

Exploring the influence of romantic relationships on young adolescent men's sexual and reproductive health attitudes and practices

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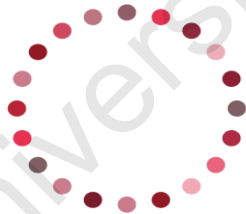
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ABBREVIATIONS

ABYM	Adolescent boys and young men
AGYW	Adolescent girls and young women
ART	Antiretroviral treatment
AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
CSE	Comprehensive sexuality education
DSBS	Division of social and behavioural sciences
DA	Discourse analysis
EC	Eastern Cape
FGD	Focus group discussion
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HCWs	Health care workers
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
IDI	Individual interview
IPV	Intimate partner violence
LO	Life Orientation
MCSJ	Movement for change and social justice
NSP	National Strategic Plan
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
SANIMHS	South African National Integrated Men's Health Strategy
SLP	Scripted Lesson Plans
STIs	Sexually transmitted diseases
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health rights

SRHS	Sexual and reproductive health services
SOP	Standard operating procedure
UCT	University of Cape Town
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
US	United States
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
VMMC	Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

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ABSTRACT

Romantic relationships serve as a training ground for the development and improvement of interpersonal negotiation and communication skills where adolescents may learn how to cater to their emotional and sexual needs and those of their partners. Sexual activity is common in adolescent romantic relationships, where adolescents may learn how to negotiate consent, communicate their sexual needs, and learn about their sexual preferences. While sex is not necessarily risky, it exposes adolescents to HIV, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and pregnancy. In heterosexual romantic relationships, which are a focus of this study, gendered power dynamics become a crucial component with serious implications for sexual decision-making and sexual negotiation, including HIV and intimate partner violence (IPV).

This qualitative study explored young adolescent men's experiences of heterosexual romantic relationships and how these shape their sexual and reproductive health (SRH), HIV, and IPV-related attitudes and practices. Specifically, the study explored (a) sexual negotiation and decision-making (b) gendered power dynamics, and (c) young adolescent men's experiences and perceptions of IPV. Twenty-eight young adolescent men aged 14 to 19 years old from Gugulethu, Cape Town took part in individual interviews conducted telephonically and through WhatsApp. Thirteen young adolescent men participated in handwritten diary entries and a total of 8 in-person FGDs, with a minimum of four young adolescent men per group, were conducted. All data were transcribed, translated, and coded using NVivo software. Thematic and discourse analysis were used to analyse the data.

Findings highlight that in heterosexual romantic relationships, young adolescent men oscillated between challenging and reinforcing gender norms, with mixed feelings of uncertainty, fear, and self-doubt. They also grappled with their desires for intimacy and emotional connection with their

partners, while negotiating their masculinities. The findings suggest that young adolescent men's sexual practices, their perceptions of risk to HIV, and STIs, and their attitudes towards IPV are located in and influenced by the romantic relationship context. As such, efforts towards improving the SRH of adolescents will require specific attention to romantic relationship dynamics.

A note on terminology used to define study participants.

Participants who took part in this study were males aged 14 – 19 years. For the purpose of this study, young adolescent men will be used to describe the population of adolescent males who are in the 14 – 19-year category. The population of interest in this thesis is complicated because of legal definitions in South Africa. In South Africa, legally 10 – 19-year-olds are considered adolescents. This sometimes clashes with cultural understandings of adolescence. For example, among the Xhosa (an ethnic group in South Africa to which young adolescent men in this study identified as) a male who falls in the legal definition of an adolescent but has undergone *ulwaluko* (traditional circumcision) is a man. To deal with these clashes, the thesis will use the term young adolescent men. In this way, the study deals with the possible clashes in the legal and biological identities versus socio-cultural identities and acknowledges that the study participants are in some ways perceived as adolescents and in some cases considered men. The study acknowledges that in literature the population of interest, that is 14 – 19 years has been referred to as adolescent boys and adolescent boys and young men (ABYM). However, in reviewing this literature, male persons aged 14 – 19 years will be referred to as young adolescent men.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a vital period in human development, characterised by physical, psychological, emotional, and social transition (Avedissian & Alayan, 2021; Del Ciampo & Del Ciampo, 2020; Sawyer et al., 2012). This is a phase of self-discovery, and identity formation and a phase where major changes in health and health-related behaviours occur, which may impact health outcomes later in life (Branje, 2022; Connolly & Goldberg, 2014; Frost, 2013; Salam et al., 2016). As adolescents start assuming adult roles and become more independent, this phase becomes a key window to engage adolescents about their opinions, ideas, and beliefs about their health and well-being (Kato-Wallace et al., 2016; Ruan et al., 2021).

Puberty – the biological and physical changes - marks the beginning of the adolescent phase (Dahl et al., 2018). However, adolescence is not only a biological construct, but also socially constructed and shaped by multiple and intersecting factors at various levels of the broader social, economic, and political context. South Africa is home to a diverse group of adolescents, who interact with complex structural and socio-cultural factors that shape their development. As such, the time when adolescence ends, the manner in which adolescents are socialised and ultimately behave and what is expected of adolescents is socially constructed and differs widely among cultures (Adegoke, 2001; Newman & Newman, 2020). These are important considerations to take note of in the manner in which adolescents are understood (White et al., 2021). Understanding that adolescent development is context-specific may be useful in providing insights into how the different contextual factors shape attitudes and behaviours. Such an understanding may also offer insights into the framing of adolescents in particular contexts. While the socio-cultural context is increasingly being recognised as a significant factor, there are instances where universal standards take precedence, and doing so may mean that contextual factors are not always at the fore. The socio-cultural context is key in understanding adolescent development in Africa, yet the legal framing of adolescence does not seem to capture the experiences of adolescents in all these

contexts. For example, the South African National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) framework strategy adopts the World Health Organisation's (WHO) definition of adolescence. The WHO defines adolescence as a phase of life from ages 10 – 19 years.

The WHO definition of what an adolescent is does not always fit with the experiences of all adolescents in South Africa. For example, the typical age of *ulwaluko* among the Xhosa is 16 years (Mavundla, 2010). according to the WHO definition of an adolescent, a 16-year-old male is at the peak of adolescence. However, among the Xhosa, one of the 11 languages in South Africa, who fall under the Nguni and one in which this study is carried out, a 16-year-old male who has undergone *ulwaluko* (a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood) is a man (Mavundla, 2010). This means that the Xhosa developmental stages are not solely defined by age, but culture and tradition play a huge role in determining which status males can assume and when. This highlights some of the differing perspectives - which may not necessarily be in conflict or binaries but could also co-exist side by side - around the different phases of development in different contexts. Considering this example, in South Africa, among the Xhosa there are instances whereby male children may have to assume a dual status: one of being a young adolescent man and therefore a minor, and one of being a man.

In addition to taking into consideration the sociocultural context when thinking about young adolescent men, there is also a need for concerted efforts that differentiate between adolescent boys and adult men. While adolescence is recognised as an intricate phase, necessitating specific needs, and priorities for this group, in the South African context, there is no conscious effort that differentiates between young adolescent men and adult men. Scholars from South Africa and the United States (US) have also noted that the behaviour of young adolescent men has been conflated with that of adult men, wherein the assumption is that what works with adult men will work with this population (Bell et al., 2015; Marcus et al., 2018). The conflation of young adolescent men

and men has resulted in the problematisation and sexualisation of this population (Shefer et al., 2015). This has also resulted in the neglect of the specific needs of young adolescent men resulting in fewer efforts that seek to understand the specific influence of masculine norms on young adolescent men (Marcus et al., 2018).

To use the same lens to understand young adolescent men and men is problematic because it may miss the specific complexities and diversities that shape the lived realities of young adolescent men. Unlike adulthood, adolescence is a phase where norms may still be malleable and may provide a window to engage adolescents about their opinions, ideas, and beliefs as they start assuming adult roles (Kato-Wallace et al., 2016). Also, using the same lens to understand young adolescent men may hinder support directed toward this population as they explore, experiment, and learn. For example, according to Marcus et al. (2018), some programmes that aim to engage young adolescent men tend to have little information about young adolescent men. Doing so means that the specific needs and challenges of young adolescent men fall in the cracks, thus increasing their vulnerabilities as they navigate this intricate phase.

