragmatics, style, use and meaning. For example, it is now common to use the noun "friend" as a verb "to (un)friend" and the same applies to the noun "google" (Yunis; 2019). Because these changes transgress standard English norms, Das and Gambäck (2013) argue that they lead to many challenges and misunderstandings because texts are characterised by having spelling errors, different creative spellings such as "gr8" instead of "great", phonetic typing, word play such as "wooooooow" instead of "wow", abbreviations such BTW for "by the way", and meta tags such as hashtags to name a few. Drawing from Crystal's 2003 work, Knight et al. (2014) state that e-language should be considered a form of language in itself, as it lies in the middle of the continuum of formality – with formal language structures and conventions being tied to writing on one end of the continuum, and the least formal language structures being tied to speaking at the other end of the spectrum. The following section will be an exploration and expansion of the abovementioned ways in which e-language manifests and the motivation behind the use of e-language, as researched and presented by other socio-linguistic scholars.

Deumert (2014) and Olojede et al. (2018) theorise extensively about the use of language on social media – particularly on the stylistic choices regarding words and writing patterns that people make when writing on social media. In various parts of their book, Deumert (2014) provides a plethora of reasons behind different stylistic choices on social media – first they state that people share their emotions and experiences in a stylised manner, so as to keep hidden the true and personal feelings one might have – therefore one's stylistic choices control how one presents oneself online. A lot of the time, according to Deumert (2014), this kind of hiding is done on Facebook in an effort to "keep it light" because a happy, joyful and funny persona is more enjoyable and desirable on the platform. Secondly, drawing from Bell (1984; as cited by Deumert; 2014), Deumert (2014) applies the speech accommodation theory to online environments by stating that the stylistic choices that people make when writing on social media can also be governed by knowing that their written piece will be seen by the masses, and therefore the way it is written needs to accommodate the masses in terms of how it is crafted

and the language used. However, research shows that stylistic choices are not only reactive to audiences, but they are active too: they shape and (re)define a situation, address specific groups or people and exclude others (Deumert; 2014). Bell's notion of referee design explains this perfectly: "people speak or write in way that would be appreciated by those with whom they feel a sense of affinity and who act as invisible referees of the performance," (1984; as cited by Deumert; 2014:13). What this means for digital writers is that they are able to use particular writing patterns and language that addresses particular groups within a larger audience, thereby creating spaces of intimacy (Deumert; 2014). Furthermore, Deumert (2014) argues that while synchronicity is the simpler way to evoke feelings of togetherness, it is not the only way to bring about those feelings – this can also be done linguistically through asynchronous communication and depends on how the asynchronous text is written. For example, choosing to write a status update on Facebook in present tense creates a sense of immediacy (Deumert; 2014).

As noted in the introduction of this section, Crystal (2003; as cited by Knight et al.; 2014) argues that writing falls on the formal end of the formality spectrum and in 2004 Crystal (as cited by Olojede et al.; 2018) went on to identify the features of formal language structures and conventions of writing – namely, graphic features, orthographic features, morphological lexical features, syntactic or grammatical features, phonological features, and discourse features. In e-language these features present different opportunities of manipulation – opportunities for users to deviate from traditional uses of these features. According to Olojede et al. (2018) e-language users make stylistic choices to either foreground or deviate from linguistic literary norms. The former has to do with calling attention to certain language features in an effort to shift the reader's attention from what is being to how it is being said –the more foregrounded the language feature is, the more conscious it becomes (Olojede et al.; 2018). The latter has to do with breaking the rules or expectations which then results in foregrounding which in turn aids memorability and attracting attention (Olojede; et al.; 2018). Some examples of the most common types of deviation include, but not limited to, deviation to simulate accent, deviation by omitting vowels, graphological deviation, and deviation by omitting punctuation marks (Olojede et a.; 2018:5-9).

Another important feature of e-language is the use of emoticons and/or emojis. These are said to be graphic representations that indicate emotional and facial expressions as well as provide contextual cues in digital communication (Skovholt et al.; 2014 and Tang & Hew; 2019). These

terms are often used interchangeably because they are spelt similarly, they are both features of computer mediated communication, and because some computer programmes automatically convert emoticons into emojis (Tang & Hew; 2019). Despite this interchangeability and similar functions, these two are indeed different: first, the word emoticon is a portmanteau of the words emotion and icon, while emoji is a portmanteau of the Japanese characters 絵 (picture) and 文字 (character) (Skovholt et al.; 2014, Novak et al.; 2015 and Alshenqeeti; 2016). Second, emoticons are symbols created using punctuation marks and letters, while emojis are small pictures (Tossell et al.; 2012, Alshenqeeti; 2016, and Riordan; 2017). And third, emoticons are keyboard-based, while emojis require Unicode otherwise they will appear as blank spaces (Tossell et al.; 2012, Novak et al.; 2015, Alshenqeeti; 2016 and Tang & Hew; 2019). According to Novak et al. (2015) and Riordan (2017), emojis evolved from emoticons: due to widespread acceptance and usage of emoticons – particularly of the smiley face and the frowny face – users went on to create more complicated emoticons such as the hesitant face, Father Christmas, a person shrugging, a heart and a rose to name a few. While this was happening, in the world of computing, Unicode was being developed and becoming standardized – allowing graphic designers and software engineers to translate these emoticons into detailed Unicode characters, that is, emojis (Riordan; 2017: 75). This introduction of Unicode made it possible for emojis to expand far beyond being face-based, and now exist in various categories such as animals, food, flags, clothing, weather, and activities to name a few (Alshenqeeti; 2016 and Riordan; 2017).

# Chapter 3: Research Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will be providing detailed explanations of the methodological decisions that were made in order to conduct and bring this project to life. Firstly, I will explain the research design and the theoretical framework upon which this research project is built. Secondly, I will provide a rationale for using WhatsApp as a platform on which to conduct this research and the subsequent decision to draw from virtual ethnographic principles as a means to collect data. Thirdly, I will provide a description and explanation of the two analysis methods used – namely, the speech act and code-switching analysis methods. Additionally, I will discuss the sampling methods, and the ethical considerations of the project.

## 3.2 Theoretical Framing and Research Design

The overarching framing of this research project is feminist, it will therefore comply with feminist theories and underpinnings of research. As such, this project rejects what Speer (2002:784) refers to as the "masculine notions of objectivity" – which are the epistemological beliefs that there exists an objective truth, a truth that is not only universal and unchanging, but is also free from "human contamination" (Brooks and Hesse-Biber; 2006:5). Rather, this research project adopts Bhavnani's (1994) concept of feminist objectivity that states that knowledge is, in fact, not universal, but rather situated. In other words, Bhavnani (1994) posits that knowledge is partial and, consequently, is context specific. Accepting the partiality of knowledge allows the researcher to be cognisant and theorise difference and the plurality of subjectivities that might come in the research process so that the project produces results that are nuanced and not just superficial generalisations (Bhavnani; 1994, Hoel; 2013). For the current research this notion of feminist objectivity meant accepting that the forms of talk, and the subsequent use of language, that precipitated as the main forms that worked to create community between young black women are not universal – they are, instead, forms that are specific to the participants.

As a feminist research project, this research employed research methods that not only minimise harm to participants, but also methods that mitigate the hierarchical nature of research – that usually places the researcher at the top and the participants at the bottom increasing

opportunities for their exploitation, subordination and objectification (Speer; 2002). How this was achieved will become more salient later in this chapter when discussing the research methods and the ethical considerations. Feminist researchers are aware of their ability to contaminate the data through intervention methods that are employed during the course of the research – which impacts the validity and the quality of the data (Speer; 2002). As such, a project that adopts a feminist framework, like this project does, has to not only acknowledge the researcher's contaminant potential, but also necessitates that the research engages in a process of critical reflexivity – reflecting on the impact that they have on the data and the manner in which they relate to participants, both physically and how they write about them (Speer; 2002).

Employed complementary to this feminist theoretical framework, is the transformative paradigm. This framework came to be due to an unhappiness premised on the opinion that the constructivist and interpretivist paradigms did not adequality address issues of social justice, therefore, this framework is governed by the focus on increased social justice for marginalised groups (Mackenzie & Knipe; 2006, Mertens; 2010). According to Biddle et al. (2015), Hall (2015), Jackson et al. (2018) and Mertens (2010 & 2013), this theoretical framework is concerned with centering the lives and experiences of groups that have been historically marginalised and oppressed on whatever basis – usually gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and physical ability. This paradigm necessitates researchers evaluate the power differentials and the privileges that exist in the research context and seek ways to mitigate these by entering the research space not as an expert, but as a learner – reflecting an awareness of these power differentials and the historical context of knowledge and knowledge production in that context (Biddle et al.; 2015, Jackson et al.; 2018).

The transformative paradigm has three main assumptions, namely, ontological, axiological and epistemological assumptions. Ontologically, this paradigm rejects cultural relativism, however it acknowledges the privilege at play when determining what is considered "real" and who has the power to determine what is considered "real" and recognises the consequences of accepting one version of reality over another (Mertens; 2010). The epistemological assumption is twofold: first, it is concerned with the relationship or collaboration between the researcher and the participants – particularly in relation to the development of the research itself; secondly it is concerned with understanding what is considered valid knowledge (Mertens; 2010 & 2013). The axiological assumption reflects a connection between the research process and the manner

in which the data collected is used to further social justice and this assumption shifts the ethical considerations of research from mere regulations to a human rights agenda, where the inclusion of a wide range of marginalised people is necessary.

In accordance with the transformative paradigm, this research project focused on the voices of young, black women who have been placed on the periphery of society based on race and gender, and have been silenced. The research will showcase the importance and the power of the talk of young black women which has been branded as un-important and trivialised as unnecessary. This trivialisation is a result of the patriarchy that does not want to hear women speak – let alone black women – and therefore employs mechanisms that unashamedly silence them, such as branding women talk as unimportant so that no one listens. In providing the space for black women to re-claim their voice by simply allowing them the chance to talk and showcasing the value that these conversations have, the paper wishes to illuminate that abovementioned social injustice in an effort to eliminate it.

The research design employed for this project is the qualitative. This is because qualitative research is conscious and sensitive to the complexities that are present in the social context in which research is being conducted and therefore advocates for research and analysis methods that allow for the complex situated realities to be illuminated and theorised (Mason; 2002:3; & Johnson & Onwuegbuzie; 2004). Subsequently, According to Babour (2011), qualitative research allows the researcher access to the emic perspective, by allowing enough room for participants to articulate matters that are of importance to them, instead of emphasizing the researcher's perspective and preconceived ideas. Through the qualitative research design, projects are able to produce in-depth, nuanced discussions or conclusions that tend to be more accurate reflections of the context that was studied as it allows for the exploration of the manner in which meanings and opinions are constructed in that context (Barbour; 2011). In research, whether conducting one-on-one interviews or focus groups, silences are inevitable – instead of simply ignoring those silences, qualitative research allows the opportunity to address and theorise them as they have the potential to bring to the fore salient issues that the researcher might not have been aware of (Barbour; 2011).

## 3.3 Going Virtual: WhatsApp as a Research Site

It was March 2020. I was about to start the fieldwork aspect of the research: the participants had been approached well in advance, the funds for fieldwork, were ready, the research equipment was ready and the opportunity for observing the participants was looming in the coming week. Unbeknownst to me, the first, of the now infamous, Covid-19 infection would be detected in South Africa and we would find ourselves in something called The Hard Lockdown at around the same time as the fieldwork was supposed to start.

Alert Level 5 or The Hard Lockdown was the South African government's immediate response to the virus having been detected in South Africa, and was said to be the level at which the most "drastic measures to contain the spread of the virus and save lives" (Explainer: The five alert …, 2020) were put in place. It came after president Cyril Ramaphosa had declared the Covid-19 pandemic a national disaster, subsequently putting the Disaster Management Act of 2000 into play – providing the foundation upon which all the Alert Levels rest. The purpose of this level was to encourage as little movement of people as possible by essentially taking away access to some amenities, goods and services – thereby forcing people to stay at home, under lockdown (see Explainer: The five alert …, 2020 & Disaster Management Act, No.57 of 2002 Regulations as amended, 2020). This stay at home order was so strict that President Ramaphosa, in his capacity as the Commander in Chief, deployed the South African Defence Force across the country to ensure that no non-essential workers were not leaving their homes.

There was a plethora of these "drastic measures" put in place, but the one of the measures that affected this research negatively was under section 11B under the Restriction on the Movement of Persons and Goods:

> (1)(a)For the period of lockdown-
> (i)every person is confined to his or her place of residence, unless strictly for the purpose of performing an essential service, obtaining an essential good or service, collecting a social grant, or seeking emergency, life- saving, or chronic medical attention;
> (ii)every gathering, as defined in regulation 1 is hereby prohibited, except for funeral as provided for in sub-regulation (8)
> (b)All businesses and other entities shall cease operations during the lockdown, save for any business or entity involved in the manufacturing, supply, or provision of an essential good or service.
>
> Disaster Management Act, No.57 of 2002 Regulations as amended, 2020:6

The other measure that affected this research negatively was under section 11C under the Prohibition of Public Transport:

> All commuter transport services including passenger rail services, bus services, taxi services, e-hailing services, maritime and air passenger transport is prohibited, except bus services, taxi services, e- hailing services and private motor vehicles for purposes of rendering essential services, obtaining essential goods, seeking medical attention, funeral services and to receive payment of grants: Provided that such vehicle carries no more than 50% of the licensed capacity and all directions in respect of hygienic conditions and the limitation of exposure of persons to COVID - 19, are adhered to.
>
> Disaster Management Act, No.57 of 2002 Regulations as amended, 2020:7

These two sections had the biggest impact on the fieldwork because the proposed plan for gaining access to the spontaneous social engagements among these young black women was heavily reliant on participant observation. This research method necessitates regular contact with the participants of the research – the researcher has to engage and interact with the participants, preferably, on a daily basis (Angrosino; 2011). While interacting with the participants on a daily basis was never part of the plan, the group did adhere to the principles of a CoP, by getting together on a regular basis – subsequently allowing openings for the researcher to gain access and observe these social gatherings. These gatherings took place at different venues, usually at the homes of the respective participants, and I, in my capacity as the researcher, was going to join them at these venues – which would have not been out of the ordinary because in my capacity as a member of the CoP I had been present at these gathering plenty of times. Should the homes be unavailable, alternate venues that were accessible and affordable, such as restaurants, were found.

However, with these abovementioned restrictions and prohibitions, this proposed plan was no longer applicable. Firstly, all South Africans were "confined to his or her place of residence, unless strictly performing an essential service, obtaining an essential good or service …" (Disaster Management Act, No.57 of 2002 Regulations as amended; 2020:6). According to Section 213 of the Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995, essential services are defined as 'a service, the interruption of which endangers the life, personal safety or health of the whole or any part of the population' (Consolidated Employers Organisation [CEO]; 2019). Therefore, by this definition, conducting any fieldwork was not essential, and was consequently prohibited – which meant that the stay at home order applied, automatically taking away the venues for social gatherings. This also extended to restaurants as they too were deemed non-essential as they were said to not provide essential goods. Additionally, because the only permitted gatherings were funerals, it meant that gathering for other [social] reasons were strictly prohibited – and this included this community's gatherings. Finally, the prohibition of public transport made it nearly impossible to commute: e-hailing services were only available at

certain government approved times, taxis were also operating at certain times and they were not operating at their full capacity so lines were extremely long, there could only be two people in a car, and there were traffic officers who conducted random checks of all the cars on the road to ensure that they were adhering to the Covid-19 protocols. Because none of the members of the CoP drove, they all were dependent of public transport and they would have had to use said public transport in order to get to the "site of fieldwork".