Public health research, focusing on both adolescents and adults that seeks to incorporate a gender lens often conceptualises gender as referring to issues that concern females (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2015). As such, the incorporation of a gendered lens often contrasts females to males, resulting in efforts largely directed towards females as they are deemed more vulnerable (Gibbs et al., 2022). Vulnerability has been feminised so much so that discourses of male vulnerability are almost non-existent (Cunniff, 2016). The unintended consequence of this is that it perpetuates the victimhood status of females and takes away from their agency. In South Africa, the work of some scholars is challenging the feminisation of vulnerability by reporting on young adolescent men's vulnerabilities and uncertainties as they navigate the adolescent phase without proper guidance (Langa, 2020; Shefer et al., 2015). In a study with AGYW, Gibbs et al. (2022) contents that an

understanding and appreciation of young adolescent boys' vulnerabilities is important in its own right and should not take away from or be compared to the vulnerable adolescent girl child.

Notwithstanding the vulnerability that adolescents may experience as they undergo some important psychological and physical changes, engaging in romantic relationships - a completely new arena - may further increase adolescents' vulnerability as they try to navigate this phase. Romantic relationships are an important context within which adolescents acquire the skills to negotiate and explore their sexual practices and identities. They serve as a training ground for the development and improvement of interpersonal negotiation and communication skills and play an essential role in setting the foundation for future adult romantic relationships (Meier & Allen, 2009; Varma & Mathur, 2015). Studying romantic relationships among adolescents may present an opportunity to alter negative SRH outcomes, and learn new health-related behaviours, including interpersonal skills in romantic relationships (Blum et al., 2017; Stöckl et al., 2014).

Heterosexual romantic relationships can be highly gendered in contexts where gender identity, norms and roles govern how these relationships function, including decision-making processes (Rogers et al., 2020). In heterosexual romantic relationships, young adolescent men are often understood as driven by uniform and simplistic models of their performance and negotiation of their masculinities, emphasising their power, all of which have serious implications for IPV (Bell et al., 2015; Giordano et al., 2006). There is less understanding of young adolescent men's ability to develop and maintain healthy and egalitarian romantic relationships. Even scholars in studies with adults have generally overlooked the context and nature of romantic relationships (Belus et al., 2020).

Although there are broader social and structural factors that influence the burden of disease related to HIV, SRH, and IPV, heterosexual romantic relationships are an important context where SRH,

HIV, and IPV-related issues unfold. Heterosexual relationships, among adults and adolescents are still the major driver of HIV transmission (Shubber et al., 2014). Other studies with young adolescent men show that due to unequal power dynamics in heterosexual romantic relationships, such relationships become a key site for both the performance and construction of masculinity (Claussen, 2019). Therefore, “it is essential to understand the nuances and complexities of these relationships themselves as a context within which young people may experience sex or violence, especially to inform intervention programmes seeking to address sexuality, violence, and relationships with teens” (Gevers et al., 2012, p. 1126).

The improvement of adolescents' SRH outcomes requires an understanding of not only adolescents themselves but also an understanding of the characteristics of their relationships (Humphries et al., 2022). For instance, sexual intercourse - which may result in negative SRH outcomes, including HIV if unprotected - occurs largely in the context of some form of ongoing heterosexual romantic relationship (Shubber et al., 2014). Yet, studies among adolescents have largely focused on adolescent's sexual outcomes – pregnancy, STIs, and HIV (Minnis et al., 2015; Naidoo et al., 2021), barely considering the romantic relationship context. While these studies are important in understanding sexual risk and HIV incidence and prevalence, understanding the romantic relationship context in which these public health issues occur is equally important. Addressing SRH, HIV, and IPV requires an understanding of young adolescent men themselves, the role they play in romantic relationships as well as understanding the romantic relationship as an important context within which these public health issues may unfold.

In South Africa, young adolescent men have specific SRH needs and are a critical population in the prevention of HIV and IPV (Nicol et al., 2023; Ruark et al., 2017). Yet, there is an imbalance in terms of programmes or interventions that seek to improve the health and well-being of young adolescent men (Hannaford et al., 2020; Makusha, 2019; Varga, 2002). The current South African National Integrated Men's Health Strategy (SANIMHS) 2020-2025 is a national government

strategy that seeks to improve the health and well-being of males. In the strategy, only medical male circumcision is identified as a programme solely focusing on males. Research has also found that in South Africa, voluntary male medical circumcision seems to be the only nationwide HIV response programme targeting South African males (Makusha, 2019). In a recent statement during the launch of the National Youth HIV prevention strategy, the Deputy Minister of Health, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo concedes that more work still needs to be done with young adolescent men.

In South Africa, youth programmes and initiatives play a vital role in providing access to and accelerating the uptake of comprehensive healthcare and prevention services. However, the mid-term review of the current National Strategic Plan for HIV, TB, and STIs 2017-2022 (NSP) indicates a very limited number of existing interventions targeting adolescent boys and young men (ABYM) in their diversity. With an exception to the hugely successful Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision Programme (VMMC), there is a wide service gap in the provision of ABYM-focused HIV care, prevention, and treatment (Department of Health, 2022, p. 4)

To develop programmes that cater to the SRH needs of young adolescent men, more research needs to be conducted with this population to understand their specific needs. Although there are increasing efforts in research directed towards young adolescent men, when this population is included in the research, it seems attention is more towards understanding young adolescent men's behaviour to improve the health and well-being of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW). For example, the first aim of a UNFPA report by Kato-Wallace et al. (2016) sought to “highlight: (1) the need to engage adolescent boys and young men as allies to achieve gender equality and as supporters of women's and girls' empowerment, and (2) the importance of addressing the specific health and social development needs of adolescent boys and young men themselves.” While the report has a focus on young adolescent men, the authors framed the aims of the report by first

highlighting the benefits of working with young adolescent men on girls. This could be misread as an approach that does not seem to centre the needs of young adolescent men for their benefit.

The tendency to place females' SRH at the centre of work done with males can also be seen in a recent South African study by Bhushan et al. (2023) talks about male partners of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) and seeks to understand their sexual behaviours, specifically to reduce the risk of HIV and other poor sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes for AGYWs. A similar approach was taken by Gottert et al. (2018) in Uganda who explored the relationships and use of HIV testing services by male partners of young women. Both the work of Bhushan et al. (2023) and Gottert et al. (2018) lay a good foundation as a start in highlighting the SRH and HIV needs of young adolescent men. No doubt changing the behaviour of young adolescent men will by extension improve the health outcomes of girls. However, young adolescent men have specific health needs that require urgent attention. Also, young adolescent men are more than just partners of AGYW, they are human beings, with specific needs before they are partners of AGYW. Interest in this group as just partners of AGYW might lead to poor comprehension of the specific health needs that shape their SRH and overall well-being. "It is time to shift away from a ... focus on men solely to improve the health of their partners and children. Men need and are willing and deserve to have access to services for their own health" (Grimsrud et al., 2020, p. 1). Future research on improving the SRH outcomes and HIV risk reduction among young adolescent men should be prioritised over and above their role in advancing the SRH of AGYWs. When the focus is on young adolescent men as a bridge to improving the SRH outcomes of girls, certain SRH needs of young adolescent men might be overlooked or missed.

Not only have young adolescent men been overlooked in public health programmes, but the role of love and the intersection of love and masculinities in shaping what happens in romantic relationships and ultimately the SRH and IPV outcomes has also been minimally studied. Whether real or assumed, love is a common characteristic of romantic relationships. Cole and Thomas

(2009, pp. 1-2), who have been arguing against the neglect of love when studying Africans maintain that "...from billboards sponsored by HIV/AIDS education and prevention campaigns to call-in radio talk shows, discussion of sex, trust, and personal feelings seem to be everywhere. Yet despite the sight and sounds of love in these varied African media, scholars have rarely addressed the topic of love". Arguments by these scholars are consistent with arguments by US scholars who maintain that when it comes to adolescent boys, their expression of emotions such as love and the desire for intimate companionship is thought of as unmanly and because of this, young adolescent men have been constructed as largely interested in sex (Allen, 2007; Bell et al., 2015).

Emerging literature in South Africa challenges the neglect of love in research with young adolescent men. For example, some research shows how young adolescent men straddle between masculinities as they negotiate their identities in romantic relationships and that as they do so, they are also invested in love (Dlamini, 2023; Hamlall, 2018; Manyapelo et al., 2019). It is therefore important for research to centre around issues of love and intimacy and how these may shape young adolescent men's choices in romantic relationships (Ruark et al., 2017). Neglecting positive ideas around love, sex, and intimacy, misses the opportunity to reshape adolescents' prevailing gender and sexual beliefs and to disrupt existing notions around negotiation and intimacy in romantic relationships. Also, the neglect of love and desire concerning the sexuality of black African people is toxic and may continue to promote unfounded prejudices about the affective worlds of black people (Bhana, 2017b; Cole & Thomas, 2009; Hamlall, 2018; Tamale, 2011).

It seems a focus on romantic relationships characterised by positive love and support has been overshadowed by a focus on the destructive and problematic behaviours of young adolescent men and society largely characterises this population as violent delinquents and sexual deviants (Langevang, 2008). The emphasis on the destructive behaviours of young adolescent men, in particular, black young adolescent boys is not only an issue in Africa. US scholars argue that young adolescent men's behaviour is judged more harshly than that of girls, and black young adolescent

men's behaviour is judged even more harshly. In the US, some have even argued that black young adolescent men are perceived as older and less innocent than their white counterparts (Goff et al., 2014). Another US study highlights the criminalisation and pathologisation of black male children, arguing that when black male children play, their play is perceived as dangerous and violent compared to that of male children from other races (Caldera, 2022). A similar view is shared by Hines et al. (2021) who argue that “instead of Black boys’ actions seen as developmentally appropriate, they are frequently viewed from a deficit perspective as needing corrective or punitive actions” (p. 2). Perhaps this view of black males explains the police brutality directed towards black males in the US (Jones, 2014).

Like in the US, the over-significance of the destructive aspects of young adolescent men rather than the problematisation of masculine norms that drive risk-taking behaviours is also present in South Africa. Thinking around young adolescent men places more emphasis on their problematic and destructive behaviours and assumes that these young adolescent boys’ behaviour is innate (Dube, 2016). Despite emerging research advocating for the need to move beyond the problematisation of black males, emphasis in research and the mindset of the general population is geared towards the documentation of the destructive behaviours of young adolescent men (Ammann & Staudacher, 2021; Dlamini, 2023). It is not clear why the emphasis continues to be on the individual behaviour of young adolescent men as opposed to contextual masculine norms that drive this behaviour. Such an emphasis misses the key fundamental of masculinity, that is, masculinity is social rather than natural (Clowes, 2013; Hooks, 2004). To place blame on individuals is rather simplistic and may continue to perpetuate the hypersexualisation of black males, including young adolescent men. Ratele (2014), a South African scholar advocates for masculinities scholars to move away from pathologising black males.

Perhaps the narrative of problematic black males continues unabated because it favours colonialists’ urge to save black females from black males (Spivak, 2010). Scholars trace the

problematization of males, particularly black males' sexual behaviour to slavery and colonialisation that sought to paint the sexuality of black African people as savage (Epprecht, 2010; Spronk, 2014; Tamale, 2011). "Slavery and colonisation were ruthless, world re-configuring forces" (Ratele, 2020, p. 2). Under the colonial gaze, the depiction of black African men focused on problematising their sexuality, rendering it deviant and violent and the majority of research continues to approach black males from a risk and deficit perspective (Bhana, 2017a; Mudaly, 2013; Ruark et al., 2017).

This study moves away from approaching young adolescent men as a problem in SRH, HIV, and IPV work. In its quest to understand the SRH, HIV, and IPV-related attitudes and practices of young adolescent men, the study explores and examines the intersections of masculinities, SRH, HIV, and IPV in heterosexual romantic relationships of young adolescent men in Gugulethu. The focus is on examining how the romantic relationship context – what these relationships are like and what happens in these relationships – shapes young adolescent men's SRH, HIV, and IPV-related attitudes and practices. In understanding and unpacking these issues, the study explores romantic love as central in young adolescent men's sexual relationships. Romantic love is used to complicate the understanding of masculinity and to offer insight into SRH outcomes, including HIV and IPV. The overall objective of the thesis is to understand how the heterosexual romantic relationship context shapes young adolescent men's SRH, HIV, and IPV-related attitudes and practices. The study was guided by the following research question.

Study research question

How does the heterosexual romantic relationship context shape young adolescent men's (14 – 19 years) SRH, HIV, and IPV-related attitudes and practices?

The following sub-questions were explored.

1. What are young adolescent men's expectations in heterosexual romantic relationships and what meanings do these young adolescent men draw from these romantic relationships?
2. How do the meanings young adolescent men attach to heterosexual romantic relationships and their expectations in these romantic relationships influence their sexual negotiation and sexual decision-making?
3. How do young adolescent men understand and express power in heterosexual romantic relationships and what factors in the broader social and economic context influence expression of such power?
4. What social factors shape young adolescent men's experiences and perceptions of intimate partner violence in heterosexual romantic relationships?

Study significance

Although romantic relationships are common in adolescence, public health studies rarely explore how these romantic relationships function and how such functioning shapes sexual health outcomes. This is concerning because it means that researchers do not fully comprehend the dynamics and characteristics of romantic relationships, how they function, the factors that drive sexual decision-making in these relationships, and their role in decision-making processes that drive SRH, HIV, and IPV.

In romantic relationships adolescents may start engaging in sexual intercourse, making it important to understand the operations of adolescent romantic relationships. Romantic relationships are an important context in which sexual decision-making, which ultimately shapes SRH outcomes, including HIV are made. Researching young adolescent men's SRH, HIV, and IPV attitudes and practices without taking into consideration the romantic relationship as an important factor in shaping these public health issues misses important aspects of romantic relationships that can improve our understanding of SRH, HIV, and IPV outcomes in adolescence. Gender is an

important factor in heterosexual romantic relationships. The study adopts Judith Butler's gender performativity approach, which argues that gender is a result of how individuals construct and understand the behaviour they are socialised into and expected to adhere to (Butler, 1990). The gender in which adolescents are socialised can teach them about emotional regulation, gender equality, sexual negotiation, and the negotiation of conflict, all of which may shape attitudes around IPV, HIV, and SRH. Adolescent heterosexual romantic relationships must be prioritised and contextualised to understand how gender and power function to shape sexual decision-making and IPV. Reyes et al. (2016) contend that young adolescent men may be a crucial population to target in the prevention of IPV. A focus on young adolescent men may be particularly important because in South Africa they have been described as the main perpetrators of IPV and adolescent girls as the primary victims of IPV (Peitzmeier et al., 2016). In South Africa, multiple factors shape men's perpetration of violence, but these are not limited to masculine norms, alcohol and substance abuse and the lingering effects of colonisation and apartheid (Vetten & Ratele 2013; Ratele, 2008)

Power and gender are not the only factors at play in romantic relationships, love, whether real or assumed is a characteristic of romantic relationships. This study highlights how love, gender, and power intersect to produce particular outcomes in adolescent romantic relationships. The study uses masculinities theories to understand power, particularly young adolescent men's power and dominance over their romantic partners in romantic relationships, their health behaviours and their attitudes towards violence (Jewkes et al., 2015). Masculinities are a combination of socially constructed beliefs about men's performance of their roles (Bell et al., 2014). Through socialisation, males perform learned ideas and roles associated with acceptable ways of being a man within the romantic relationship contexts. By focusing on the affective qualities of heterosexual romantic relationships, the study showcases how young adolescent men perform gender roles learned from their broader context, while simultaneously challenging or reinforcing these roles. This complexity leaves young adolescent men ambivalent and vulnerable, exposing

how the process of negotiating masculinities is fraught with emotional turmoil that these young adolescent men do not always know how to navigate.

There may be multiple public health benefits to understanding adolescent heterosexual romantic relationships. A closer look at the heterosexual romantic relationship context can inform our understanding of what these relationships are like, how they work, what young adolescent men want from these relationships, what happens in the relationship, decision-making, including sexual decisions made in the relationship, how young adolescent men may enact masculine norms and how doing so impacts the functioning of the relationship. The study highlights how young adolescent men's sexual practices and their perceptions of the risk of HIV, STIs, and their attitudes towards IPV are located in and influenced by the romantic relationship context. Romantic relationships may thus be an entry point for SRH, HIV, and IPV programming and interventions.