All the abovementioned limitations worked to make physical fieldwork impossible – which is why WhatsApp became a viable option. The participants were in regular contact via WhatsApp: they had group chats, which the researcher was also a part of, and they spoke to the researcher because, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, they are a member of this CoP. These WhatsApp conversations, particularly the one-on-one conversations between the researcher and the respective participants, still presented the researcher with organic interactions between the members of the CoP, organic conversations, and use of language, that the project is interested in.

Using WhatsApp for general research and/or academic research or as a site of activism is not unheard of – as seen in Shahid (2018), Barbosa and Milan (2019), Singer et al. (2020) and Colom (2021) to name a few. The most common view of WhatsApp, particularly in academia, has been as an object of research – something to be studied (Colom; 2021). And according to Singer (2020) and Colom (2021), this is evident in the research stemming from the healthcare discipline: WhatsApp has been studied as a platform for communication between health professionals and between health professionals and patients in an effort to improve the efficiency of health practice. This sounds familiar to what this project is doing as far as having a vested interest in the WhatsApp conversations among the participants and subsequently the manner in which those conversations create a community. However, this research project is not interested in studying WhatsApp itself, but rather used WhatsApp as a data collection tool – which Colom (2021:3) noted to be "practically non-existent".

## 3.4 Research Method: Virtual/Digital Ethnography and Data Collection

As explained in the proceeding paragraphs, physical fieldwork was no longer a viable option and this necessitated a move onto a  virtual space. However, because the proposed research method, participant observation, is an ethnographical method, the research was still able to draw from the broader principles of ethnographic research and apply them to the virtual social space that is WhatsApp – which Barton and Lee (2013) note to be a characteristic of online research. Hine (2011:4) does not contest this approach as they note that using ethnography in an online context implies a participant observation approach anyway because the analysis of message content – which is what is done in this research – is backed up by the researcher's "embodied learning through being a part of the situation." The most important consideration for making this move from physical to virtual ethnography is recognising that a virtual space is dynamic, therefore its boundaries are in continuous flux – and the complete immersion of the self into this space is still possible (Kamara; 2020)

Marres' (2017; as cited by Kamara; 2020) definition of this research method, known as virtual ethnography, focuses on the virtual aspect, stating that its foundations are internet-based and therefore allow the study of virtual communities, while Hine's (2017; as cited by Kamara; 2020) definition focuses on the ethnographic aspect – stating that it is about the researcher immersing themselves in the community in which they are studying in order to gain understandings about said community.

Making use of virtual ethnography was ideal because the ethnographic aspect of it speaks directly to the focus of this research: finding naturally occurring situations and drawing context specific conclusions based on those situations (Hine; 2011). For the this research, as noted in the beginning of this chapter, this meant accepting that the forms of talk, and the subsequent use of language, that precipitated as the main forms that worked to create community between young black women are not universal – they are, instead, forms that are specific to the participants.

Additionally, virtual ethnography presents a unique space wherein the online and offline spheres of social interaction connected or ebbed and flowed into and out of these spheres as if in constant liminality between these two dimensions (Barbosa & Milan; 2019). In other words, interactions on chat apps are embedded in the lives of individuals because they merge into and

become a part of other aspects of their lives that are not necessarily bound to the online world (Barbosa & Milan; 2019). This is further illustrated in the embodiment of these virtual interactions that is seen in the fashioning of new identities based on these interactions – particularly at a group level (Barbosa & Milan; 2019).

## 3.5 Sampling

This research project will be making use of purposive sampling. According to Coyne (1997) and Palinkas et al. (2015) purposive sampling means that a researcher selects participants who not only have the necessary knowledge or experience to fulfil the purpose of the research, but are also willing and able to articulate their knowledge or experience so that the researcher can get as much information as possible. Barbour (2011) posits that purposive sampling has a positive impact on the inclusion of "outliers" – the groups of people who have been dismissed and invisiblized in research – because their inclusion allows for the systematic comparison of perceptions and opinions of groups. Purposive sampling ensures that the member of the groups have at least one common characteristic – if the participants carry the same stigma, discussions of difficult or sensitive topics become easier (Barbour; 2011).

The purpose of this research is to explore how young black women use talk as a resource to create community with each other. Therefore, the three participants were young black women between the ages of 20 and 25 who already interact with each other – who are already a CoP. The latter is of utmost importance as the research is in interested in the organic shared languaging of peer group, necessitating a group that already speaks to and have a relationship with each other.

As mentioned in preceding paragraphs, the researcher is a part of this group – making the researcher an insider. As an insider, the researcher already has access and rapport with the members of this community – and according to Chavez (2008), insiders have an understanding of the community's ways of thinking, understandings and emotional precepts. Chavez (2008) continues to argue that having an insider status has some crucial benefits: facilitates the mitigation of power in the researcher-participant relationship in that it equalises this relationship, the researcher's presence in the field is legitimised almost instantaneously, one has access to more in-group activities, data collection is made easier because the researcher is privy to the linguistic dynamics and in-group jargon, the researcher is able to discern between

the participants' true behaviour and performed behaviour and researchers are able to detect the participants' hidden behaviour and unusual occurrences. More on the researcher's role will be explore later in this paragraph.

### 3.6 Data Collection and Analysis

To collect the data, I used a combination of two methods: archived data and extracted data – which, according to Kozinets (2014; as cited by Barbosa & Milan; 2019), are two ways that virtual ethnography can be can be conducted on WhatsApp chats. Archived data is data that has been taken directly from the WhatsApp group or one-on-one conversations, including any images, videos, and voice notes, and is imported (Barbosa & Milan; 2019). An important characteristic of this kind of data collection nis that the research as not involved in the creation of data (Barbosa & Milan; 2019). Extracted data, on the other hand, is data that the research was actively involved in the creation via chat, instant money, emails to name a few (Barbosa & Milan; 2019).

The reason I say I used a combination of these collection methods is because I was very much involved in the generation of the data – which are different one-on-one chats excerpts with each of the participants that took place in 2019 during the month of March – making it extracted data. In order to work with them, I imported these chats that included memes, gifs, voice notes and images onto my laptop – this coupled with the fact these chats were in the past, make this data archived.

I made use of a total of ten excerpts from chats that I had with the three participants. These chats were then imported onto NVivo12 – which is a computer software that is a research tool for qualitative data analysis. It was in this software where the data was coded for the first time and this coding was done on three levels: What; How; About how the What and the How create and/or enrich the community. In other words, the data was first coded superficially – just on the content, the what. This was followed by a more in-depth coding based on the linguistic features of the chats: the use of emojis, regularly recurring terms and words, words and terms that are peculiar to WhatsApp. And, finally, the data was coded for how the first two categories work to make community between the participants and this can be about how they argue; how they repeat each other's words; how do they invoke each other; how they signal their closeness.

Ultimately, from this thoroughly coded data I decided on two analysis methods: Code switching and a Speech Act Analysis.

### 3.6.1 Code Switching and Code Mixing

In order to understand what code mixing and code switching is, it is important to explain what a code is – as someone who does not have a linguistic background, having this basic understanding first was important before deciding on using it as an analysis method. According to Cakrwarti (2011), a code, simply put, is a system that is people employ when speaking to each other. In other words, when people talk to each other, the system of communication that they employ is a code – that is, that language or that dialect, or that register or that accent or that style that they choose to use is a code (Cakrwarti; 2011:11). As much as people are required to choose a code when speaking, they are also allowed to switch between codes or to mix codes for different occasions and for different purposes (Cakrwarti; 2011). This choice to mix and/or switch between codes is made possible by the fact that people are likely to have access to more than one code to choose from – making them multi- or bi-lingual (Cakrwarti; 2011). This is not to say that they have a strong command of all the codes they have access to, but rather because it is most likely that they have varying commands of these said codes and they can therefore choose one that they are comfortable with and allows them to communicate effectively based on the situation and could lead to a code switch or a code mix (Nurhamidah; 2017 & Cakrwarti; 2011).

Therefore, code switching refers to the act of either mixing together two language codes or switching between two language codes when speaking and this switching and mixing can occur during the same conversation. Ndlovu (2017:133) and Chimbganda and Mokgwathi (2012) note that this switch or mix happens in such a way that one language, the target language is the foundation or the "matrix language" wherein parts of the other language are embedded – making the two original languages the on-stage language and the backstage language, respectively. In the case of this research, the data showed that both English and isiXhosa took turns being the matrix language: some conversations were in English and the switches or mixes would be in isiXhosa and vice versa.

There are two types of code switching: situational code switching and metaphorical code switching (Cakrawarti; 2011). The former, as suggested by the name, is regulated by the

situation that the speaker finds themselves in where they speak one language code in one situation and another language code in another situation about the subject matter (Wardhaugh; 1986 as cited by Cakrawarti; 2011). The latter is regulated by the subject matter – a change in the subject matter requiring a change in language (Cakrawarti; 2011). Additionally, there are two types of metaphorical code switching: intersentential and intrasentential mixing (Ndlovu; 2017, Nurhamidah; 2017, Chimbganda & Mokgwathi; 2012 & Cakrawarti; 2011). Because code switching or mixing can happen in the same conversation, speakers have the ability to mix codes within a sentence – that is, intra-sentential mixing – or they can switch between sentences – that is, inter-sentential switching (Ndlovu; 2017, Nurhamidah; 2017, Chimbganda & Mokgwathi; 2012 & Cakrawarti; 2011).

According to Cakrawarti (2011), code switching is a regular occurrence in informal conversations where the speakers are familiar with each other and have a shared educational, ethnic and socio-economic background. Therefore, CoPs draw from these shared backgrounds and use language in ways that allow continuous and collective creation of new social meanings from which members can co- and re-construct and negotiate individual and group identities (Wentker; 2018). This idea of CoP using and reusing language to create in-group identities is furthered by Chimbganda and Mokgwathi (2012:22), who state that CoPs employ code switching as a deliberate departure from standard structural understandings of linguistic resources in an effort to "create legitimate space[s] for the voices of those on the lower echelons of the social ladder" – creating an us versus them dichotomy.

Code switching is therefore relevant to this research as the participants are bilingual – speaking both English and isiXhosa and this research has accepted the use of both languages. It is also important to note that this project used code switching to encompass both inter-sentential switching and intra-sentential mixing (or code mixing). The research analysed the function of code-mixing in the WhatsApp chats because, much like Wentker (2018:110), this project did not view instances of code switching as simply a means "to compensate for an assumed deficit in either language, but rather as a valuable linguistic tool that can be used for various (linguistic) purposes…).

### 3.6.2 Speech Act Analysis

Upon exporting and superficially scanning the data, we noticed the use of emojis was prevalent. At first I coded these for what emojis are they and how many times they are used in one turn as I had noticed that it was very rare that an emoji was used once – for example, one participant would send three face with tears of joy emojis (😂) and another would respond with a whole string of the same emoji. This first round of coding the emojis, led to the question why: why are emojis being used to begin with, what purpose do they serve? Ultimately, this line of questioning resulted in the second analysis method that this research employed: the speech act analysis. Choosing to employ a method from the [linguistic] pragmatism school of thought, was fuelled by the belief that these emojis had to be doing *something* in these chats – given their strong presence in the data, surely they were being utilized for specific reasons and were adding *something* to these interactions – hence the application of the speech act theory to figure out what that something was.

This idea that emojis present in computer mediated communication (henceforth CMC) are doing something, has long been argued in linguistic scholarship (see Crystal; 2006, Derks et al.; 2008, Tossell et al.; 2012, Skovholt et al.; 2014 & Shaari; 2020). In this school of thought, it was understood that emoticons, and more recently emojis, had two primary functions: 1. Being markers of emotion – especially because the first part of the word emoji is derived from the word emotion (Skovholt et al.; 2014, & Tang & Hew; 2019) and 2. Being virtual substitutes for the facial and body language cues that are present and enhance physical conversations (Tossell et al.; 2012). Dresner and Herring (2014; as cited by Shaari; 2020) warn against any rigid interpretations concerning the function of emoticons and body language (specifically facial and body movements). They believe that the meanings expressed by gestures are not restricted to a certain degree of emotion and always subject to change so as the ones illustrated through emoticons.

That is to say, there should not be formulaic or standardised interpretations of the function of emoticons. For example, just because one uses the smiling face emoji (☺️), it should not be assumed that automatically equates to a happy or positive emotional expression, nor should it be automatically assumed that it represents an actual smile, nor should it be automatically assumed that it represents the same illocutionary force each time it is used.

The speech act theory is premised on the idea that humans use language to get things done with words – that is, speakers intentionally use words and utterances to achieve specific actions – and how hearers understand the intention of what is being said (Shaari; 2020). According to Shaari (2020) and Skovholt et al. (2014), the idea that utterances are performative was first posited by Austin in 1962 who noted that:

> Basic units of communication have locutionary meaning (the literal meaning of the utterance – linguistics), illocutionary meaning (the social function or the anticipated force of the utterance), and perlocutionary force (the actual effect produced by the utterance in each context – on the receiver).
>
> Shaari; 2020:139

Essentially, from this quote one can deduce that a speaker can say one thing and that one thing can be understood in three ways – literally, socially and consequentially. For example, "It is hot in here" literally refers to the temperature in the room, socially it can be understood as a request to open a window and consequently a window is opened (Skovholt et al.; 2014:783).

This research was interested in the social function of emojis in the community creation of the participants, therefore focusing on their illocutionary force. The illocutionary force category was further broken down into five categories:

> 1. **Representatives:** refers to the act of expressing belief such as asserting, explaining, claiming and reporting.
> 2. **Directives:** refers to the act of expressing desire such as requesting, advising, suggesting, commanding, questioning and ordering.
> 3. **Commissives:** refers to the act of expressing intention such as promising, threatening, offering and refusing.
> 4. **Expressives:** refers to the act of expressing emotions such as apologizing, complimenting, thanking, blaming and praising.
> 5. **Declarations:** this illocutionary act does not express any emotional or psychological state but involves act such as declaring peace/war, hiring/ firing someone from a job or naming a candidate.
>
> Shaari; 2020:140

Abiding by the principles of virtual ethnography, it was important to not code the WhatsApp chats for these types of illocutions, rather to see which of these, if any, exist in the data naturally. It was also important to not be bound by these categories, in case the emojis in the data performed social acts outside of these described here – especially because the research accepted that the ways in which language is used to be situational.

## 3.7 Ethical Considerations

Thanks to its promise of end-to-end encryption on messages and calls, WhatsApp is hailed for being one of the having "one of the highest levels of security" (Gibson; 2020:6). This end-to-end encryption security promise states that "Messages and call stay between you and the people and businesses you choose. Not even WhatsApp can read or listen to them." Naturally, this reassures users and gives them a false sense of security and are comfortable with sharing sensitive information on the platform (Barbosa & Milan; 2019). It was for this reason that it was important that research ethics still applied in this project – particularly considering the fact that these conversations took place before their potential as research data was realised.

Barbosa and Milan (2019) and Colom (2021) all advocate for a more cyclical approach to implementing ethics to an online space – where ethical issues, such as consent, are discussed by the researcher and the participants regularly due to the dynamic nature of online chat conversations. This approach was recommend for live, ongoing chat conversations, whereas the conversations in this research had occurred in the past and so getting consent once off was possible. In order to obtain consent, I gave each of the participants the different sections of data that concerned them for review. The informed consent form included a retraction clause stating that the participants, upon reviewing their respective dataset, were allowed to notify the researcher of parts they did not want included in the project.