This chapter provided an overview of the problem, defining the problem, and the romantic relationship context as key variables of interest in the study. The literature cited in this chapter highlights how the problem, which is young adolescent men and romantic relationships is perceived and written about in research and how such a focus has resulted in the overshadowing of this population. The following chapter is an in-depth review of the literature on some of the public health issues faced by young adolescent men. It starts by providing a snapshot of how adolescent romantic relationships have been conceptualised in literature, a review of the literature on the influence of peers in dating and the initiation, development, and progression of adolescent relationships. Following this, the chapter provides an overview of adolescents' SRH, including HIV, STIs, and IPV-related health issues. While these may not be the only health issues faced by adolescents, these are urgent public health issues confronting adolescents in South Africa. These issues are also more likely to unfold in the context of romantic relationships. In addition, literature on gender and love is reviewed to give an understanding of how adolescents experience these issues in heterosexual romantic relationships and in the broader context in which they are

embedded. Finally, masculinities theories as the theoretical framework of the study are discussed. Adolescents are a diverse group with unique needs and the research presented in the literature review section is not meant to homogenise adolescents but seeks to show some of the urgent public health issues that adolescents are faced.

Thesis chapter overview

Chapter 1: *Introduction* - This chapter introduces the problem statement and justifies why the focus of the study is on heterosexual romantic relationships and young adolescent men's SRH, HIV, and IPV-related outcomes. The chapter also provides the overall aims of the study.

Chapter 2: *literature review* - The chapter introduces the research background, and relevant literature in the field of adolescence, specifically focusing on sexual and reproductive health (SRH), HIV, and intimate partner violence (IPV). The chapter also discusses masculinities theories and how these theories might shape young adolescent men's behaviour in romantic relationships.

Chapter 3: *Methodology* - Describes the research and describes the study setting, study design, and methods. The chapter also details the sample of the study, participant recruitment, data collection process, and the process of data analysis which involved the use of thematic analysis and discourse analyses. Finally, the chapter discusses the ethical considerations, a justification for the application of parental consent waiver, and the limitations of the research as well as the researcher's reflexivity.

Chapter 4: *You are not a man, boy* – This chapter explores young adolescent men's experiences of heterosexual romantic relationships and their engagements with gender and masculinities in these relationships. The chapter sets the foundation for – young adolescent men's engagement with gender norms and expectations, power struggles, and the question of IPV, while simultaneously having to navigate other aspects of the romantic relationship, such as love, sex, and their SRH.

Chapter 5: *Mating birds* – young adolescent men’s notions of being a real man were tied to sex. While not completely ignoring elements of risky and harmful sexual behaviours among young adolescent men, this chapter debunks the construction of young adolescent men as merely sexual predators. It seeks to move away from pathologising young adolescent men’s sexual behaviours and the stereotypical thinking that the sexuality of these young adolescent men is inherently risky and therefore, in need of fixing. The chapter pays particular attention to young adolescent men’s understanding of sex, their decision-making processes around sex, how they navigate their sexual worlds as well as the dilemmas presented by engaging in sexual intercourse.

Chapter 6: *The SRH attitudes and practices of young adolescent men* - Sex is not necessarily risky but may expose young adolescent men to poor SRH outcomes, particularly because love might impede young adolescent men from thinking that they are at risk of STIs. The chapter explores young adolescent men’s SRH attitudes and practices. Decision-making and motivations around condom use are explored. This is followed by an exploration of young adolescent men’s perceptions of their risk to HIV and STIs and attitudes around HIV testing. Lastly, young adolescent men’s views on pregnancy prevention are explored.

Chapter 6: *Love and vulnerability* – Young adolescent men’s narratives revealed that there is a link between sex and love. This chapter explores what love looks like in the romantic relationships of young adolescent men. It examines young adolescent men’s experiences of love and desire, their expression of love, and the uncertainties that come with love. The chapter seeks to (a) disrupt the prevailing discourse that constructs young adolescent men as incapable of freely expressing love, draw attention to how love and sex are deeply intertwined and how young adolescent men are invested and committed in love (b) show that young adolescent men may be interested in proving their manhood, by conforming to masculine expectations, they also embrace alternative practices of being a man and experience a variety of vulnerabilities in their romantic relationships.

Chapter 8: *Discussion, implications for the study, and conclusion* - This chapter provides a discussion and conclusion on young adolescent men's experiences of romantic relationships and how these romantic relationships shape these young adolescent men's SRH, HIV, and intimate partner violence (IPV) related attitudes and practices. The findings of the study are used to draw up study implications. The limitations of the study are also discussed.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Adolescence is a phase where major changes in health and health-related behaviours occur, which may impact health outcomes later in life (Frost, 2013). This phase is a good time to intervene as it presents an opportunity for adolescents to learn healthy skills early, which may hopefully advance their general well-being and health outcomes (Farahani, 2020). The importance of intervening early in adolescence is critical now more than ever due to the increasing number of sexually active adolescents (Farahani, 2020). In some African contexts, some proverbs speak to the importance of intervening early and shifting behaviours. In South Africa, the Nguni - a combination of three tribes - Swati, Zulu, and Xhosa tribes - of South Africa - have a proverb that goes “*lugotshwa lusemanzi*”, which means one cannot bend a stick when it is dry. There is also a Swahili saying, “*samaki mkunje angali mbichi*”, which means bend a fish when it is not yet dry – it is too late later. During adolescence behaviours and beliefs may get established and consolidated, as such, intervening early and shifting behaviours that may expose adolescents to poor SRH outcomes, including HIV infection and IPV may be crucial in improving the health and well-being of adolescents.

Defining romantic relationships in adolescence

This section does not seek to impose a definition of adolescent romantic relationships but simply seeks to highlight how adolescent romantic relationships have been conceptualised in research. It seems South African, and perhaps African scholars in general have placed less emphasis on defining romantic relationships in adolescence. Bhana has been instrumental in unpacking romantic love in the lives of adolescents in South Africa, KwaZulu-Natal. However, her work does not provide a working definition of what romantic relationships are. Also, emerging scholars in South Africa are increasingly focusing on emotions and the affective worlds of young adolescent men (Hamlall, 2018; Dlamini, 2023; Manyapeelo, 2018). Similarly, while these scholars have done a great job at unpacking the emotional affection/feelings of young adolescent men in South Africa, they do not offer a conceptualisation of romantic relationships in their work.

Perhaps South African scholars have not defined romantic relationships to let the findings of their studies speak for themselves. After all, conceptions of romantic relationships vary significantly in South Africa. For example, in a recent study among young adolescent men in KwaZulu-Natal, Manyapelo et al. (2019) borrow from Furman, a US scholar as they think about adolescent romantic relationships. Even in doing so, Manyapelo and colleagues are cognizant of the fact that Furman's definition of adolescent romantic relationships is not universal and as such not true for all adolescents. For example, in their study, Manyapelo introduced the idea of polygamous romantic relationships, which shifted from the dyad approach by Furman. Indeed, in KwaZulu-Natal polygamy remains rife as such, young adolescent men may aspire to polygamous romantic relationships.

Also making it hard to define romantic relationships in South Africa is the continued cultural practice of *ukuthwala*. *Ukuthwala* is a cultural practice wherein young women are abducted by young men and forced into a romantic relationship/marriage (Makho, 2009). Although South African scholars have raised concerns about the practice, it remains rife, particularly in rural areas of the country (Mwambene & Mqidlana, 2021). Arranged marriages, which continue to be practised in South Africa, particularly among the Vhavenda (an ethnic group mainly found in the Limpopo province of South Africa) further make the idea of having a definition of romantic relationships a challenge (Raphalalani & Musehane, 2013).

Work by US scholar Furman has been instrumental in understanding adolescent romantic relationships (Furman et al., 1999; Furman & Shomaker, 2008). According to Furman et al. (1999), romantic relationships are ongoing dyad associations and interactions that are entered voluntarily between two individuals who acknowledge that they love and care for one another, whether the interactions are short or long-term. These relationships are also characterized by emotions and passion, including sexual attraction, sometimes manifested by physical contact, such as kissing and engaging in pleasurable sexual intercourse or anticipated sexual intercourse.