Additionally, in order to protect the identities of the participants and the data, full anonymisation was provided: names were replaced with random letters, and other identifying information was removed. The participants were given both an information sheet and a consent form – the former detailed the scope of the research, how their WhatsApp conversations were used and the contact details of the researcher and the supervisors, while the latter, in addition to guaranteeing anonymity and the aforementioned retraction clause, included information about who will have access to their conversations. And finally, despite using letters, the participants were expected to sign the consent form using their real names – only the researcher has access to these and they will be kept in a folder in a locked cabinet at the home of the researcher.

## 3.8 Reflexivity

When I started writing this chapter I mentioned that the overarching framework of this research project is feminist. This therefore meant that I, as a researcher, could not ignore the demands made by this framing – and these include transparency about my position as a researcher. According to Bhavnani (1994) feminist objectivity demands transparency – transparency from the researcher regarding their presence in their research and take responsibility for that presence by acknowledging that they have an impact on said research. Being completely transparent requires extensive reflexivity on the part of the researcher – being honest about who they are and the privileges and oppressions they bring into and shape the research (Bhavnani; 1994, Barbosa & Milan; 2019, Gibson; 2020). This exercise is important because these privileges and oppressions heavily influence the manner in which they choose to view and validate information during the course of the research process and when deciding on which knowledge is worth knowing and which one is not (Bilge; 2013). Additionally, according to Sultana (2007), reflexivity is important in the process of identifying the power differentials in the relationship between the researcher and the researched – Bhavnani (1994) notes that these power differentials have an impact on the interaction between the researcher and the participant which require negotiation from the researcher.

Bourke et al (2009) makes a reference to what they call The Co-ordinates of Positionality – these are points of constant negotiation, justification and positioning and they include race, gender, class, nationality, language and ethnicity to name a few. These are the physical markers that play an important role in where the researcher finds themselves on the insider-outsider spectrum in relation to the community being researched (Bourke et al; 2009). Bourke et al (2009) continue to argue that researcher have the task of constantly having to prove their "insiderness" by playing at the commonalities they might share with the participants - this was not an issue in this research project.

Having been part of this CoP prior to conducting the research, I came into the research with an unequivocal insider status: we are all black women, we are all Xhosa, we are the same age, we all live in predominantly black townships, we attended the same Model C high school, and thanks to various forms of funding, we have all had the privilege of being university students. Additionally, in 2019, the year from which the WhatsApp conversations were collected, we had been a fully-fledged CoP for 9 years: we had carried each other through grief, we had had

countless sleepovers and as many DMCs (deep meaningful conversations), we had attended each other's 21st birthday parties, graduation parties and parties in general, we had explored different parts of the city plenty of times, we had had inside jokes, and we had had plenty nonsensical words and phrases born out of high school that we used at random. I had to shift into the researcher role in order to allow for what Hine (2011:6) refers to as "reflective observation".

While I had achieved the ideal insider status and was fully immersed in the culture of the group, I was weary of the challenges that this shift from being a full participator to a full observer would bring. The first of these challenges is addressed by Hine (2011:7): "making the familiar seem strange by questioning the taken-for-granted of daily practices …" Being so accustomed to the language patterns and dynamics of the group, meant that I took the majority of these for granted, and this became painfully clear when my supervisors would point them out and asked me why certain phrases were used and I had difficulty answering them. Having a third party, in the form of my supervisors, examining the data and then asking guiding questions, while daunting, made engaging with the data in my capacity as researcher much easier because I needed to have answers to their questions and I could only get to those answers by critically examining the data.

Another challenge I had was because this is my research project, I had the privilege of choosing which parts of the chat to use. And this was tricky because, as alluded to earlier, a lot of these conversations were DMCs wherein the participants were vulnerable because they were talking to their friend – not a researcher. I struggled to reconcile my desire to produce a good research project with my loyalty the participants. This is why it was important to be as honest as possible to them about everything, from mentioning having to use our chats in the beginning when we were in the thick of Hard Lockdown discussing potential ways of conducting fieldwork to collect data so the research project could continue, to having them review the exact sections I was thinking of using, while regularly explaining the scope of the project to explain the context in which their chats would exist – and to just confirm and re-affirm that they are still onboard.

# 4 Theoretical Framework

## 4.1 Community of Practice

One of this research project's interests lies in the shared language practices of peer groups – in other words, this project is interested in the natural language dynamics within groups contexts. This natural language flow was explored through peer group engagement under the assumption that within such groups the members already talk to each other and therefore they not only have an organic rapport that allows for organic language, and they also have a shared resource base from which they access these shared language practices.

A critical approach to theorizing peer-group linguistics interaction comes from Wenger and Lave's thinking on Communities of Practices' (henceforth CoP). According to Wenger (2011), this theory was originally coined as a social learning concept whose use was intended for learning theory. This concept was brought into existence when Wenger and Lave were researching apprenticeship as a learning model and they discovered that learning did not occur between the master and the apprentice, but rather in the social relationship between the apprentice and more advanced apprentice – referring to the latter as a community of practice as they served as a "living curriculum" for the apprentice (Wenger; 2011). According to Wenger (2011), there are three main characteristics of CoP: The Domain, The Community and The Practice. The domain refers to the members of a CoP not only having the same "domain of interests" (Wenger; 2011:1), but also being committed to these interests and mutual accountability towards the achievement of these interests (Holmes & Meyerhoff; 1999; Wenger; 2011). The community refers to the importance of the interaction between the group members in pursuit of the interests in the domain – this interaction can be in the form of joint activities, discussions, coming to each other's aid and sharing information – building relationships that enable them to learn from each other (Wenger; 20011). Finally, the practice refers to the members of a CoP actively developing a shared repertoire of resources over time and sustained interaction – these resources can be experiences, stories and language such as specialised terminology or linguistic routines (Holmes & Meyerhoff; 1999, Eckert; 2006 Wenger; 2011).

These preceding elements of CoP are captured by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's (1992) definition as cited by Holmes & Meyerhoff (1999):

> An aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour. As a social construct, a CoP is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages.
>
> (1992:464)

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet were one of the first scholars to apply the theory of CoP to sociolinguistics as way to theorise language and gender – connecting seemingly broad categories from each respective discipline to lived social and linguistic practice (Eckert; 2006). Eckert notes that a CoP does not simply identify a social group based on what they call "abstract characteristics" such as class or gender, nor does it simply identify a social group based on co-presence, but rather, CoP identifies a group based on a shared practice – like a book club, a friendship group or a wine club (Eckert; 2006:1). As mentioned by Wenger (2011), Eckert (2006) reiterates the fact that through regular and sustained interaction, members of a CoP develop ways of undertaking tasks, views, values, power relations and ways of talking that are unique to their CoP – making CoPs perfect for the study of situated language use, language change and of the very process of conventionalization that underlies both" (2006:1). CoPs exceed geo-location: CoPs can be online, members do not have to reside in the same area – Eckert (2006) argues that this fluidity in the social space results in diverse membership experiences, and consequently, has the potential to capture relationship between social and linguistic change.

Theorizing peer-group talk as community of practice strengthened my own research by foregrounding shared linguistic practices as situated and powerful resources in the 'organic' creation of solidarity.

### 4.2 Young Black Women as Critical Constituency

This research project is interested in the voices of young black South African women. As such, the theorisation of who they are and where they are located is important in answering why this project is interested in these particular voices. Doing this, allows for the theories of vulnerability, theories of violence and the HIV discourse will come across.

In their 2001 piece on the Black Consciousness Movement, Gqola rightfully and profoundly noted that "…there is a tendency to marginalise the politics of black women." (2001:142). This marginalisation can, and has, occurred in a number of different ways, however, one of the most important ways has been stripping black women of their voices – silencing them on/to/into the periphery of society. Throughout history, black women have always been spoken for – either by the white Western supremacist man who was posited as the authority of all people, the white feminist who seemingly understood and therefore had the right to speak on the plight of all women and the black man who claimed the right to speak for them despite single axis of understanding oppression and his lack of understanding and knowledge of their experiences (Gqola; 2001, Valdvia; 2002). Gqola (2001) noted how, in the context of apartheid South Africa, the empowered black male speaker worked to completely exclude the apparently powerless and voiceless black women from liberation movements – making struggle exist only between black men and white men.

By centering the voices of black women, this project wishes to show the validity of the lived experiences of these women – experiences that create valid situated knowledges (Few et al.; 2003). The reality is that black woman have been speaking, this project is therefore interested in a said talk and in showing how that talk is politically and socio-culturally shaped towards 'community-making' within a peer group system.

It is no secret that South Africa had a tumultuous history that created a context of intense militarisation and violence. The transition from apartheid South Africa to a democratic South Africa, naturally, came with changes in the ways of being for South Africans – one of the ways that came with democracy, was/is what Gqola (2016) refers to as the New South African Woman (NSAW). The NSAW exists to serve two main purposes: a departure from apartheid femininities and an aspiration of what South African women can become in a free country (Gqola; 2016:120). The NSAW exists due to the social and political transition which came with a loosening of some gender restrictions – resulting in an increased number of women occupying the public and political spaces in a number of different ways (Gqola; 2016). According to Gqola (2016), the NSAW can appear in many forms – as long as these forms do not deviate far from the stereotypical notions of what it means to be a good wife. The NSAW is an aspirational woman – she embodies economic freedom, consumer status, ambition, drive and all-round success, all while being consumable with her smooth skin, straight hair, manicured nails and an arched brow (Gqola; 2016).

However, this NSAW is not the reality of many South African women – much like the South African Constitution, as noted by Gqola (2007 & 2016), is aspirational. South African women's – particularly young women – realities are saturated with gender-based violence. This NSAW exists in a context in which she is constantly under the threat of rape, sexual harassment at work and other public spaces and are surrounded, and have to deal with, misogynist metaphors, images and language – the irony of this situation is not lost: legislatively, South African women are said to be empowered (Gqola; 2007). According to Gqola (2007), this irony is because women empowerment is understood very superficially – in terms of these said women simply adapting to systems that are usually oppressive rather than transforming the systems to be more receptive and accommodating to women and their contributions. Gqola (2007) argues that the high statistics of gender-based violence in South Africa is reminiscent of apartheid South Africa wherein black women had no freedom of movement – which then renders the freedom that The Constitution affords and protects null and void for black women.

Young black South African women are particularly vulnerable to intimate partner violence – according to Abrahams et al. (2009) the rate of female homicide is six times higher than the global rate and younger women of colour are at greater risk. Much like Gqola (2007), Abrahams et al (2009) notes that the perpetrators of such heinous crimes are known, however during investigations police did not have any suspects – Abrahams et al. (2009) have associated this to the biases that police have: because the victims are likely to be young and black, these crimes are not thoroughly investigated and the perpetrators are not pursued. This is a reflection of the legacy of inequality and under-servicing of black communities left behind by apartheid as well as a reflection of the low status of black women according to both race and gender (Abrahams et al.; 2009).

A plethora of scholars (Jewkes et al., 2002, Jewkes et al.; 2006, O'Sullivan et al., 2006, Jewkes et al.; 2010), found that there is a distinct link between intimate partner violence – which is a feature of sexual relationships – and the rate of HIV infections in young adults – particularly young black women. According to the most recent study by the UNAIDS, in 2018 the HIV prevalence rate for young black women was 25.8%, compared to 15.0% (UNAIDS; 2019) – in 2006 these statistics were 24.5% and 7.6% respectively (O'Sullivan; 2006). Violence in relationships is created and maintained by the gendered power inequalities: the patriarchal nature of heterosexual relationships dictates a type of masculinity that controls women,

necessitates male toughness and strength – resulting in risky and predatory sexual preferences (Jewkes et al.; 2006, O'Sullivan; 2006). Furthermore, gender notions that dictate female behaviour such as – modest behaviour, protecting their virginity, not engaging in sexual relations until marriage – increase the chances of young black women being infected with HIV as they are inexperienced and have minimal to no social support or guidance (O'Sullivan et al.; 2006). Because men tend to have more power in relationships compared to their partners, they control the negotiation of condom use during sex, the refusal of sex and when sex happens – which all have an impact on the risk of HIV infection of women (Jewkes; 2006).

As the above has shown, black young South African Women are the most vulnerable in the South African society. They deal with a plethora of challenges that subsequently influence, very starkly, their lived experiences. This research project is premised on the assumption/belief that salient narratives will come from this space.

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# 5 Analysis – Emojis Doing Things

## 5.1 Introduction

Premised on the idea that emojis are the performative feature of computer-mediated communication (CMC) – (Crystal; 2006, Derks et al.; 2008, Tossell et al.; 2012, & Shaari; 2020) – this first analysis chapter aims to use the Speech Act Theory as an analytical tool, focusing particularly on the illocution of the emojis. Revealing the "social function" (Shaari; 2020:139) of the emojis will illustrate the work that they do and how they create, reinforce and/or maintain a community among these young black women in their day-to-day WhatsApp conversations. Preliminary engagement with the coded data showed that the emojis do not fall neatly into all five illocutionary categories because, much like Skovholt et al.'s 2014 study, the speech acts identified in this project are ones that are present in the data. Therefore, analysis is completed using only the categories under which the naturally occurring speech acts fall – namely, expressives and directives (Searle; 1976 as cited by Shaari; 2020:140).

The rest of the emojis present in the data will therefore be analysed according to the communicative intention(s) of the speaker or, more appropriately, the sender of the message. This is done for the same abovementioned purposes: understanding how community is created and maintained by a group of friends whose primary means of communication is through social media. However, the two types of analyses are not mutually exclusive – as such, it is most likely that the analysis produced will be the result of merging the two.

As noted earlier in this dissertation, the use of emojis is widespread within CMC and this group of friends is no exception. Below is the table of emojis, as generated by NVivo 12, with minor edits I made, that gives the name of the emoji and what it looks like (Name), its other names, meaning(s) and use (Description) and the number of times one emoji has been coded (Reference).

From the table, one can see that in one month, this group of friends made use of 21 different emojis and of those, face emojis are the most common – 17 out of the 21 can be found under the category of "smiley and people". One can also deduce that the favourite emoji of the group is the face with tears of joy as it has been coded 69 times across all four conversations.

| Name | Description | References |
|---|---|---|
| Grinning Face with<br>😅 | Concerned Face, Nervous Face<br>Original meaning: commonly conveys feelings such as sadness, disappointment, fear, and anxiety or discomfort or nerves commonly used to express a close call | 1 |
| Clapping Hands<br>👏🏽 | Original meaning: Round of Applause | 2 |
| Clinking Glasses<br>🥂 | Original meaning: as done at a celebratory or convivial toast (“Cheers!”). | 1 |
| Eyes<br>👀 | Shifty eyes, Eyeballs<br>Original meaning: Used to indicate ‘pervy eyes’ to indicate approval of an attractive photo posted online; or ‘shifty eyes’ to convey a deceitful act. | 2 |
| Face with Tears of Joy<br>😂 | LOL/Laughing hard/Laughing crying<br>Original meaning: Used to show that something is funny or pleasing. | 69 |
| Fire<br>🔥 | Original meaning: Commonly used for various metaphorical expressions related to fire, including the slang hot (“attractive”) and lit (“excellent”). | 1 |
| Folded Hands<br>🙏🏽 | Thank you, Prayer, Please<br>Original meaning: Please or thank you in Japanese culture/ Using the same gesture as praying hands. | 3 |
| Grinning Face with Smiling Eyes<br>😄 | Original meaning: Often conveys general happiness and good-natured amusement. | 1 |
| Hugging Face<br>🤗 | Original meaning: May be used to offer thanks and support, show love and care, or express warm, positive feelings more generally. | 2 |

| Name | Description | References |
|---|---|---|
| | Due to its hand gesture, often used to represent jazz hands, indicating such feelings as excitement, enthusiasm, or a sense of flourish or accomplishment. | |
| Loudly Crying Face 😭 | Bawling, Sobbing, Crying<br>Original meaning: Intense feelings such as inconsolable grief/overwhelming joy/uncontrollable laughter | 12 |
| Raising Hands 🙌 | Hallelujah, Praise hands, Arms in the air<br>Original meaning: Used to convey celebrating success or another joyous event. | 1 |
| Red Heart ❤️ | Original meaning: expressions of love | 9 |
| See-No-Evil Monkey 🙈 | One of the Three Wise Moneys (See no evil, Speak no evil and Hear no evil).<br>Original meaning: A call for discretion or a figure for willful ignorance. Used as a playful way to convey a laughing/disbelief/cringing | 3 |
| Skull 💀 | Original meaning: Used to express figurative death/extreme laughter/frustration/affection | 4 |
| Smiling Face with Heart Eyes 😍 | Original meaning: Often conveys enthusiastic feelings of love, infatuation, and adoration | 2 |
| Smiling Face with Smiling Eyes 😊 | Smiley Face, Smile, Happy Face<br>Original meaning: Expresses genuine happiness and warm, positive feelings. | 4 |
| Speaking Head 🗣️ | Original meaning: Used in the context of shouting or mansplaining | 1 |
| Unamused Face 😒 | Original meaning: unimpressed/dissatisfaction/side-eye | 4 |

| Name | Description | References |
|---|---|---|
| Upside Down Face 🙃 | Upside down version the slightly smiling face. Original meaning: Used to convey irony/sarcasm/silliness/goofiness | 6 |
| Woman Shrugging 🤷🏾‍♀️ | Represents a shrug | 3 |

Table one: Emojis used by friends on WhatsApp between 1 March 2019 - 31 March 2019. Meanings of emojis from https://emojipedia.org/

## 5.2 Laughing to Keep from Crying 😂😂😂

Confirming the plethora of literature about emoticons, one of the ways in which emojis are used is to mitigate or diffuse otherwise serious conversations (see Crystal, 2006; Derks et al.; 2008; Cramer et al., 2016; Rashdi, 2018 & Shaari, 2020). Many emojis can be used for this purpose, however, the most common one from this project's dataset is the face with tears of joy emoji (😂). There is a heavy reliance on the main meaning of this emoji to bring about a joyful light-heartedness into an otherwise heavy and dark conversation, as will be illustrated by example one and two.

Example one is a one-on-one conversation between A and S. It is an excerpt from two parallel ongoing conversations about coming into adulthood and being unemployed. Having multiple conversations at once is a regular occurrence between these friends – this is facilitated by WhatsApp's feature that allows one to respond to a specific message in text the conversation. These two conversations are not mutually exclusive in that what starts off as a conversation about adulthood and navigating that, turns into a conversation about finding employment because one of the signifiers of being a successful adult is having a job. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that when one thinks and talks about growing up, employment is at the forefront of that thought process.

Example 1:

1. [2019/03/04, 18:57:59] S: I can't take care of myself. I need my mother.
2. [2019/03/04, 19:04:31] A: I can't do shit on my own
3. [2019/03/04, 19:06:04] S: Shit=everything.

4. [2019/03/04, 19:20:12] A: 😂😂😂😂😂😂
5. [2019/03/04, 19:20:19] A: Exactly
6. [2019/03/04, 19:20:55] S: 😂😂😂😂 rha!
7. [2019/03/04, 19:33:02] A: MESS!
8. [2019/03/04, 20:15:25] S: A big one futhi.
9. [2019/03/04, 20:22:20] A: 😂😂😂😂 we're too old for this
10. [2019/03/04, 20:31:22] S: What else can we do?
11. [2019/03/04, 20:42:07] S: So if you y'all want cars washed or pets to be fed, I'm here.
12. [2019/03/04, 20:43:13] A: 😂😂😂😂😂😂😂😂 uyadika!
13. [2019/03/04, 20:43:34] S: Ek se ma net.
14. [2019/03/04, 20:45:30] A: I'll definitely keep you in mind when we need to clean our dog
15. [2019/03/04, 20:46:11] S: Please Mntase[1]. Whatever 😂

Example 1 Translation

1. [2019/03/04, 18:57:59] S: I can't take care of myself. I need my mother.
2. [2019/03/04, 19:04:31] A: I can't do shit on my own
3. [2019/03/04, 19:06:04] S: Shit=everything.
4. [2019/03/04, 19:20:12] A: 😂😂😂😂😂😂
5. [2019/03/04, 19:20:19] A: Exactly
6. [2019/03/04, 19:20:55] S: 😂😂😂😂 *rha!*[2]
7. [2019/03/04, 19:33:02] A: MESS!
8. [2019/03/04, 20:15:25] S: A big mess!
9. [2019/03/04, 20:22:20] A: 😂😂😂😂 we're too old for this
10. [2019/03/04, 20:31:22] S: What else can we do?
11. [2019/03/04, 20:42:07] S: So if you y'all want cars washed or pets to be fed, I'm here.
12. [2019/03/04, 20:43:13] A: 😂😂😂😂😂😂😂😂 you're so annoying!
13. [2019/03/04, 20:43:34] S: I'm just saying
14. [2019/03/04, 20:45:30] A: I'll definitely keep you in mind when we need to clean our dog
15. [2019/03/04, 20:46:11] S: Please Friend. Whatever 😂

The first aspect of this above example that is noticeable is the fact that each time the face with tears of joy emoji appears, it appears multiple times consecutively – as seen in lines 4, 6, 9 and

[1]Formally, this word means kin – someone in the same family, usually a sibling or relative that is similar in age. Shortened version of "mntasekhaya" which literally means "child of my home/house". Colloquially, it's used to mean friend – but not just any kind of friend, because its formal meaning signifies closeness, one reserves the word for a close friend.

[2] "Rha!" is a very passionate expression/exclamation that can be anything from a compliment or gratitude to a threat or betrayal depending on context and intonation. In this case, it conveys disgust.

12. Using multiple consecutive emojis communicates excitement and enthusiasm (Rashdi; 2018:122), therefore, in the case of this example, each line with the consecutive emojis iconically signifies a loud, boisterous, fully-body laugh. This phenomenon of repetition can be described and explained by Tannen's concept of "enthusiasm constraint" (Tannen; 2005; as cited by Rashdi; 2018: 122) which speaks to the high involvement required by in person conversation: repeating emojis, using capital letters, using multiple punctuation marks are various means by which people mimic the high energy and enthusiasm that would be present in real life conversations.

The content of the conversation itself is not necessarily a laughing matter – in fact, from line 6 until line 10, both S and A acknowledge how much of a "disgusting mess" it is for them to be getting older and at the cusp of adulthood and apparently not be competent enough to successfully take up space as adults. Closely following that, from lines 11 to 15, S expresses a desperation for any kind of employment – even jobs that are considered unskilled labour or are thought to be of low class. The laughter that is signified by the 😂 emoji works to diffuse the heaviness of these two worries – providing moments of intentional comic relief from the anxiety and pressures of reality. The repetitiveness creates a light and comedic atmosphere within the conversation, thereby creating and maintaining a safe space for each other (Kelly & Watts; 2015). In this space, they can joke about, ridicule each other, and sit comfortably in having nothing figured out because they are sitting in it together – carrying each other.

Turn 15 is the only time in this conversation that the face with tears of joy is used once – it is important to note that S's turn 15 is the end of this conversation. 😂 is used to indicate the end of this conversation. It is not uncommon for CMCs to end with an emoji (Kelly & Watts; 2015, Cramer et al.; 2016 & Rashdi, 2018). Kelly and Watts (2015) and Rashdi (2018) argue that closing a conversation in this way works to build rapport between the speakers as it signals the acknowledgment of the sender's message while not saying much – especially ending with the same emoji that has been used in the conversation. This is demonstrated in turn 15: using the same emoji that has been most common throughout the conversation, maintains the jovial energy that has been present throughout an otherwise distressing conversation. Ending it this way not only softens the "whatever", which can read as dismissive or brash, but it also ensures that S and A do not leave each other in the dark space that this type of conversation might have given rise to.

Example 2:

1. [2019/03/04, 12:46:03] S: <attached: 00024735-AUDIO-2019-03-04-12-46-03.opus>
2. [2019/03/04, 13:04:48] A: YHEYI[3]! And don't talk to me about your boyfriend kuba ndizokukhumbuza oko uba he's an abuser - even when he does nice things for you
3. [2019/03/04, 13:14:29] S: Exactly 😂😂😂😂
4. [2019/03/04, 13:22:09] A: Ewe mntase. Noba uyakhutshwa left, right and centre - oksalayo[4] he's abusive
5. [2019/03/04, 13:23:23] S: Oksalayo friend 😂😂😂 I can see you saying that.
6. [2019/03/04, 13:40:04] A: 😂😂😂😂

Example 2 translation:

1. [2019/03/04, 12:46:03] S: <attached: 00024735-AUDIO-2019-03-04-12-46-03.opus>
2. [2019/03/04, 13:04:48] A: EXACTLY! And don't talk to me about your boyfriend I will remind you all the time that he's an abuser - even when he does nice things for you
3. [2019/03/04, 13:14:29] S: Exactly 😂😂😂😂
4. [2019/03/04, 13:22:09] A: Ewe friend. Even if you're being taken out left, right and centre – the fact remains that he's abusive
5. [2019/03/04, 13:23:23] S: the fact remains friend 😂😂😂 I can see you saying that.
6. [2019/03/04, 13:40:04] A: 😂😂😂😂😂

Example 2 is another example of how the face with tears of joy is used to bring about levity in tough engagements. It is another conversation between A and S coming off of a broader conversation that was trending in the South African popular culture at the time: a video had surfaced on black South African Twitter that appeared to be a screen recording of an Instagram Live that was streamed by popular gqom[5] artist, Babes Wodumo in which it appeared her and her partner, popular recording artist and producer, Mampintsha, were arguing – following which, her partner was visibly upset and can be seen stalking her and eventually assaulting her (see The latest on Babes Wodumo …, 2019; Assault of Babes Wodumo …, 2019 and Babes

[3] This is an expression whose meaning entirely rests on the context in which it is said. In this context, it signifies an emphatic agreement to what S said in the preceding voice note. Therefore, can be translated as yes or exactly.
[4] The word can be translated into the phrase "the fact remains". Usually used in a playful or informal debate where one person is losing the debate and knows that they are losing the debate, to console themselves.
[5] The word "gqom" means drum in IsiZulu and the reason this genre received this name is because of the loud drum-like noises that are in Gqom music. Gqom consists of deep bass sounds that are mixed with broken beats and most songs include special effects like screaming and shouting. As it is believed to have originated in Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN), as KZN natives, Babes and Mampintsha were/are both major players in this music genre (Sishuba; 2018).

Wodumo Assault …, 2019). Bringing these conversations down to a personal level in which one, especially those gendered as women, talks about and envisages oneself or one's friends in Babes's shoes is not difficult because this sad reality of gender-based violence is not farfetched in South Africa: one in five South African women who have a partner has experienced physical violence from that partner, there are approximately 146 sexual offences against women daily and femicide in South Africa is five times higher than that of the global average (Statics South Africa; 2020, Ramafoko; 2020 & Gouws, 2021).

S and A have brought down this conversation to a personal level, where they imagine what would they would do if they had a friend that kept going back to an abusive boyfriend (this video is the second time that Mampitsha's alleged abuse of Babes Wodumo had surfaced. See Levitt; 2018, Venge; 2018 & Mlambo; 2018). In the voice recording that S has attached, they explain that if they were to ever have a friend in an abusive relationship their only advice to them would be to, "get out of there! Get out of there while you are still in one piece!" If the friend, like Babes, chooses to stay with the abusive boyfriend, then S says that they will be a) frustrated at that decision, b) the friend must not talk about the boyfriend to her and c) the friend must not expect any different advice from her. In her turn, A emphatically agrees with this sentiment going further to state that even if this theoretical boyfriend takes the friend out on dates, buys her gifts, does nice things for her, the fact remains that he is an abuser and will remind her of that.

In turn 3, S agrees with A and uses five 😂 emojis. As mentioned above, the insertion of these emojis work as intentional pressure release points created to distract from or to allow space for light-heartedness in tough conversations. Again, this is not to say that the content of the conversation is not serious, in fact in turn 5, S makes it explicit that the laughter that is indicated by this emoji is a response to the manner in which A would say the things she has said because she knows A – indicating that her and A have an ongoing relationship and have had many interactions where they have had to look for things to laugh about to keep from crying. Turn 6 reinforces the commonality of ending a conversation with emojis.

The two examples above have illustrated the ways in which speakers use emojis – particularly the face with tears of joy emoji – as a means to insert intentional light-heartedness into tough conversations. This is not done to diminish the seriousness of the content of the conversation,

but because the content is so heavy that it necessitates creating moments of pressure release and moments of comfort in order to continue talking about these otherwise avoided topics with each other.

### 5.3 The Shade of it All 👀

Zilic (1999 as cited by Shaari; 2020: 137) argues that the use of emoticons in CMCs allow for the faking or concealing of one's true feelings and opinions – especially if those feelings and opinions are, or can be received as, harsh or negative by the listener. If the sender discerns that their message has the potential of being received negatively, they will provide emojis to contextualise their message (Rashdi; 2018). According to Skovholt et al. (2014), this phenomenon can be explained by Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness – which has a lot to do with what they would call "face" work – which will be expounded on in the coming paragraphs as it emerges in the examples that follow.

Example 3

1. [2019/03/01, 18:09:37] C: It's the 1st March. I hope you're deep within planning your wine farm birthday extravaganza
2. [2019/03/01, 18:09:49] C: 👀
3. [2019/03/01, 18:30:51] A: Kanene🙃😭
4. [2019/03/01, 18:47:51] C: <attached: 00004604-GIF-2019-03-01-18-47-51.mp4>
5. [2019/03/01, 18:48:05] A: 😂😂😂😂😂😂 I will
6. [2019/03/25, 15:33:39] C: Sisi 👀👀👀👀
7. [2019/03/25, 16:19:29] A: 😂😂😂😂 I'm really too broke to do anything else
8. [2019/03/29, 17:28:11] C: Uzutsho xa usitya iSolids so I can buy you a burger or somethin' for your birthday 🙃

Example 3

1. [2019/03/01, 18:09:37] C: It's the 1st March. I hope you're deep within planning your wine farm birthday extravaganza
2. [2019/03/01, 18:09:49] C: 👀
3. [2019/03/01, 18:30:51] A: Oh yes 🙃😭
4. [2019/03/01, 18:47:51] C: <attached: 00004604-GIF-2019-03-01-18-47-51.mp4>
5. [2019/03/01, 18:48:05] A: 😂😂😂😂😂😂 I will
6. [2019/03/25, 15:33:39] C: Sisi 👀👀👀👀

7. [2019/03/25, 16:19:29] A: 😂😂😂😂 I'm really too broke to do anything else
8. [2019/03/29, 17:28:11] C: You must say when you are eating solids so I can buy you a burger or somethin' for your birthday 🙃

Example 3 is an excerpt from a conversation between C and A and it shows how the shifty eyes emoji (👀) can be used as a means to conceal the harshness of what has been said. It is important to note that the way that this emoji is used in this context is far from its original meanings of shifty eyes that indicate deceit or pervy eyes that indicate approval of an attractive photograph. Here they are a literal side eye – looking at someone out of the corner (sides) and not facing them directly. On social media, a side eye can convey anything from disapproval to knowing, surprise or shock depending on context (urban dictionary; 2007).