A justification for the exclusion of 10 – 13-year-old adolescents

Romantic relationships may start early in adolescence (10 – 13 years) and these are considered important for the development of this age group. However, these relationships are largely social and less intimate (Diamond et al., 2015). For example, though younger adolescents may start getting curious about their bodies, exhibit interest in sex, and may start engaging in romantic relationships, sex is uncommon among this population. South African literature shows that the majority of young adolescents, in general, experience sexual debut at 14 years (Fisher, 2004; Jaspan et al., 2006; Pettifor et al., 2005) while sexual debut for males is 15 years (Richter et al., 2015). Although there may be very young adolescents who are having sex, South African studies show that there is a small proportion of adolescents younger than 14 years old who are having sex (Ahanhanzo et al., 2018; Gevers et al., 2012). Other studies show that in sub-Saharan Africa, for most 10 – 13-year-olds who are having sex, such sex is happening in the context of child marriage (Liang et al., 2019). This means that romantic relationships in younger adolescents may be conceptualised differently from those of young adolescent men (14-19 years) and that there may be social and cognitive differences in the romantic relationships between younger adolescents and young adolescent men.

The fact that the majority of 10 – 13-year-olds are not having sex means that they cannot be part of this study. This is because this study is interested in young adolescent men's experiences of romantic relationships and how these shape their SRH attitudes and practises. In order for potential participants to effectively contribute to this study, they would, in addition to dating experience need to have sexual experience – although we appreciate that not all 14 – 19-year-olds are having sex.

Initiation, development, and progression of romantic relationships in adolescence

The initiation and courtship process of a romantic relationship is referred to as *ukushela* in Nguni languages. In South Africa, despite an increase in studies that explore love, fewer studies have explored how romantic relationships are initiated and how young adolescent men navigate and experience *ukushela* (Dlamini, 2023). Of the studies that have explored the initiation of romantic relationships, these show that largely, male partners are expected to *shela* (Gevers et al., 2012). Part of the process of *ukushela* is males taking pride in showcasing their persuasive skills when asking a girl to date them (Zibane, 2021). For other scholars, the idea that males should *shela* highlights power dynamics in heterosexual relationships where males are seen as sexually active while girls are deemed sexually passive (Aggleton et al., 2018; Renold, 2018). However, gender norms around *ukushela* are questioned by some South African scholars who contend that history shows that females have been central in *ukushela* and had the agency to choose a partner as opposed to passively waiting to be chosen by a partner (Hunter, 2005; Vilakazi, 1962). A recent study in KwaZulu-Natal shows that indeed *ukushela* may be undergoing some shifts wherein adolescent girls are challenging the view that *ukushela* is only reserved for young adolescent men (Zibane, 2021).

While South African scholars have made no efforts to document the initiation, development and progression of romantic relationships, scholars from the US have sought to understand and describe how romantic relationships develop and progress during adolescence (Collins et al., 2009; Furman et al., 1999). Collins identified five adolescent relationship dimensions (Collins et al., 2009).

Five dimensions of romantic relationships in adolescence	
Romantic involvement	Refers to being in a relationship, when dating began, and the duration and frequency of relationships.
Partner identity	Refers to the types of people adolescents date or prefer to date.
Relationship content	Refers to the activities that the couple chooses to or not to engage in as a couple.
Relationship quality	Refers to adolescents' positive, supportive, or beneficial experiences of relationships.
Cognitive and emotional processes	Refers to how one views and represents oneself, their partner and the romantic relationship in general. This dimension also captures feelings and emotions that arise as a result of the relationship.

Reading these five dimensions of romantic relationships in adolescence requires an appreciation of the role of the socio-cultural environment in which adolescents live. Such context determines the normal development of romantic relationships, what may be considered abnormal, and may determine whether adolescent dating is permitted. The proposed five dimensions above may not be true in some African contexts, where arranged marriage is common and in these societies, adolescents might not have the freedom to choose the type of partners they prefer to date, as parents and the family might be responsible for choosing a partner (Sam, 2009). Also, the manner in which romantic relationships in arranged marriages develop, and progress may differ from the framework proposed by Collins.

Other researchers from the US, such as Connolly et al. (2014) have also sought to explain how adolescent romantic relationships develop and progress. The scholars argue that adolescent romantic relationships progress in a phased manner, that is, from group interactions to more dyad interactions. They identify four stages of progression,

- I. The initiation phase is characterised by key feelings such as attraction and desire directed at a potential partner, with limited physical interaction.
- II. During the affiliation phase, group setting interactions comprise adolescent boys and girls, thus, offering adolescents an opportunity to interact and meet possible partners.
- III. The intimate phase is characterised by the establishment of a relationship between two individuals, and they begin to detach from the larger peer group to focus on their emotions as a new couple.
- IV. The committed phase is where the couple invests in their intimacy (emotional and physical), displaying care for one another and serving as attachment figures.

While Connolly and colleagues' characterisation of adolescent romantic relationships is important in understanding how adolescent romantic relationships form and progress, the suggested progression pattern may not be true for adolescents in different contexts and may even vary for different adolescents (Connolly et al., 2004). For example, some adolescents might follow Connolly and colleagues' suggested progression of romantic relationships while some adolescents may develop feelings of attraction and desire through interacting in group settings, thus experiencing the affiliation phase before the initiation phase. This means that adolescents may not always be able to say how and when their relationships started (Viejo et al., 2013). Similarly, while Connolly and colleagues' framework might be important in our understanding of how adolescent romantic relationships may progress, the framework might not work in other contexts.

The role of peers in adolescents' romantic relationships

Peers may provide support and guidance in navigating the intricacies of romantic relationships, however, there is conflicting data in different contexts on the exact role of peers in adolescent romantic relationships. South African scholars argue that in the absence of positive sex education, peers and the media, including social media can be trusted sources of pubertal and sexual information, thus influencing adolescents' sexuality-related decisions (Malinga & Ratele, 2016; Sieving et al., 2006). US studies show that peers can have a positive role by offering emotional support when adolescents experience victimisation in romantic relationships (Weisz et al., 2007). However, other US scholars maintain that adolescent peer relationships do not always provide positive experiences. For example, peers are also capable of spreading false information, leading to arguments and violence between the peer couple (Baker, 2017). The view that peers do not always offer positive experiences in romantic relationships is also reported by Dutch scholars who argue that romantic relationships that deflect from peer norms may experience more conflict than those that adopt peer norms (van Zantvliet et al., 2018).

Studies with a specific focus on young adolescent men report on the influence of peers highlighting young adolescent men's increased susceptibility to peer pressure when it comes to sexual intercourse. A study done among young adolescent men in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, found that peer pressure to propose love to multiple women was an acceptable practice among young adolescent men, often leading to multiple concurrent sexual partners (Manyaapelo et al., 2019). The practice of polygamy is common in KwaZulu-Natal, so young adolescent men might propose love to multiple women based on the widespread acceptability of polygamy in their contexts. When young adolescent men do not succumb to such pressure and opt to reject traditional masculine norms, they may be subjected to bullying and mockery (Brozo et al., 2002). Similarly, young adolescent men's failure to comply with dominant masculine norms may result in social exclusion (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2006). Young adolescent men may thus adopt certain behaviours due to fear of social exclusion and harassment by peers and sometimes by adolescent girls.

However, not all young adolescent men succumb to peer influence. Young adolescent men in a South African study were found to reject and negotiate dominant markers of heterosexuality within their given social contexts (Bhana & Chen, 2020; Frosh et al., 2003). Other South African scholars such as Bhana and Chen (2020) report on how young adolescent men forged new ways of being by rejecting violent behaviour and engaging in cross-gender friendships. This finding is consistent with other findings in South Africa, which report that young adolescent men exhibit and embrace multiple positions of masculinities to be accepted by their peers (Langa, 2020; Ratele et al., 2007).

Considering the influence of peers on adolescents, perhaps peer-led approaches may be used to foster positive change. In some African contexts, evidence shows that peer-led strategies are not effective (Mason-Jones et al., 2013; Mason-Jones et al., 2011), while some show that peer-led strategies are effective (Akuiyibo et al., 2021; Gebreyohanes et al., 2015). Despite the contradicting evidence, adolescents continue to rely on their peers for information and support on dating and sex (Mabuie, 2020). Programmers may need to find ways to incorporate peer-led strategies in offering reliable and up-to-date sexual information. The success of peer-led programmes is grounded on the notion that it is easy to share sensitive sexual information among people of the same age group (Mabuie, 2020). In addition to peers, both in historical and contemporary times, certain African societies have formal structures established to teach sexuality-related information to adolescents and these are discussed in the section below.