In this example, the emoji first appears in turn 2, and together with the Tamar Braxton "get it together.com" gif that is attached in turn 4, do a couple of things: first they throw shade, second they convey an expectation and third they are passing judgement that this expectation (that is, this wine farm birthday extravaganza mentioned in turn 1) has not already been thought of, planned and communicated. Essentially, C is giving a directive to A – requesting that A makes plans for their birthday that is coming up soon. But C recognises that the tone of that message might be too harsh or commanding than what they intend, therefore the inclusion of the 👀 in their next turn. This inclusion can be explained by Brown and Levinson's (1987, as cited by Skovholt et al.; 2014:783) notion of the face: in conversation, one wants to maintain a positive public self-image, that is, a positive face, in order to be approved of by interlocutors. A command, like the one C has made, can be categorised as a face-threatening act because it dictates what A has to do in the future – and politeness calls for compensating for this face-threatening act (Skovholt et al.; 2014:783). The inclusion of the 👀 does just that, because it relies on one of the ways they are usually used on Black Twitter – which is to show **playful** disapproval and/or judgement. Doing this, allows for C to not only save face on behalf of A, but to also contextualise how she is making this command. Evidently, C has successfully managed to save A's face because nowhere in the following turns does A express offense. Rather, A responds to the idea of the birthday coming up in general: the use of the upside-down face (🙃), coupled with saying "Kanene" – whose tone in this context is disinterest – and the abruptness of the response all work to convey the lack of excitement for the birthday. This emoji can also be used to show distress – internal distress about the birthday and the sudden

expectation of planning this extravaganza. Line 6, the shifty eyes are repeated three times and, in their multiplicity, they have lost their playfulness and have not only become a straightforward shade filled reminder that the date of the birthday is fast approaching and there is still no communication of the Extravaganza, but they are also a means to put pressure on A to finally do as requested much earlier in the month. C has chosen to directly perform the face-threatening act. Turn 7 shows this choice has not threatened A's face, in fact, A just finds it amusing – as revealed by the use of multiple face with tears of joy emojis. Turn 7 also reveals the reason behind both the disinterest and the distress: A is "too broke".

Example 4 also shows how politeness over CMCs is created and achieved.

Example 4

1. [2019/03/13, 20:35:06] A: Also, I really hope you don't speak like this to the poor patients. Oh yhini[6]😭
2. [2019/03/13, 20:35:11] S: Not at all.
3. [2019/03/13, 20:36:13] S: 😂😂😂😂 I bite my tongue each time I feel like saying things like that. I don't want to lose marks for not showing compassion.
4. [2019/03/13, 20:36:39] A: You better bit your tongue sisi😂😂😂😂😂 You had better

In this example, the face with tears of joy emoji is used as a politeness tool by A to save face – as seen in turn 4. This is a part of a conversation between S and A in which S was complaining about how difficult the patients are and how they were making her life "miserable" by not listening to her (S is a final year natural medicine student who is completing mandatory clinic hours). The manner in which S speaks of the patients evidently does not sit well with A, who we see in turn 1 chastising S for the manner in which they speak to patients. In turn one, we see this chastisement and we see that A emphasises it through the use of the loudly crying face emoji: this face and the phrase that proceeds it cements the fact that A is not on S's side. The phrase "Oh yhini" is a phrase that is used to express compassion to someone – to show that you wholly sympathise with them and the "them" in this case are the patients. By calling out their friend and speaking for the patients, A has committed a direct face-threatening act (FTA) and has offered no immediate compensation for it – going against one of the suggested ways

[6] "Yhini" is a Xhosa expression used to convey sheer or deep deep sympathy for a person – it's almost a whole body experience coming from the gut.

to successfully commit a face-threatening act while maintaining politeness (Skovholt et al.; 2014:784).

In response, S does not seem to have taken offence, but rather goes on to explain to and reassure A that she conducts herself differently when she is with the patients (as seen in turns 2 and 3). In fact, in turn 3, she precedes her response with four face with tears of joy emojis whose purpose is unclear, but one could posit that they are performing three functions: 1) showing that they are not offended by A's perception of her lacking the appropriate bedside manner, 2) they are perhaps laughing while recalling times that they have had to bite their tongue when dealing with patients in any capacity or 3) they are also perhaps acknowledging that they are aware of their harshness. It is only in turn 4 that A compensates for her turn 1 face-threatening act, as well as another act she commits in turn 4. In turn 4, A repeats S's words – while Tannen (2007; as cited by Rashdi; 2018) argues that doing this shows acceptance of what the other person (in this case S) has said, A recognises the words or the phrase coming from her may not be perceived positively as they take on a threatening tone and she recognises that this compounds on turn 1's FTA and might do too much damage to S's face, therefore she adds the five 😂 emojis. These emojis, as seen earlier in this chapter, pickup on and maintain the cheery and playful atmosphere with this conversation that was set off by S's string of emojis (Kelly & Watts; 2015). They are also compensation for the turn 4's FTA: in order to counteract the possible interpretation of their message being negative, this time A immediately uses these emojis as contextualisation cues to ensure that S knows how to interpret her message (Rashdi; 2018). A relies on the face with tears of joy emoji meaning to show that while the message might sound like a threat, she is not saying it in a threatening way – she is laughing out loud, being playful and therefore not to be taken seriously as she is saying this. Both these functions of these emojis work to save S's face.

CMCs, for the most part, are without paralinguistic cues – as such, there has to be a way to frame one's messages and responses in such a way that reduces the chances of offending one's interlocutor. According to Skovholt et al. (2014) in order to do this, CMCs rely on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory who – in turn – rely on Goffman's notion of "face". As seen in the two above examples, emojis play a critical part in creating and maintaining a positive face – thereby creating and maintaining a positive interaction. This is because emojis can be used as contextualisation cues that frame how one is to interpret the message one's received.

Providing these cues depends on the sender, who upon assessing their message and its impact on their public face and on the face of the receiver, decides whether or not to include these cues. Depending on context, any emoji can be used to do this – from the grimacing face (😬) to the loudspeaker (📢) – in examples 3 and 4, we have seen the eyes (👀) and the face with tears of joy (😂) emojis used to save face.

### 5.4 All the Feels 😭

One of the main arguments on the functions of emoticon and emoji use in CMCs is to convey emotion (see Derks et al.; 2008, Tossell et al.; 2012, Kelly & Watts; 2015, Cramer et al.; 2016, Rashdi; 2018 & Shaari, 2020). Cramer et al. (2016) and Rashdi (2018) agree that emojis are an iconic and playful representation of how one feels about the person/people that they are in conversation with and/or one's own offering in the conversation – in fact, in CMCs emojis are considered to be the best way to share emotions. The following example will illustrate how the loudly crying emoji (😭) is used to show the same emotion for different reasons – a lot of the times relying on the emoji's original meaning.

Example 5

1. [2019/03/21, 20:03:04] V: Ha.ah mntase not you.. the family, I totes understand why though.. the folks are literally broke so they feel helpless at this point, and I really don't blame them. But I know things will definitely pull together at the last hour. Ta G always comes through for a girl. 😂 yeyi [7]it was an awful dream! Imbi[8]!
2. [2019/03/21, 20:19:49] A: Yho mntase I can only imagine all that stress😭 But I really don't think you shouldn't let all the financial pressures take away from the moment. You EARNED IT SISI! You need to bask in all the glory and fantastic-ness and success of it. All the stress and the all-nighters, all led to this moment - BASK IN THAT SHIT! Ta God will 100% come through for the beyps.
3. [2019/03/21, 20:44:29] V: Enkosi mntase ❤️😭
4. [2019/03/21, 20:45:16] A: If you tell anyone I'm mushy, I'll deny it. K, thanx
5. [2019/03/21, 20:52:39] V: 😂😂😂 Bitch I hate you!

[7] Exclamation that expresses anger, shock, surprise depending on context. Here it conveys surprise.
[8] Direct translation: it's ugly. This term has gained popularity on black South African social media, and it is used to refer to a bad situation. Formally, this phrase is an answer to a question about an object. However, on social media there need not be a question, whatever situation/topic you are talking about at the time can be the object that the phrase refers to. When referring to a situation, it means that nothing is going well.

Example 5 Translated

1. [2019/03/21, 20:03:04] V: No friend not you.. the family, I totally understand why though.. the folks are literally broke so they feel helpless at this point, and I really don't blame them. But I know things will definitely pull together at the last hour. Ta G[9] always comes through for a girl. 😂 wow it was an awful dream! It's ugly!
2. [2019/03/21, 20:19:49] A: Wow friend I can only imagine all that stress😭 But I really don't think you shouldn't let all the financial pressures take away from the moment. You EARNED IT SISI! You need to bask in all the glory and fantastic-ness and success of it. All the stress and the all-nighters, all led to this moment - BASK IN THAT SHIT! Ta God will 100% come through for the babes.
3. [2019/03/21, 20:44:29] V: Thanks friend ❤️😭
4. [2019/03/21, 20:45:16] A: If you tell anyone I'm mushy, I'll deny it. K, thanx
5. [2019/03/21, 20:52:39] V: 😂😂😂 Bitch I hate you!

Example 5 is an excerpt from a one-on-one conversation between A and V. It comes from a conversation about V's upcoming graduation and how preparations are going for that event. From turn 1, one can deduce two things: 1) absolutely no part of these preparations is going well due to financial constraints and 2) V is religious as she calls on her faith to insert positivity into the situation. In the same turn, she uses the 😂 emoji in the same way that was illustrated in examples one and two above – to provide comedic relief in an otherwise tough conversation. She does this when referring to an awful dream that she had into which her stress about not being able to afford graduation had spilt.

The first time that the loudly crying emoji is used is in turn 2, when A responds to V. While A might not be physically crying, she uses this particular emoji intentionally as it represents feeling overwhelmed by emotion and externalising said emotion – being joy or pain or grief, and in this case the main feeling being overwhelming stress that A has now taken on with her friend. It can also be said that A being the first one to show this emotion can be seen as an invocation to V to cry as a result of the intense feelings of stress that they have expressed in turn 1 – it creates a safe space for V because it okays this level of vulnerability – and then she goes on to offer words of encouragement. Turn 3 sees the second crying emoji in this

[9] Adding a "Ta" before someone's name is a sign of respect and is usually used when referring to men older than you and is usually used by young(er) men. The G is God.

interaction and it can be interpreted as V recognising and accepting the invocation in turn 2 and chooses to use also use the 😭 emoji to convey a release in the pent-up stress and frustration of the financial instability that is eclipsing the excitement and happiness that should be surrounding her graduation. In conjunction with this, V also thanks A makes use of the red heart emoji (❤️) which means love. Therefore, while she is crying to relieve stress, when considering the thanking and the red heart, one can deduce that these are also tears of gratitude – gratitude for being offered the space to be vulnerable, gratitude for the kind words of building them up and gratitude for positivity poured into their "situation".

## 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that emojis work in complex ways – ways that speak to the manner in which is created and maintained through WhatsApp. Using the Speech Act Theory, the chapter did this by focusing on the social function of said emojis, particularly the face with tears of joy (😂), the eyes (👀), and the loudly crying face (😭) emojis. From the Laughing to Keep From Crying section, the nuances of community creation are revealed in the insertion of the face with tears of joy emoji as means to bring about levity into tough conversations; thereby creating moments of pressure release and moments of comfort for each other. Using this emoji shows a construction of a safe and comfortable space that, in turn, allows for the construction of a level of intimacy between the interlocutors that then allows for self-expression. Functioning in similar ways as the aforementioned section, the use of the loudly crying face permits the expression of emotion – therefore creating an intimate space for vulnerability. Vulnerability is an important characteristic of a healthy community as it indicates feelings of comfortability, and security for members. Also seen in these two sections is the choreographed ritual of one falling and the other falling too and/or lifting the other. The former works to invoke closeness between community members by ensuring the one who has fallen knows and feels the presence of the other so that they know that they are not alone in their distress/discomfort/worry – thereby allowing them to sit comfortably in those feelings. And just like they fell together, through the use of emojis, words of encouragement, of kindness and of support they build and lift each other back up.

It can therefore be said that while emojis work in complex ways, these participants use them in ways that insist on and recognise the fragility of the people in conversation and create a community that not only accommodates this fragility, but one that allows and accepts it.

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# 6 Analysis: Code-switching for a Purpose

## 6.1 Introduction

Echoing the works of a plethora of sociolinguists, such as Thurlow (2003) Deumert and Masinyana (2008), Chimbganda and Mokgwathi (2012), Ndlovu (2017) and Wentker (2018) to name a few, this second analysis chapter aims to focus on the social functions of code-switching. In doing so, this chapter will be interested in the "how and why" aspects of code-switching to elucidate the motivation and the effects of code-switching (Chimbganda & Mokgwathi; 2012:22) in an attempt to answer the overarching questioning in which this dissertation is interested in: how young black women create, maintain and/or reinforce community with each other.

According to Cakrawarti (2011), code-switching or mixing comes as a result of speakers being bilingual and therefore having a choice of which language to use, depending on the context in which they find themselves as well as their comprehension and fluency of the languages they know. The participants of this study are all first language isiXhosa speakers and have acquired English mainly through their education – as such, much of the code-switching in the data is mainly between these two languages and, to a much lesser extent, Afrikaans. Structurally, code-switching resulted in WhatsApp conversations that were either in Xhosa and the switches were in English or conversations that were in English and the switches were in isiXhosa.

While code-switches are often unmarked and can occur simply because "our lizard brain take over; folks would slip into a different language or accent without even realizing it or intending to do it" (Nurhamidah; 2017:412 & Wentker; 2018:124), it is also true that the reasons, and consequently the functions, of code-switching are vast and can go from marking conversation openings and closings (Ndlovu; 2017: 135-136) to excluding others (Cakrawarti; 2011:17). The WhatsApp data collected presented two main socio-lingustic functions: Humour and Friendship Work/Maintenance (Thurlow; 2003:10, Deumert & Masinyana; 2008:121, Wentker; 2018:122 & Adomah; 2020:84). This is not to say that there are no other functions of code-switching present in the data, such as repetition for both emphasis and clarity and a real lexical need for example. They are present – they simply work to achieve the two main purposes of friendship work and to provide humour.

Therefore, the following chapter will have sections on friendship work and humour while noting how the smaller above-mentioned functions contribute to these two themes. As isiXhosa is a big part of this chapter, preceding each example provided for the above-mentioned themes will be a summary, written in Xhosa, of the analysis of said example as well as explanations of Xhosa phrases and/or words that have been used in the original WhatsApp messages and will appear in their original state in the analysis.

## 6.2 Humour and Teasing

Much like the use of the face with tears of joy emoji (😂), the WhatsApp conversations between these friends show that code-switching is used to evoke humour to, mainly, provide moments of comedic relief during serious conversations (Adomah; 2020:84). Outside of this, switches are also used for banter and what Podnar (2013) calls pro-social teasing and thirdly, simply make the person one is in conversation with laugh (Thurlow; 2003:11& Adomah; 2020:84). The following examples will illustrate how the participants choosing to code-switch achieves this humorous effect.

**"Sisi"** – sister. This word always retains its meaning, however, its tone changes and its wholly dependent on the context of the conversation.
**"cela ungayithethi"** – do not even say it or do not mention it. This phrase is an avoidance technique that is usually used when someone knows exactly what "it" is but refuses to name it because "it" evokes some level of discomfort in the speaker. Socially, this phrase is usually used in a jocular manner that takes away the attention from the actual distress/discomfort that the person is feeling and brings it to phrase itself because it is known to be funny.

Le nthetho ingezantsi iphakathi kwesithethi u-S no-A malunga kosuku lokuzalwa lwesithethi u-A esiya kwiminyaka angamashumi amabini anantlanu, isithethi u-S sithetha ngalomba siqhula ukuze isithethi u-A siyamkele kakuhle lento ayithethayo. Isithethi u-A asiyamkekli kakuhle lento ithethwayo kuba ethelekise iminyaka yakhe nalapho akhoyo ebomini ngokwentsebenzo azingqinelani ngokokwakhe. Indlela isithethi u-S esiyibeke ngayo iye yafika yamkeleka, kodwa ngenxa yoxinzelelo esiziva sikulo isithethi u-A siye sawuhesha ngobuchule lo mba.

Ukutshintsha kolwimi nokusetyenziswa kwesibhulu kubonisa ukungaziva kakuhle ngalomba, isibhulu sigxininisa ukungaziva kakuhle nokukungafuni ukuzibandakanya kule ntetho. Igama u "Asseblief" liveza isicelo sokungafuni ukuqhubekeka nale ncoko. Isithethi u-S sibona unkungaziva kakuhle ngalomba kwisithethi u-A, ukuze amxolise okanye asuse ukungaziva kakuhle isithethi u-S siyazibandakanya kuba bezintanga, esinye isizathu sesokuba exolisa isithethi u-A angaziva eyedwa koluxinzelelo.

Example one is a conversation between S and A and S is teasing A by reminding her that she is turning 25 soon – reminding her of her looming entrance into adulthood. From the exchange, it is clear that A does not appreciate this reminder – which is understandable considering the politics of adulthood versus where she is on the adulthood journey as expounded upon in the previous chapter under The Laughing To Keep From Crying section.

Example 1:

1. [2019/03/04, 18:18:37] S: Do you realise that you're 2 years away from 25?
2. [2019/03/04, 18:19:06] A: Sisi. Cela ungayithethi
3. [2019/03/04, 18:19:45] S: You Sisi!!!!! *YOU*
4. [2019/03/04, 18:29:43] A: ASSEBLIEF
5. [2019/03/04, 18:54:57] S: We are ADULTS!

In her first response, A refers to S as "Sisi" followed by a full stop – indicating that she is serious, as the tone of "sisi" is stern and sounds almost like a warning to S. The cautionary value of "sisi" is emphasised by the phrase "cela ungayithethi" which follows it. Together, these result in a playful warning S to stop and not go any further with this reminder. However, being aware of the social connotations of this phrase, S simply ignores this warning and continues to tease A – this time "Sisi" here is used matter-of-factly, as a means for S to emphasize that she is talking to her and about her. Podnar (2013:15) states that when engaging in pro-social teasing, like S is doing here, it is important to make use of meta-signals to ensure that the other person can infer the playfulness of the message and does not take offense – especially considering the fact that messages can be easily misinterpreted. This response can be seen as a linguistic meta-signal of pro-social teasing due to its overly emphatic nature (Podnar; 2013:15): the repetition of the word "you", the tone of "sisi", the multiple exclamation marks and the capitalisation and boldening of the last "you".

While A knows that S is only teasing her and means no harm, in turn 4 she emphasises her desire to not want to hear about her turning 25 by pleading with S in Afrikaans. Afrikaans has a very complicated, mostly negative, history in South Africa and is not very popular in post-apartheid South Africa because of this history. Therefore by intentionally choosing to switch to it, A wants to be emphatic so that S knows to take note that she is being serious (Cakrawarti; 2011:16 & Adomah; 2020:81). Additionally, the emphatic function is increased through the use of the capital letters – which indicate shouting, rendering the request for S to stop reminding

her about her impending birthday a command. This seems to work, as S not only stops teasing A, but she now includes herself in the conversation – pointing out that she too is about to enter adulthood. Thereby acknowledging and empathising with the feelings of discomfort that this might have brought up because that is where she too is at.

**"uyadika"** – you are annoying. By its standard use and/or isiXhosa definition, this word is an insult. However, socially, the way it is used has evolved in such a way that allows for the context in which it exists to determine its tone. As such, "uyadika", and all its variants (sadiki, sudika), is used in a friendly/joking/funny way among friends – especially when one has said something funny.
**"ek se ma net"** – I am just saying. Afrikaans phrase whose tone is determined by the context in which it is used, often used in a funny and carefree way.
**"Mntase"** – Mntase is a word that is derived from "mntana wasekhaya" which was shortened to become, "mntasekhaya", which was shortened even further to become "mntase". All of these mean the same thing: child of my home, that is, indicating a familial relation – often a sibling relation. Recently, mntase gained social traction thanks to social media and has therefore been used more loosely. It is mainly used among friends to indicate closeness – leaning on its original meaning. Therefore, calling someone "mntase" means that that person is as close to you as a sibling would be.
However, "mntase" can also be used when addressing a stranger: can be a politeness tool when you do not know the person, but also still want to be friendly.
In the case of this dataset, the use of "mntase" is aligned with the former.

Incoko engezantsi Phakathi kwesithethi u-S no-A ngumzekelo womba onzulu omalunga nentswela ngqesho, kodwa iye yatshintsha yathatha umoya okhaphukhaphu. Isithethi u-S siyiqala lencoko ngokuthi ukuba kukho umntu odinga ukuhlanjelwa imoto okanye kutyiswe isilwanyana sasendlini ukuze awenze loo msebenzi, le Ndlela ivulwe ngayo le ncoko ibonisa ukuncama kwimeko yokungaqeshwa nokuphelelwa lithemba. Igama u "uyadika" libonisa ubudlelwane obuhle Phakathi kwezithethi nokutshintsha kwencoko ithathe imo ekhaphu-khaphu.

Ulwimi lwesibhulu lusetyenziswe nje ngendlela ebonisa ukudala nobukhaphu-khaphu bencoko, igama umntase libonisa ubudlelwane nokuvana Phakathi kwezithethi zombini, incoko iqale ngemo enzulu yaze yatshintsha yaba nokuqhula ekugqibeleni. Igama u"Mntase" liveza ubuhlobo Phakathi kwezithethi, libonisa nokungakhathazeki kwesithethi u-S malunga nokutshintsha komoya wencoko.

Example two is another conversation between S and A that comes right after a heavy "I'm desperate for a job" conversation – which will appear for analysis later in this chapter. However, it takes a deliberate step away from the heaviness and rather is much lighter and is funny – while still talking about the desperation to find a job. This speaks to the already established theme of not leaving each other in a dark place that may have been induced by this

kind of topic, hence the joking in attempt to lift the mood of the conversation. This is an important function of talk: through using pragmatic devices, emojis in the previous chapter and code-switching in this chapter, these young black women support and take care of each other by ensuring that their interactions not only create and maintain a healthy and light community, but also to maintain healthy and light members of said community.

Example 2:

1. [2019/03/04, 20:42:07] S: So if you y'all want cars washed or pets to be fed, I'm here.
2. [2019/03/04, 20:43:13] A: 😂😂😂😂😂😂😂😂 uyadika!
3. [2019/03/04, 20:43:34] S: Ek se ma net.
4. [2019/03/04, 20:45:30] A: I'll definitely keep you in mind when we need to clean our dog
5. [2019/03/04, 20:46:11] S: Please Mntase. Whatever 😂

S initiates this light-heartedness by declaring that she is available for washing cars and feeding pets. A responds with a string of face with tears of joy emojis and A tells her "uyadika". Podnar (2013:16) notes that insults such as these are an indicator of the quality of the relationship that the interlocutors have with each other – stating that they are common in close relationships because the people in these relationships are familiar with each other and each other's humour, making said insults funny rather than malicious. This is the case in this example, in that from her responses one can deduce that S is not offended by being told she is annoying – instead, she adds to this jocular atmosphere by switching to Afrikaans and using a very common phrase that indicates that she is not offended by leaning in on the phrase's common use. It is important to note here that the Afrikaans is used in a different way as previously stated: here it is a stylistic choice to add humour (Adomah; 2020:84), rather than emphasis. Further, in conjunction with using the face with tears of joy emoji, in her final turn, S refers to A as "Mntase" – a term of endearment between friends – which shows that there are no hard feelings, she is not upset or offended.

**“hay sisi”** – no sister. A phrase that shows disapproval in a very flippant way. One would say this and move on without hearing the person’s response.
**“phaaaaaa kude”** – phrase meaning far away. Elongated version of the word “pha” is often used when interlocutors are having a silly/funny/light-hearted. The vowel extension indicates the tone, which in turn indicates how far away the speaker would like the listener to go or to be from them.
**“mxm”** – not actually a word, but rather a sound one produces when sucking one’s teeth to show frustration/irritation/ an attitude.

Incoko engezantsi ngumzekelo wokutshintsha kolwimi oluveza ukuvana nobuhlobo Phakathi kwesithethi u-S no-A apho isithethi u-S sichazela u-A malunga nolwazi olubuthakathaka ngaye. Incoko iye ijike ibe nobuqhula obubhekiselwe kwisithethi u-S malunga nokuncanca kwedami yabantwana. Isithethi u-S siyiqala incoko ngokuthi besizoyeka ukuncanca idami ngexesha lakhe siphendule isithethi u-A ngobuza ebezakuyeka xa enangaphi. Isisthethi u-A sisebenzisa isingesi nesixhosa ukubonisa unkungabinzulu nokungayithethi ngobuqatha lento ayithetha, ukulandeliswa kwamagama athi “Hayi sisi” aveza ukungafuni mpendulo.

The final example of how code-switching is used to tease in this dataset is seen in example 3 below in which A is teasing S for her love of pacifiers when she was a child. At some level, according to Thurlow (2003) and Deumert and Masinyana (2008), this exchange is an example of friendship work or maintenance in that S has offered intimate information about herself growing up and by doing this, she has strengthened their bond. A responds by teasing her and she is not offended – which, as seen in the previous example, speaks to the quality of their of relationship.

Example 3:

1. [2019/03/04, 20:52:44] S: I could have stopped at my OWN time!
2. [2019/03/04, 20:55:22] A: When you were how old? Hay sisi
3. [2019/03/04, 21:02:00] S: Love is love. Whether it’s for pacifiers or people. You don’t make people burn what they love. 😂
4. [2019/03/04, 21:03:33] A: 😂😂😂😂😂😂😂😂😂 love is love phaaaaaa kude
5. [2019/03/04, 21:03:51] S: Mxm 😒

This exchange starts off with S being adamant that she would have stopped using her pacifier in her own time (implying that someone forced her to stop when she was not ready or did not want to). A rebuts by asking her when she would have stopped – but she does not care to hear the answer as evidenced by her saying, “hay sisi”. To A, that was a rhetorical question and “hay sisi” indicated an end of that discussion. Her uninterest in S’s defence is emphasised when

A uses S's line of defence and tells her to love her pacificer "phaaaaa kude". In spoken conversations the "pha" is dragged – hence A spelling it the way she has – and this is done to give the person you are talking to an idea of exactly how far away from you you would like them to continue doing the thing you disagree with. And much like "hay sisi", "pha kude" can be a signifier of an end of discussion and you do not care to hear what the other person has to say, because you have made opinion clear and moved on. In turn five, S recognises that arguing her case is futile and so she simply responds with a "mxm" and the unamused face emoji to show that she is indeed unamused and a bit frustrated that A is not listening to her and ultimately is siding with the person who made her burn her pacifier.

This all sounds very intense and hostile, but as Podnar (2013:15) puts it, "the pseudo-aggressiveness of teasing is not to be taken seriously" and the target of the teasing, in this case S, knows not to take it seriously because of both the paralinguistic (the tone of turn 2 and multiple 😂 emojis in 4) and linguistic (spelling of "pha" in turn 4) meta-signals. Additionally, because A and S are close friends, S most likely has a "positivity bias" towards A (Podnar; 2013:16) – as a result, even without the meta-signals, it is most likely that they would have assumed A to be teasing and take no offence.

The three above examples illustrated how code-switching can be used to create humour and as a means for interlocutors to tease each other. The former is done in an attempt to try evoke laughter in an otherwise serious or tense conversation, as seen in example 2 above. The latter communicates the closeness and the quality of the bond between the interlocutors and from the above examples one can deduce that A and S have a close relationship.

### 6.3 Friendship Maintenance

Thurlow (2003) Deumert and Masinyana (2008), Wentker (2018) and Adomah (2020) agree that one of the purposes of code-switching is to do some "friendship work" – whether that is offering support, complimenting, giving advice, showing gratitude and/or offering advice to name a few. The following examples will attempt to show how the young women in this friendship use code-switching to do this "friendship work".

**“wethu”** – Originally, this word means ours, but it is also regularly used when one is asking another person to do something for one – it is a polite way to emphasise the plea. Additionally, this is a phrase that can be said when one feels nonchalant about something. The way it is used in the example below aligns with the former.
**“Yhu/Yho”** – (these can be used interchangeably) is a Xhosa expression that is usually used to convey utter shock and disbelief. But it’s important to note that “yho” is more of a shock that is laced with sadness/disappointment – the Xhosa word to describe this would be “ukudana”. And the sadness/disappointment is shown by how you would say “yho”: you would say it much lower (compared to “yhu”) and your whole body sinks or pulls back into itself.
**“sana”** – shortened version of “usanalwam” meaning my baby. Often used as a term of endearment and is usually used in conversation by people who know each other and are close enough to use terms of endearment when speaking to each other.

Umzekelo wesine ubonakalisa isiXhosa sisetyenziswe ngolwimi oluqalwa ngayo le ncoko, utshintsha kolwimi lusuka kwisiXhosa ukuya kwisingesi. Isithethi u-Awenza isicelo kwisithethi u-C malunga ne imeyili ethunyelwe lisebe le OT yakwa SHAWCO lisuka kwisebe le mfundo. Igama “wethu” libonisa ukwenziwa kwesicelo ngendlela ethobileyo. Ekuqhubeni kwale ncoko isithethi A sibuza ukuba yathunyelwa nini I-imeyili , siphendule isithethi C nge 10 ka February utshintsha kolwimi emva koko lubonisa ukulibaziseka kwempendulo nesidingo sokuphendulwa ngokukhawuleza.

Ekuhambeni kwencoko esi sibini siphela sikwicala elinye kuvezwa yindlela abathetha ngayo ngesekela lomongameli wakwa SHAWCO ngokuthi uzenza umntu oxakekileyo. Incoko ivalwa ngesithethi u-A sivuma ukunceda isithethi C ngemizamo yokuphendulwa kwe imeyili yesithethi A. Incoko ibonisa ukuvana kwezithethi ezimbini nobuhlobo obukhoyo phakathi kwezithethi. Isibhulu sisetyenziswe ngendlela engenantsingiselo ephambili.