Adolescents learning about dating and sexuality

African societies have different cultural and traditional beliefs and practices intended to impart principles about sexuality and lay a foundation for what may be considered safe and meaningful transitions (Mudhovozi et al., 2012). Historically, African societies selected respectful and recognised adults who are responsible for educating adolescents about what this new phase means and what is expected of them as they start assuming some adult roles (Mudhovozi et al., 2012). In South Africa, *mangwane* (maternal aunt) among the Sotho and *vhMakadzi* (paternal aunt) among

the Venda are responsible for teaching girls about sexual matters (Ramathuba, 2015). In Uganda, it is the responsibility of *ssengas*, (paternal aunts) to educate adolescents about their sexuality and expected roles (de Haas & Hutter, 2019) whereas, in Tanzania, *somo* (old knowledgeable, and respected women) are responsible for socialising young girls until such time that they get married (Mudhovozi et al., 2012).

Despite some African societies having experienced adults teaching adolescents about sexuality, recently, in some of these societies, there has been a concerning silence around adolescent sexuality (Li et al., 2018). In South Africa, and other African countries, cultural norms that deem sexual communication between adults and adolescents are used as a justification for this silence (Reed et al., 2011). Regardless of this silence, some cultural practices that have a bearing on adolescents' SRH outcomes remain prevalent in some African countries. For example, in South Africa, customary practices, such as *ulwaluko* (traditional circumcision) among the Xhosa are an important rite of passage into manhood. Although there seems to be a growing critique of traditional male circumcision due to the deaths of young men (Douglas et al., 2017; Mdhului et al., 2020). *Ulwaluko* has been the primary mode of educating young adolescent men about sexuality and what it means to be a man (Mudhovozi et al., 2012). For young females, the cultural practice of *inkciyo* among the Xhosa and *umhlanga* among the AmaZulu, both referring to virginity testing remains prevalent. Virginity testing is said to encourage and enforce abstinence from sexual intercourse (Mokwena & Morabe, 2016). Like traditional circumcision, this cultural practice has also received a lot of criticism. Some scholars argue that the practice suppresses girls' sexualities, leading to unequal gender relations and sexual double standards (Matswetu & Bhana, 2018). The practice has also been criticised for policing young women while the same is not done for young adolescent men. Further, the public nature of the ceremony has been linked to negative stigma among girls who have "lost" their virginity (Durojaye, 2016).

The relevance of traditional forms of socialising adolescents may have been disrupted by the establishment of sex education in schools (Parikh, 2016). South Africa introduced comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) (referred to as Life Skills in primary school and Life Orientation in secondary schools) in 2000 and learners start receiving CSE in grade four up until grade 12 (Ngabaza, 2022). CSE was introduced as a response to the high rates of HIV/AIDS, child rape and unwanted and unplanned teenage pregnancies (Department of Basic Education, 2019). The aim of CSE was thus “to equip young people with the appropriate knowledge, skills, and values necessary for self-fulfilment and meaningful participation as citizens of a free country” (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 4). The department developed Scripted Lesson Plans (SLP) to standardise the provision of CSE and assist educators in teaching scientifically accurate, evidence-informed, incremental, age-appropriate, and culturally appropriate content.

From a public health point of view, a standardised and state-facilitated approach to teaching adolescents about sexuality-related issues might seem progressive (Ramírez-Villalobos et al., 2021). However, in South Africa, the introduction of CSE has resulted in anxiety among parents and the larger community due to the belief that sex education offered in schools is inappropriate for children (Koch & Wehmeyer, 2021). The anxiety around this can also be seen in teacher’s reluctance to deliver CSE. South African teachers may have difficulty reconciling their values with those of CSE and this impacts their teaching (Francis, 2013). Similar findings on educators’ disconnect between the content of CSE and their cultural and religious beliefs are reported in Asia and other African countries (Chirawu et al., 2014; Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2016).

In addition to the pushback from parents and teachers, CSE has been criticised for its emphasis on the danger, risk, and disease approach, which focuses on HIV and pregnancy prevention and seeks to restrict adolescents’ sexuality (Francis, 2013; Glover & Macleod, 2016). The danger, risk, and disease approach might educate adolescents about some aspects of sex, but it fails to acknowledge adolescents’ holistic development, including the development of positive romantic relationships.

While the danger, risk, and disease approach has its pitfalls, this approach has broadened our understanding of the prevalence, incidence, and some of the factors shaping adolescent SRH outcomes, HIV, and IPV. Current knowledge around the SRH, HIV, and IPV of adolescents is a result of this approach. The following section reviews the literature on adolescent SRH, HIV, and IPV with a specific focus on these matters as it pertains to young adolescent men.

Adolescents' sexual and reproductive health

Sex is an essential part of healthy human development and is not necessarily risky (Tolman & McClelland, 2011). However, as adolescents enter romantic relationships and start exploring sexually, they may be exposed to sexual risks such as HIV and STIs, resulting in poor SRH outcomes. The decrease in the age of sexual debut among young adolescent men has been shown to increase their vulnerability to HIV risk and other poor SRH outcomes (Richter et al., 2015) and this is corroborated by findings from the US (Bell & Garbers, 2019; Li et al., 2018). To improve the SRH outcomes of adolescents, they need timely access to SRH information, support, and services (Denno et al., 2015). Yet, in many contexts, SRH efforts directed toward young adolescent men are minimal (Bell et al., 2013; Bell & Garbers, 2019; Clowes, 2013; Svanemyr et al., 2015). A recent scoping review also shows that SRH interventions for young adolescent men continue to be rare worldwide (Sawalma et al., 2023). This is not a new issue, twenty-seven years ago, Mbizvo and Bassett (1996) noted the importance of understanding the SRH of both males and females in sub-Saharan Africa, stating that positive SRH outcome is a dual commitment. Varga (2002) reviewed programmes and research focusing on males in sub-Saharan Africa and the findings showed that less is known about males' SRH, referring to them as the missing 50% in SRH work.

Recently scholars in Africa have also raised concerns about the neglect of young adolescent men in SRH and HIV research (Askari et al., 2020; Mantell et al., 2020; Svanemyr et al., 2015). Other scholars in the US support this argument, maintaining that young adolescent men make up half of the problem and ignoring this population is ignoring half of the solution (Askari et al., 2020; Bell

& Garbers, 2019; Claussen, 2019). Literature in South Africa shows that young adolescent men are more vulnerable to HIV and poor SRH outcomes due to the decreasing age of sexual debut (Kushal et al., 2022; Richter et al., 2015). Poor SRH efforts – through programming and interventions – directed at young adolescent men may send the message that SRH is not a concern for young adolescent men and may excuse them from taking responsibility for their SRH outcomes. This may be problematic because, in romantic and sexual relationships, young adolescent men are part of important sexual decision-making, including condom use (Gibbs et al., 2022). As such, their SRH attitudes and practices should be explored and understood, to capacitate them with appropriate and safe sexual decision-making capabilities. Indeed, Svanemyr emphasises the need for more increased focus on young adolescent men, arguing that whereas the focus on girls is necessary, there is also a need to “strengthen programmatic research for creating enabling environments for boys’ SRH in their own right as well as in promoting gender-equitable attitudes and relationships with girls” (Svanemyr et al., 2015, p. 13).

In South Africa, current efforts to teach adolescents about sex to improve SRH outcomes include CSE in school. The CSE curriculum aims to offer adolescents accurate and up-to-date SRH information, yet teachers are reluctant to speak to learners, instead, they rely on the risk, danger, and death approach (Francis, 2013; Glover & Macleod, 2016). “The emphasis on risk, danger, death, and disease as key pathways into the sexual worlds of teenage Africans is a limiting exercise” (Bhana, 2017a, p. 37). While this approach might have worked in cautioning adolescents about HIV, such an approach also pathologises, silences, and undermines adolescents’ sexuality (Renold, 2018).

HIV prevalence among adolescents

There is a link between poor SRH outcomes and HIV (Akutukwasa et al., 2019; Crankshaw et al., 2016; Hopkins & Collins, 2017). South African studies show that the pathways to infection in HIV are similar to broader patterns in SRH (Hopkins & Collins, 2017; Jewkes et al., 2010). Similar

findings are reported in a review that focused on 50 countries (Hopkins & Collins, 2017). Heterosexual relationships are seen as the major driver of HIV transmission, where young adolescent men are described as active transmitters of HIV (Jacques-Aviñó et al., 2019; Shubber et al., 2014), making these young adolescent men a critical population in the prevention of HIV (Nicol et al., 2023). Young adolescent men are less vulnerable to HIV compared to adolescent girls. In Southern Africa, 30% of all new infections are among adolescent girls (WHO, 2010), with South Africa having 113,000 new infections (Shisana et al., 2014). Even so, young adolescent men have poor HIV outcomes compared to girls, with HIV being the 4th leading cause of death for young adolescent men in sub-Saharan Africa (Finlay et al., 2020). Also, according to Naidoo et al. (2021), the HIV prevalence among this population is on the rise. This makes the focus on young adolescent men even more critical in the prevention of HIV (Nicol et al., 2023).

The public health response to the evidence that young adolescent men are also affected by HIV is “surprisingly little” (Dovel et al., 2015, p. 2). In South Africa, there are substantial gaps in HIV testing, prevention, and treatment services targeting boys (Hannaford et al., 2020; Makusha et al., 2020). It is not clear why, despite evidence showing that young adolescent men need help to prevent and manage HIV, this population continues to be sidelined. There have been calls to bring on board young adolescent men as allies to AGYW in fighting the scourge of HIV. Boys need tailored programmes and interventions that focus on improving their health and consented efforts targeting young adolescent men could potentially shift current HIV incidence and prevalence rates (Nicol et al., 2023). This is because young adolescent men are still younger and may be more malleable to changing risky sexual behaviours that make them susceptible to HIV risk. Changing these behaviours now may also result in adult men who are not only aware of HIV but also take conscious steps to reduce their risk, and by association, that of their romantic partners. Sommer et al. (2015) use the Swahili saying, “bend a fish when it is not yet dry – it is too late later”, which translates to changing behaviours earlier rather than later.

A UNAIDS (2017) report emphasises the need to address blind spots in the current HIV response. The report highlights the inclusion of young adolescent men and adult men as key in the HIV response, arguing that doing so would result in a triple dividend that will benefit males, their partners, and their families. Although a link between HIV and gender has been made and HIV is described as an important strand in masculinities, specifically African masculinities (Ammann & Staudacher, 2021; Dovel et al., 2015), the continued neglect of young adolescent men in the HIV response highlights a failure to truly understand the impact of gender as a driver of the burden of HIV (Makusha et al., 2020). Perhaps less focus and efforts are directed at young adolescent men because they are not perceived to be part of the populations vulnerable to HIV. Key populations vulnerable to HIV are adolescent girls and young women, men who have sex with men and transgender. Sex workers and people who inject drugs are also classified as key populations vulnerable to HIV (Karim & Baxter, 2019; Murewanhema et al., 2022). Young adolescent men's vulnerability to HIV is not only shaped by masculine norms but also by "differential access to HIV testing and treatment services" (Dovel et al., 2015, p. 3). Opening hours of health facilities, unfair treatment by health workers, and the setting of health facilities, which largely cater to women also influence men's access to health services resulting in low rates of HIV testing and treatment (Dovel et al., 2015; Kaufman et al., 2016). In South Africa, HIV is further driven by cultural norms of "*isithembu*" (polygamy), which may applaud having multiple and concurrent sexual partners (Manyaaapelo et al., 2019).

Although heterosexual relationships have been identified as the major drivers of HIV (Jacques-Aviñó et al., 2019; Shubber et al., 2014), HIV research has paid little attention to heterosexual romantic relationships as an important context within which HIV is likely to be transmitted (Belus et al., 2020; Case et al., 2012). Romantic relationships form the contexts within which adolescents acquire their sexual, including sexual negotiation skills, explore their sexuality and sometimes engage in sexual intercourse (Meier & Allen, 2009). They may be an entry point in understanding young adolescent men's sexual behaviours, the manner in which they enact their masculinities and

try out masculine behaviours in these relationships and how masculinities may shape sexual decision-making and potentially shape young adolescent men's attitudes and practices towards HIV.

Intimate partner violence in the lives of adolescents

Like HIV, IPV occurs in the context of romantic relationships, and studies show that IPV is highly prevalent among the adolescent population (Miller et al., 2017). Studies in different parts of South Africa show that the rate of IPV experienced by young women and perpetrated by young adolescent men is high. Of these studies, the study by Zembe et al. (2015), conducted in a peri-urban area reports the highest prevalence of IPV (80%) and sexual violence (67%). South African studies also show that IPV presents a public health crisis because it is linked with poor SRH outcomes, and HIV, including poor adherence to ART (Grose et al., 2021; Jewkes et al., 2010; Silverman & Raj, 2014). In South Africa, young adolescent men have been described as the main perpetrators of IPV and adolescent girls as the primary victims of IPV (Peitzmeier et al., 2016). As such, Reyes et al. (2016) contend that young adolescent men may be a crucial population to target in the prevention of the onset, escalation, and persistence of dating violence into adulthood. Factors that shape male perpetration of violence have been identified as masculine norms that favour power and dominance over women (Fahlberg & Pepper, 2016; Ratele, 2017). The brutal history of colonialism and apartheid in the case of South Africa has also been used to explain the high rates of male-perpetrated violence. Colonialism and apartheid in South Africa have also been used to explain violent behaviour and the normalisation of such behaviour in the country (Ratele, 2020). Vetten and Ratele (2013, p. 4) contend that “the violence, first of colonisation and then apartheid, has created a particular context in which violence has been made a major element in the management of social relations and conflict in South Africa”. Due to the high rates of violence in South Africa, some scholars have also made a link between general violence and IPV (Kurniawan et al., 2019; Math  y, 2006). For example, exposure to violence at an early age increases the likelihood of violent behaviour among exposed individuals compared to individuals who were not exposed to violence (Burton, 2003; Liu et al., 2018), thus perpetuating a cycle of violence in some

instances. However, the ‘victim to victimiser’ hypothesis is not true for all individuals. Not all people who have experienced violence perpetrate violence.

The majority of IPV research above stems from a male-perpetrator female-victim theoretical paradigm. Adolescents may be both victims and perpetrators of violence (Sui et al., 2020). The exclusive portrayal of young adolescent men as perpetrators of violence reinforces the assumption that they are naturally violent. Recent literature shows that young adolescent men also experience concerning rates of IPV. For example, a study conducted in Malawi found that IPV is common among both male and female adolescents (Kidman & Kohler, 2020). Similar findings are reported by Walker et al. (2020) in Australia. Despite literature showing young adolescent men are also victims of IPV, relatively few studies have explored young adolescent men as victims of IPV. According to Hogan (2016), this is because young adolescent men as victims of IPV is a somewhat controversial topic as they may shy away from assuming the victimhood status. Recent studies in South Africa report on how males who experience IPV feel a sense of failure to meet masculine ideas, resulting in shame and embarrassment, and such feelings have been found to delay or hinder seeking help (Pelowich et al., 2024; Rowlands, 2022).

It may be crucial to tackle IPV early in adolescence as this is a phase where attitudes and norms around violence are formed and may present an opportune time to shift attitudes around IPV. Despite the acknowledgement of IPV as a pressing health and well-being issue, In South Africa, IPV and IPV health-related issues have largely been researched with poor reference to context (Bhana, 2015; Mfecane, 2018). IPV happens in the context of romantic relationships among romantic partners, so it may be crucial to use adolescent romantic relationships as an entry point in the prevention of IPV. This study emphasises the romantic relationship as a context that may be important in understanding IPV. Issues around IPV are gendered and may unfold in the context of ongoing sexual and romantic relationships. An understanding of how young adolescent men perceive, and experience romantic relationships may provide a better understanding of how they

interact with their partners, how decisions are made, and what shapes sexual decision-making and attitudes around power, control, and dominance, which may ultimately shape IPV-related attitudes.

Public health research in South Africa and elsewhere has done a good job of highlighting HIV, SRH, and IPV as some of the urgent public health challenges faced by adolescents. However, much of this research has neglected the affective world of adolescents and how romantic love may shape sexual attitudes, sexual decision-making, and IPV. A focus on romantic relationships characterised by positive love and support has been overshadowed by a focus on problematising sexual relations among black African people (Ruark et al., 2017). Efforts have largely been on the high prevalence of HIV and recently the high prevalence of IPV among adolescents, hence, adolescent sexuality continues to rely heavily on the danger, risk, and damage lens (Bhana, 2013). The problem with this lens is that it neglects ideas around positive sex, pleasure, and sexual rights, thus, missing the opportunity to reshape adolescents' prevailing toxic gender and sexual beliefs and to disrupt existing notions around negotiation and intimacy in romantic relationships. To improve programmes aimed at enhancing adolescents' sexuality, a thorough understanding of adolescent romantic love, pleasure, and power dynamics in romantic relationships is necessary (Bhana, 2016; Glover & Macleod, 2016).