Example four is the first time we see isiXhosa being the matrix language and the switches happening in English (Ndlovu; 2017: 133) – hence an English translation is provided below. This conversation reveals that A and C are part of the same student-led non-profit organisation called SHAWCO, but they are in different departments – education, and health - specifically occupational therapy - respectively. C asks for assistance from A to get SHAWCO Ed to respond to communication sent by SHAWCO OT quite a while ago.

Example 4:

1. [2019/03/05, 21:16:58] C: Sicela uHoywa wethu kwa SHAWCO Ed💀
2. [2019/03/05, 21:19:48] A: 😅😅😅😅 siyawatheni this time?

3. [2019/03/05, 21:21:05] C: Please krweca whoever deals with emails asiphendule kwa SHAWCO OT semblief wethu 🙏🏽
4. [2019/03/05, 21:26:29] A: Shame kudala nabhala?
5. [2019/03/05, 21:30:33] A: 😂😅😂😂nibhale nini?
6. [2019/03/05, 21:37:15] C: 10 Feb
7. [2019/03/05, 21:37:54] A: Yhuuuuuuu they need to respond
8. [2019/03/05, 21:43:10] A: Which email address did you send it to
9. [2019/03/05, 21:44:33] C: Kuthwa it was sent to the Vice President
10. [2019/03/05, 21:44:51] A: Ok. I'm speaking to him now
11. [2019/03/05, 21:49:45] A: Uthi he's been waiting on the President (yathanda uzenza busy la gal)
12. [2019/03/05, 21:50:41] C: Yho the bbz sana💀
13. [2019/03/05, 21:50:58] C: Ok I'll pass on the message
14. [2019/03/05, 21:51:05] C: Dankie🙏🏽
15. [2019/03/05, 21:57:52] A: 😅 I'll also keep asking him.

Example 4 Translated:

1. 2019/03/05, 21:16:58] C: Can we please be attended to at SHAWCO Ed💀
2. [2019/03/05, 21:19:48] A: 😅😅😅😅 what have we done this time?
3. [2019/03/05, 21:21:05] C: Please tap whoever deals with emails to respond to us at SHAWCO OT please.
4. [2019/03/05, 21:26:29] A: Shame did you write a long time ago?
5. [2019/03/05, 21:30:33] A: 😂😅😂😂 when did you write?
6. [2019/03/05, 21:37:15] C: 10 Feb
7. [2019/03/05, 21:37:54] A: Yhuuuuuuu they need to respond
8. [2019/03/05, 21:43:10] A: Which email address did you send it to
9. [2019/03/05, 21:44:33] C: They are saying it was sent to the Vice President
10. [2019/03/05, 21:44:51] A: Ok. I'm speaking to him now
11. [2019/03/05, 21:49:45] A: He says he's been waiting on the President (that girl likes to make herself busy)
12. [2019/03/05, 21:50:41] C: Yho the bbz sana💀
13. [2019/03/05, 21:50:58] C: Ok I'll pass on the message
14. [2019/03/05, 21:51:05] C: Dankie🙏🏽
15. [2019/03/05, 21:57:52] A: 😅 I'll also keep asking him.

This interaction starts off with C telling A that they would like to be attended to by the department she is a part of – while she might have not made it explicit that she is asking A to do something on her behalf, because of the way the word "wethu" is usually used, A can infer that this is either asking her to do something or the request to do something is coming. Turn two reveals that SHAWCO Ed has been less than perfect and has made many mistakes in the past – hence asking A what they have done this time around. Turn three reveals what this request is – A to bring someone's attention to an email that SHAWCO OT sent – and C switches to emphasise her plea for help: she pleads in English (please), Afrikaans (semblief), repeats "wethu" and uses the folded hands emoji that means please.

As noted above, "yhu" is an expression that indicates shock – and in turn 7 A has dragged out its spelling to show just how much she is shocked by the fact that it has been three weeks without a response from SHAWCO Ed. As a result, without any hesitation, she immediately helps C: she asks the relevant question in order to gauge who the email was sent to in order to know who exactly to talk to (turn 8) and speaks to them immediately (turn 10) and lets C know why there has been a delay (turn 11). Also in turn 11, A mocks the president of SHAWCO Ed, who we now know is the reason behind the silence – the tone of "uyathanda uzenza busy la gal," as well and the fact that it is in Xhosa work to let us know that the president is being mocked. The operative word that makes it mocking is "uzenza", meaning that the president *makes* herself busy – implying that she is not actually busy, she just likes to seem too busy [to respond to emails]. According to Wentker (2018: 126), the reason behind mocking the president can be explained by the "'us versus them' dichotomy upon which the in- and out-group identity is based." Therefore, A does the mocking in order to establish an us (A and C) versus her (the president) situation, firstly, to show C that she is on her side and secondly, to okay any mocking that she might want to engage in and/or any frustration she might feel towards the president. Through the use of the word "yho", C expresses her disappointment in the president and calls her babes (bbz) – which is condescending considering her (the president) position in the organisation. Compare this to C calling A "sana" in this same response – which is a term of endearment and they mean essentially the same thing, but one seemingly has a negative connotation, while the other has a positive connotation.

In turn 14, C expresses gratitude in Afrikaans for the help that she received from A. In this conversation, the use of Afrikaans appears to be unmarked and is simply a language that C

calls upon because she can and that is still friendly. A then offers to continue helping C behind the scenes by following up with the person who was sent the email.

The main thing that this interaction represents is the nature of friendships: leaning on your friend(s) for help and then showing gratitude and appreciation for that help (Deumert & Masinyana; 2008: 121). From this interaction, one can deduce that C and A are good friends as C was comfortable enough to ask for help – which required a level of vulnerability on her part. The quality of their friendship was reiterated by A, who did not hesitate to not only help, but also to continue helping.

"Noba uzithe …" – this is a phrase used to indicate or to suggest that one settles for something. The "something" is usually not the popular or preferred choice
"indiza entloko" – the literal translation: "it is going to my head". This is an idiom used to express frustration

Umzekelo wesihlanu uphakathi kwesithethi u-V no-A malunga nomsitho wasesinaleni ozayo Isithethi u-V uthetha ngomba womsitho ozayo kunye nokungabikho kwemali yokwenza amalungiselelo afanelekileyo. Isithethi A senza inzame zokunyusa umoya nokwanyusa umdla noba isimo asisihlanga. Le ncoko isuka ngesithethi siyibeka imeko yokuswela imali neengcinga zokungayi kumsitho ozayo, isithethi A sinika impendulo ngesingesi nesiXhosa utshintsha kolwimi kuveza indlela agxininisa ngayo ukuba akanokwazi ingayi kwaye ngokunyanzelisayo nokungamniki thuba lokukhetha. Isithethi A siphinde sisebenzise igama u-"noba" ukucebisa into anoncamela kuyo nefikelelayo ukuze abenempahla yokunxiba isivakalisi us icala ngokugxininisa ngesilungu esithi "you're going" ngokunyanzelisayo.

Impendulo yesithethi V kumgca wesithathu igxininisa ukuxhalaba nokungaziva kakuhle ngalomsitho, ukuxhalaba kwakhe ukuvakalisa ngesingesi atshintshe asebenzise nesixhosa.. Le ncoko iqukunjelwa ngokuvala ngesithethi A sicebisa isithethi V ukuba akafuni uphaphama ngemizuzu yokugqibela sele engxama., kodwa isithethi V asirhoxi kwindlela aziva ngayo malunga nomsitho ozayo. Isiphelo sencoko sesingathembisiyo

Example 5 is a conversation between V and A about V's upcoming graduation. Here we see A offering encouragement to V about this graduation as it seems that finances are a major dampener on it. This interaction is T venting and being frustrated that the way she thought the graduation preparation would go and the feelings she thought she'd have around graduation are not aligning because in reality the financial constraints are very apparent and that is frustrating and stressful.

Example 5:

1. [2019/03/21, 18:25:33] V: Mainly because the coins for everything are just not coming together. At this rate I might not even make it to the ceremony. NdiGrad(e) in absentia 🤦♀
2. [2019/03/21, 18:27:02] A: You can't not go sisi. That's crazy talk.
   Noba uzithe Mr Price and call it a day - you're going
3. [2019/03/21, 18:46:33] V: Sisi the idea of the Graduation is amazing but wow indiza entloko no lie.. I'd rather not think about it .
4. [2019/03/21, 18:55:02] A: Take it from the Queen of Not Thinking About It: You don't want to phaphama 2 days before sowurush(a) everything and you're stressdt. At least figure out one thing a day.
   Also, you're the Queen of being prepared, andiyazi sowusoyiswa yiGraduation nyana

V immediately lets it be known that money, or lack thereof, is the problem – so much so that she is considering not going. The word "NdiGrad(e)" is an example of intra-lexical code mixing (Cakrawarti; 2011:15), where the English root word (grad) has both an isiXhosa prefix (ndi-) and suffix (-e) and this one word can be translated to "I will grad …". Another example of this can also be seen in turn 4 where the root word is "rush", and the prefix is sowu- and the suffix is (a) which can be translated to "you are suddenly rushing". Choosing to do this to the word rush speaks to the brevity of CMCs: the isiXhosa word for rush is "ukukhawuleza" or "khawuleza", and while it is a common word that the participants know, it is longer in length and would therefore take longer – hence the preference of using "sowurush(a)". The final example of this type of switching can be seen again in turn 4 where "graduation" has a Xhosa prefix (yi-) – which, in this context, can translated to "by a graduation". Doing this to the word instead of using a Xhosa version of "grad" is because it is much easier than saying, "umsitho wasesinaleni" and the Xhosa the latter is not very common – therefore, as noted by Cakrwarti (2011:17) and Adomah (2020:82), this switch is a result of a real lexical need due to the speaker having very little or no access to the equivalent lexicon of the word they switched to.

A's immediate response, as seen in turn 2, is to reprimand V for even considering not going because graduation and what it represents is no small feat – hence not going is "crazy talk". We know A is reprimanding V because as noted earlier, the tone of the word "sisi" is determined by the context and here its tone is stern. To emphasis the fact that T cannot miss her graduation, A offers her an affordable option to find something to wear – the "noba uzithe …" tells us that this place is not usually an option for such an occasion because it caters to a

more casual style. However, A overlooks this and offers it based on its affordability – which, in this situation, is what is important.

Despite this potential solution, V is just as adamant about graduation being nothing but a source of stress and frustration – through her use of the word "sisi", which she uses the same way as A did in turn 2, and the phrase "indiza entloko". In her final turn, drawing from her own experiences A offers final words of encouragement – still underpinned by the idea that V absolutely cannot miss her graduation. She tells her that she needs to take it a day at a time – figuring out one thing a day, that way she will not be unprepared when graduation finally comes. By calling V "the Queen of Being Prepared", A is highlighting that in the past, there has never been a situation in which V had not been prepared for – it is one of her strengths. The tone of the last part of A's last turn is very nonchalant, almost dismissive to show V that she is not worried about the graduation – she also should not worry too much about it. This tone as well as the word "nyana", which means little, helps to downplay the magnitude of graduation, in an attempt to make it less overwhelming to V.

This example illustrates friendship work through the acts of offering encouragement and guided solutions to steer one away from making rash decisions that they will probably regret in the long run. Given that A and V are close friends, one can assume that A knows V's academic journey that has led to the point of graduation – therefore the relentless insistence of her attendance, despite the financial woes.

Umzekelo wesithandathu uphakathi kwesithethi A no-S malunga nokuswela ingqesho nokufumana umsebenzi ozolungela ixesha lokungabikho maxhaphetshu kwesithethi S. Incoko Iqala S sikhalaza ngongafumani msebenzi nokuncamela umsebenzi wasebusuku, isithethi A site sitshintshe ulwimi ukuya kwisingesi. Amagama athi "yhu ha.a" abonisa ukothuka kwesithethi A kuba engenokwazi usebenza ebusuku kuba oko kungazuhambisana namaxesha akhe kwizifundo. Isithethi S sibonisa ukudinga umsebenzi ngokuthi angazama usebenza ebusuku.

Uyayithetha ngokucacileyo ngesingesi ukuba uyawudinga umsebenzi, isithethi S sivakalisa ukuxakeka kwizifundo nomsebenzi nomsebenzi wesikolo wasesibhedle. Indlela equkunjelwa ngayo le ncoko isithethi A sibonakalisa uvelwano, igama u-"mntase" libonakalisa ubuhlobo novelwano kule meko yokongamelwa ngumsebenzi wemtundo ephakamileyo.

Example 6 sees A and S are talking about the job hunt – sharing their very basic criteria for what they need from a job – particularly as far as scheduling is concerned.

Example 6:

1. [2019/03/04, 20:32:34] S: I can't really find anything that works with my schedule. Unless is something overnight.
2. [2019/03/04, 20:33:20] A: Yhu ha.a - can't be doing things overnight
3. [2019/03/04, 20:33:57] S: I can surely try 🙈
4. [2019/03/04, 20:33:59] S: I'm desperate.
5. [2019/03/04, 20:39:21] A: I understand mntase
   Yho mna I'm applying to everything on campus
6. [2019/03/04, 20:39:50] S: I have too many classes and clinic hours to work. 😭
7. [2019/03/04, 20:41:11] A: Yho mntase I understand shame

In her first turn, A expresses absolute refusal to working overnight as S has mentioned that would be something that works with her schedule. One can deduce A's "absolute refusal" in her use of the words "Yhu ha.a". As noted earlier, Yhu is a Xhosa expression that is usually used to convey utter shock and disbelief and "ha.a" simply means "no". So, by putting these two together A is conveying two things: 1) shock that S would even consider working overnight and disbelief that that is even an option and 2) refusing that option for herself. This being the only instance of switching in her turn tells us that she wanted to emphasise her refusal – so that it is not lost in the matrix language and for S to take note of it (Adomah; 2020:81).

In her responses, turns 2 and 3, S stands in her decision of being open to working overnight because she is so desperate. A calls S mntase in the wake of S having expressed her desperation to find a job – hence the willingness to potentially work overnight. A does this to comfort S in her desperation to find a job and to show her that she sympathises with her because she understands that desperation – as she reveals that she too is looking for a job.

A uses the word "yho" twice in separate occasions during this conversation – which, because of the already established meaning of the word, tells us that the tone of these turns (5 and 7) is that of sadness or disappointment. While it is not clear what exactly she is disappointed by, one can posit that the first time she uses it, it communicates what she has not actually said: her applications have not been fruitful – despite them being for jobs in and around campus. The second time she uses it, it might be because she is sad as she realises that while wanting a job

and the financial benefits that come with it, being a student is the top priority – therefore a job will have to suit the academic schedule that they have, including S's clinic hours, and realises that that limits the job pool significantly – making it all the more difficult to find one.

Essentially, this exchange is characterised by A and S both being in a bind as far as looking for employment as full-time students is concerned. One has a bit more freedom in terms of their academic schedule, but the other does not. However, this does not seem to matter as they are both having a difficult time finding said employment. Not much comforting has or can happen outside of one invoking their closeness because they are in the same position. Perhaps this is enough – reminding the other that even in this desperation and seemingly futile employment search, they are close, they are in the thick of it together. This example illustrates how communication, particularly text based communication, can create and maintain community between interlocutors: here we see how simply listening, recognising hardships and consequently empathising brings about an intimate version of solidarity that establishes and emphasises closeness. It is also important to note that the exclamations (yho) and terms of endearment (mntase) used to express this empathy and closeness are all in Xhosa – a language that the participants grew up with and undoubtedly brings about feelings of comfort because, to them, it is the language of family, of friends and of home.

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# 7 Discussion Chapter

## 7.1 Introduction

As argued from the very beginning of this research project, conversations of young women hold value and play pivotal roles in community building and maintenance. Whether these conversations happen physically or virtually, the important thing is that they are happening – women are talking to each other. This act of women talking – black women, no less – to each other goes against the grain, it is a revolutionary act that they have been conditioned against precisely because of its revolutionary nature, because of the power that lies in its unpredictability and because it gives rise to opportunities of women to create bonds with each other (hooks; 2000). The question remains: what do young black women speak about? How does talking to each other create and maintain bonds with each other?

Over the last decade, the creation of knowledge, establishing a close-knit community despite physical distance can be accredited to the explosion of digital communication platforms, which, as noted by Deumert (2014), allow for synchronicity which in turn mimics physical communication due to its immediacy. The use of Computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC) allowed this group of young black women to create a safe space wherein they are able to exist fully without fear, wherein they could share their vulnerabilities and their worries and their joy and their support. From the study conducted, the findings highlight that using emojis and the ability to code-switch allowed these women to not only be active participants in their conversations, but to also achieve the aforementioned safe space.

When it comes to creating and maintaining a community, the face-to-face conversation usually provides the means by which knowledge is shared. This is because of the nonverbal element of conversation; wherein facial expressions and the body are used to convey meaning beyond what is being said (Tossell et al.; 2012, Tang & Hew; 2019 & Shaari; 2020). With the rapid use of CMC, emojis are now used as paralinguistic cues and are relied upon for illocution (Shaari; 2020). Using the Speech Act Theory as a critical lens of analysis, the study focused on the use of emojis in WhatsApp conversations between these young black women in their everyday conversations, with the aim to elucidate the manner in which they use emojis in their conversations contributes to the creation, and maintenance of a community among them. Emojis were selected for analysis primarily because of their widespread use in this data and

analysis was conducted based on the naturally occurring speech acts that these emojis were to be performing in the data, as well as the intent of the speaker.

The second aspect of the discussion focuses on the use of code-switching. The goal is to get a clearer understanding of how code-switching plays an integral role in how young black women create, maintain, and/or reinforce community with each other. Bilingualism allows the speaker to have the option to choose which language they prefer, depending on the social context, as well as their fluency in the language (Nurhamidah; 2017 & Cakrwarti; 2011). The present study featured participants whose first language is isiXhosa and can also comprehend English and some Afrikaans as a result of formal education – the analysis context being their ability to code-switch between these three languages during their WhatsApp conversations.

## 7.2 Community Exceeds Location

As mentioned above, interpersonal relationships usually rely on face-to-face, or body-to-body, communication for the maintenance of said relationships due to the nonverbal elements that add to what is being said (Tossell et al.; 2012, Tang & Hew; 2019 & Shaari; 2020). However, this data has shown that communication does not have to be restricted to the physical realm for it to maintain bonds and consequently maintain community: these participants were still able to convey emotional meaning, create a sense of co-presence, empathise with each other, and recognized and allowed each other's fragility. This can be explained by the principles of communities of practice (henceforth CoPs): CoPs exceed geo-location – members do not have reside in the same area (Eckert; 2006). As such, CoPs do not identify social groups based on co-presence, but rather based on a shared practice, like friendship, and interaction (Eckert; 2006). This can be further explained by metaxis, which explains our ability to engage in two contexts: the physical context and the virtual context – due to the deeply embedded nature of digital communication practices in our lives, we are able to be present in both the physical and virtual contexts (Deumert; 2014 & Burger et al.; 2017). As noted by Deumert (2014), "why we are able to intertwine our everyday living with the virtual – accepting its reality, while simultaneously accepting that it is different from the concrete physical world around us." For example, in example 3 in the first analysis chapter, C gives A a directive to be "deep within planning" her (A's) wine farm birthday extravaganza – the fact that C is not physically giving A this directive does not diminish the validity and the reality of the judgement and shade that C throws at A – in fact, C knows this, and they go on to use the shifty eyes emoji (👀) in order

to contextualize the tone and the energy with which they are giving this directive, thereby maintaining politeness and saving A's face. Another example that illustrates that communication does not have to be bound to the physical realm for bonds to be maintained is example 5 in the first analysis chapter: in this example, through the use of both emojis (❤️ and 😭) and code switching (mntase, beyps, enkosi) A is building V up – encouraging them to externalize their feelings, encouraging them to attend their graduation, reminding them of their achievements and what they are capable of . While the crying represented by the loudly crying face and love represented by the red heart and the terms of endearment and the words of encouragement are not happening physically, does not mean that the warmth and the love and the support that they convey are not valid.

### 7.3 Language to Create a Group Identity

Sociolinguists have long argued that youth language can be used to facilitate the creation of a group identity and the creation and maintenance of solidarity (see Bucholtz & Hall; 2004, Wert & Salovey; 2004, Dragojevic et al.; 2016, Mensah; 2016 & Rezaei; 2017). In various places, the data and subsequent analysis in this research confirmed this argument to be true. First, the participants use terms of endearment, such as "mntase," "sana," and "sisi," when they call each other. While these terms are standard isiXhosa words, they are used colloquially because they deviate from their standard uses: the meanings of these terms are rooted in family or kin, as such, they should be reserved for the family member to which they refer. However, these young women use them with each other – this is significant because they use these terms to indicate their closeness and the strength of their bond.

The second way that these young women use young language to create a group identity is by creating an us versus them dichotomy that reinforces their group identity and others those outside of the group. This is an important exercise because as Wert and Salovey (2004:126) point out in order to comfortably claim and maintain membership in a group, "one needs to know who they are who they are not" in relation to the group and the rest of society – hence this us versus them dichotomy. As Eckert (2006) rightfully noted, people are part of different groups – that is, CoPs – and there have different ways of being in each CoP. This can be seen in example four of the second chapter of analysis wherein C and A are talking about the SHAWCO president. From this example, we can see that both C and A are part of SHAWCO – which for the purposes of the argument I am making here can be considered CoP 1 – and

they are part of the friendship group that is being studied in this project, which can be understood to be CoP 2 – illustrating Eckert's (2006) above note. However, we see that they hold the friendship group (CoP 2) membership to a higher regard in that through the use of the phrase "uyathanda uzenza busy la gal", A mocks the SHAWCO president, stating that they like to pretend to be busy [to respond to emails] when they actually are not busy at all in order to let C know that she (A) is on her (C's) side – C reciprocates this mocking by condescendingly referring to the president as a "bbz". This successfully others the president and reinforces their bond to each other as part of CoP 2.

The final way that these young black women use language to maintain solidarity, is by "inventing similarity by downplaying difference" (Bucholtz & Hall; 2004:371). This can be seen throughout the data wherein the participants share a sentiment of "I understand what you are going through because I am going through it too" – thereby amplifying similarity, which then works to bring about a sense of co-presence. An example of this can be seen in example 1 of the first analysis chapter wherein S and A are talking about their inability to successfully take up space as adults despite them being on the cusp of adulthood. From the beginning of this exchange, these two friends make it clear they have this similar worry – immediately affirming and confirming what the other has said. Establishing this similarity lets them both know that they are not alone in their worries and that makes said worries much less daunting – which then okays the jocular tone with which they have this otherwise serious conversation and the comedic atmosphere that they have created through the use of the face with tears of joy emojis (  ). Another example of inventing similarity by downplaying difference can be found in example 1 of the second analysis which continues this theme of entering into adulthood and the anxieties that come with it. Here, however, we first see the threat of emphasizing and pointing out difference even when done playfully: we see a moment of real tension when S keeps reminding A that she is turning 25 soon despite A expressing that she does not want to be reminded through the way she uses the word "sisi", the phrase "cela ungayithethi" and the capitalized word "asseblief". S recognizes the tension and in her last turn uses the word "we" to indicate that she too is about to enter adulthood – bringing herself into the conversation and thereby amplifying their similarity. It is important to note that "inventing" similarity implies making up similarity, that is, it is not real, but the data shows that these young black women *do* have these similarities – they do have anxieties about being young adults because, as noted

by Mensah (2016), being young adults in Africa is characterized by dire socio-economic dynamics that make not having a meaningful future a very real possibility.

## 7.4 WhatsApp as a Third Space

Deumert (2014) has argued that third places can exist in the virtual world in the form of chat applications – the data from this research project confirms this argument. Third places, like WhatsApp, are characterized by a friendly atmosphere, enjoyable conversations and fun interactions which all work to create bonds and companionship based on plasir (Deumert; 2014). It is important to note that in these spaces talk is characterized by "phatic communion" which is described as "aimless", "purposeless", and "irrelevant" – but can this type of communication truly be "aimless" and "irrelevant" when it is accepted that human connection, which is the point of this communication, is the "bedrock of man's nature" (Coupland; 2000:2)?

Examples of these types of conversations can be found in the second analysis chapter – specifically example two and three. Example two shows us the quality of A and S's bond: through the use of both emojis and code-switching, we know that these two have a good bond because despite the insult in "uyadika" there is no offence taken, rather, there is humor and there is laughter and there is enjoyment. The same can be said for example three wherein A teases S about her love of pacifiers. These funny and entertaining conversations are features of sociability in third places.

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# 8 Conclusion

This research project set out to explore the manner in which a group of young black women use conversations with each other as a vessel to create community with each. The focus was on the spontaneous conversations that came as a result of social interactions in order to access the natural communication behaviours of the peer-group in question. The main purpose of this project was to showcase the significance of black women talking to each other as it leads to the bonding of these women – moving away from the sexist notion that women's conversation and the consequent relation to each other is unnecessary and valueless (hooks; 2004). As such, the main objectives for this project were to understand community making among young black women and to understand what role language plays in this community making.

Initially, this project was to be set out to be conducted physically and the conversations observed would be body-to-body. However, due to COVID-19, the research had to be conducted virtually and the conversations observed were computer mediated. Principles of ethnographic research were therefore applied to the virtual space that is WhatsApp as WhatsApp was the field of research. A combination of extracted and archived data was used to collect the data that where one-on-one WhatsApp chats that presented organic interactions between the members of the CoP – which meant that I still had access to organic use of language that the research was interested in.

Using the speech act theory to analyse the data collected, the research found that emojis work in complex ways that allows for community creation and maintenance. Three emojis were the focus of this analysis – namely, the face with tears of joy (😂), the eyes (👀), and the loudly crying face (😭) emojis. From the Laughing to Keep From Crying section, the nuances of community creation are revealed in the insertion of the face with tears of joy emoji as means to bring about levity into tough conversations; thereby creating moments of pressure release and moments of comfort for each other. Functioning in similar ways as the aforementioned section, the use of the loudly crying face permits the expression of emotion – therefore creating an intimate space for vulnerability.

Analysing the data for code-switching also revealed that they while they my unmarked, code switching performs functions that allow for the creation and maintenance of community. Much

like the 😂 emoji, the first major function of code-mixing is to inject humour in an otherwise tense conversation, for banter and prosocial teasing. These all speak to the quality and the closeness of the relationship that the group members have with each other. Another function of code-mixing is friendship maintenance: offering advice, encouragement, support, and showing gratitude, to name a few.

As argued from the very beginning of this research project, conversations of young women hold value and play pivotal roles in community building and maintenance. Whether these conversations happen physically or virtually, the important thing is that they are happening – women are talking to each other.

### Limitations

One of the limitations of this research was that this community of practice did not make use the group chat that WhatsApp offers. This then meant that the project could not access and capture interactions that happen among the group as a whole – that is, how they engage with each other simultaneously. As such, one-on-one conversations were used and that meant that the researcher herself, as part of the CoP, was central in the data as the data was one-on-one conversations with her.

### Recommendations for Future Study

This "talking to one another" online, in specific and co-created patterns of linguistic creativity, constitutes, I have argued, a relationship to community-making for black women which has been under-researched. Further research here would be exciting, and could comprise deeper exploration of emoji usage alongside a exploration of how such a micro-community influenced people close to it: family members, other peers, political groups.

Doing this research has been an intensive process for me, self-isolated during COVID and confined largely to e-communication for community-making, and the experience of researching has simultaneously been one of reminding myself of the meanings of linguistic and social resiliences young black women historically, and in the contemporary moment, create as "norms".

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## APPENDIX A: Consent Form Sample

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

Faculty of Humanities

Department of African Feminist Studies

**Name of researcher**:

| |
|---|
| Asemahle Ngandi |

**Title of research project**:

| |
|---|
| Exploring Community Creation: Conversations of Young Black Women |

By being part of this research project:

- I give consent to the researcher to use the following excerpts from our WhatsApp conversations for research purposes
- I agree to my responses being used for education and research on condition my privacy is respected, subject to the following: - *(tick as appropriate)*

| | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| My name may be used in the published research | | |
| My personal details (e.g. age, occupation, position) may be included in the published research | | |
| My responses can only be used in a way that I cannot be personally identifiable | | |

- I am aware that the above chat excerpts will be accessible to the researcher, two academic supervisors and an external moderator;
- I am aware that my involvement in this research project is voluntary. As such, I am able to cease my involvement should I want to;
- I am aware that I am able to request any of the above excerpts not be used for this research project;
- I am aware that there will be no monetary compensation for my involvement in this research.

- I have read this consent form and the information it contains and had the opportunity to ask questions about them.
- I understand that. the case of dissertation research, the document will be available to readers in a university library in printed form, and possibly in electronic form as well.

**Name of Participant** : _____

**Signature of Participant** : _____

**Date** : _____

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The researcher must supply you with an ***Information sheet*** which provides his / her contact details, outlines the nature of the research and how the information will be used and explains what your participation in the research involves (e.g. how long it will take, participants' roles and rights (including the right to skip questions or withdraw without penalty at any time), any anticipated risks/benefits which may arise as a result of participating, any costs or payment involved (even if none, these should be stated)) | | | | |
| Has this been provided? | **Yes** | | **No** | |

APPENDIX B: Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

Faculty of Humanities

Department of African Feminist Studies

**Title of research project**:

| |
|---|
| Exploring Community Creation: Conversations of Young Black Women |

**Name of researcher**:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Asemahle Ngandi | | | |
| **Telephone** | 0718646169 | **Email** | NGNASE001@myuct.ac.za |

**Name of researcher's thesis supervisor**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Prof Jane Bennett | | | |
| **Telephone** | | **Email** | jane.bennett@uct.ac.za |

**Name of researcher's thesis co-supervisor**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Dr Ellen Hurst** | | | |
| **Telephone** | | **Email** | ellen.hurst@uct.ac.za |

**Department address details:**

| | |
|---|---|
| African Gender Institute<br>Level 2 and 4<br>Harry Oppenheimer Building<br>Upper Campus<br>University of Cape Town<br>Rondebosch | |
| **Telephone** | 0216504840 |

**What are the implications of your involvement in this research project?**

The researcher may explain these to you verbally in more detail, if needed.

The purpose of this research is to explore how young black women use talk as a resource to create community with each other. The research is interested in the naturalisation of language within an already established community of practice of a peer group. This research topic was of my own choosing for my Master's Degree through the Department of African Feminist Studies at the University of Cape Town and as such, whatever knowledge gained here will be used for academic purposes and will be accessed by my two academic supervisors and an external moderator.

Outside of granting consent to the use of excerpts from past WhatsApp conversations, there is very little no active participation required from you – you simply have to read through these excerpts and let the researcher know if there are any that you would rather have not used for this research.

Informed Consent is granted to the researcher when you sign the consent form, it therefore advised that you read through the consent form thoroughly BEFORE signing it. Should you have any questions, please reach out to the researcher via the email provided above.