Narratives around love

The emphasis on HIV among African people has overshadowed romantic love. Scholars in South Africa and those doing work in Africa have been vocal about this, maintaining that public health research continues to detach sexuality from love and emotions (Bhana, 2017a; Cole & Thomas, 2009; Ruark et al., 2017). Love is a universal social construct and the social, cultural, and religious ideas shape individuals' meaning of platonic and romantic love (Cavanagh, 2007; Giordano et al., 2010; Suleiman & Harden, 2015). Romantic love manifests in multiple ways and serves different purposes for different people and different cultures have varying definitions of love, which shape individuals' experiences and expression of love (Beall & Sternberg, 1995). Some people love those

who share the same gender or sexual identity as them, while others prefer to be in romantic relationships with people of the opposite gender.

Issues concerning romantic love among black Africans are rarely explored (Hunter, 2010). According to Cole and Thomas (2009), this is a result of slavery and colonialism that depicted African sexuality as hypersexual and savage and thus lacking emotional intimacy and love. African scholars such as Ruark et al (2017) and Tamale (2011) argue that such views have largely resulted in the positioning of black African people's sexualities as immoral, lustful, and exotic (Ruark et al., 2017; Tamale, 2011). Bhana (2017a) contends that the idea of love among black African people as an anomaly is misleading and serves to preserve racist ideas about Africa.

In instances where social science, humanities, and public health explore romantic love, such exploration tends to focus on the materiality of love. Talks about love, sex, and romantic relationships concerning African people, in particular, sub-Saharan Africa, often involve money and gifts as an exchange for sex and this has been identified as a driving factor for HIV (Kilburn et al., 2018). Several studies report on how common it is for AGYW in sub-Saharan Africa to have sex for money (Ehrhardt et al., 2009; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; Maman et al., 2000). For Hunter (2010) the reality is that in a context such as South Africa, characterised by poverty, social dislocation, and economic inequalities, love cannot be read in isolation from social dependencies. While concerns about the negative health consequences linked to having sex for money and other material benefits are justified (Nobelius et al., 2010), particularly in the age of HIV, research in Africa shows that offering gifts and money in relationships is a representation of love and devotion (Moore et al., 2007; Poulin, 2007). The view that money and gifts only serve as compensation for sex or even to coerce women to have sex misses the opportunity to understand the symbolic expression of love among young people. Such a missed opportunity may result in a mismatch between what adolescents need and the proposed programmes and interventions targeted at this population.

Love and gender

Often narratives around love tend to focus on love as a feminine trait. While a focus on love may be crucial in understanding the operation of gender relations (Bhana, 2017a), young adolescent men are largely socialised to suppress their emotional vulnerability and weakness and have been described as lacking emotional intimacy and communication in romantic relationships (Malinga & Ratele, 2018; Scheff, 2003). However, there is a shift in discourses around young adolescent men and love, with studies showing that boys' relationships are based on care, compromise, agency, and an increased likelihood of equality. Emerging research in South Africa with young adolescent men gives a more complex picture, showing AGYMs' vulnerability, desire for intimacy, and companionship in romantic relationships (Dlamini, 2023; Hamlall, 2018; Shefer et al., 2015). Young adolescent men also experience ambivalence, insecurities, and vulnerabilities about issues of love and romantic relationships (Randell et al., 2015; Shefer et al., 2015) and South African studies report that young adolescent men fell in love earlier and more often than girls, despite perceptions that girls fall in love faster than young adolescent men (O'Sullivan, 2005; Wood et al., 1998). In recent studies, South African scholars Dlamini (2023), Hamlall (2018) and Manyapelo et al. (2019) focused exclusively on young adolescent men, and findings from these studies show how young adolescent men are invested in love and negotiate their identities in romantic relationships while straddling between masculinities.

This move is consistent with work by McCormack and Anderson (2010) in the United Kingdom (UK), where they report that young adolescent men were not ridiculed or considered less of a man for expressing their physical tactility and emotional intimacy. Similarly, studies in the US are increasingly challenging narratives around what young adolescent men may or may not want in relationships. A study among adolescents aged 13 – 15 years shows that despite adolescent boys being characterised as wanting sex, the desires of most of these adolescent boys went beyond wanting sex, instead, they expressed the desire for emotional connection (Tolman et al., 2004). Another US study with young adolescent men aged 14 to 16 years reported that these young

adolescent men in the study sought and desired care, intimacy, and trust in romantic relationships (Giordano et al., 2006).

Love has been described as an influential force in altering gender inequalities and toxic gender roles in romantic relationships (Deutsch, 2007). Similar sentiments are expressed by Bhana (2013), who argues that efforts to tackle gendered hierarchies and sexual violence could potentially be strengthened by paying attention to love, affection, and the positives of romantic relationships. Focusing on love is not to deny that young adolescent men can be violent towards their partners and other men, it simply provides a holistic picture and challenges the narrative which seeks to reduce romantic relationships as a context where sex is the only focus and a risky activity, where men have all-encompassing power over women (Dlamini, 2023; Motimele, 2021).

Masculinities theories

Adolescence presents an important dimension of gender, during this phase, adolescents start displaying gender norms, attitudes, and roles acquired during socialisation in their early years as children (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2018). This study uses theories related to masculinities to understand how young adolescent men's meanings and experiences of being in a romantic relationship shape their HIV, SRH, and IPV-related practices and attitudes. Also, theories relating to masculinities may offer insights into how gender roles and norms manifest in young adolescent men's heterosexual romantic relationships and may help think about young adolescent men's motivations and meanings in these relationships.

Gender is socially constructed, performed differently in different contexts and cultures, and is integral to how individuals think, behave, and perform their roles in any given society (Graaff & Heineken, 2017). Children are socialised through play whereby they acquire skills to interpret and understand their roles as expected by society (Perez-Felkner, 2013). They are socialised into

specific gender ideas, which shape and frame their behaviours based on their gender (Sawyer et al., 2012). Largely, in contemporary societies, young adolescent men continue to be socialised to adopt stereotypical attitudes related to manhood, wherein they are taught, at a young age to dominate spaces at family, community, and societal levels and to defend and affirm their manhood (Mora, 2012). Also, modern societies continue to fall into the trap of allowing young adolescent men more sexual freedom, they can express their sexuality and sexual curiosity with no boundaries or fewer boundaries from society, while girls face pressure not to show interest in sex (Watson et al., 2013).

It is not that female children cannot assume masculine roles or roles reserved for males, but the social construction of gender means that in many societies, certain roles are reserved for the performance of either males or females. In a society where manhood is associated with strength, power, bravery, and dominance, male children may be socialised and expected to embrace these characteristics while female children are discouraged. In this sense, gender thus becomes a social construct in which children are taught or learn vicariously to perform their gender. Judith Butler, well known for her thoughts on gender performativity has argued that gender is not humanity's innate trait, rather it is a result of how individuals construct and understand the behaviour they are expected to adhere to (Butler, 1990). Gender is therefore "the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory frame, which congeal overtime to produce the appearance of the substance of a 'natural' kind of being" (Butler, 1990, p. 33). However, these distinct ideas of how males and females behave are not clear and gender performativity is not fixed. Instead, there are huge variations in how adolescents perform their gender (Macleod, 2016). Also, there is an increase in young people who reject society's expectations of how males and females perform their gender (Randell et al., 2015; Shefer et al., 2015). Notwithstanding this rejection and despite resistance by gender activists and some young people, many societies continue to enforce binary ways of being male or female (Hentschel et al., 2019).

According to Connell, masculinity is a gender identity specific to male persons (Connell, 2000). It is a combination of socially constructed beliefs about males' performance of their roles (Bell et al., 2013). Masculinity and what it means to be a man is not stable, to cater to the varying forms of being a man, plurality, and fluidity of masculinity, Connell (2000) argues that we ought to speak of masculinities. There seems to be a consensus that masculinities are context-specific positions that males occupy, such positions are largely influenced by the practices and values of a given context and as such differ from one context to the other (Vijlbrief et al., 2020).

Gender is an important factor in heterosexual romantic relationships with serious implications for sexual decision-making and sexual negotiation (Edin et al., 2016; Graham & Mphaphuli, 2018; Manyapelo et al., 2019). Within these romantic relationships, gender becomes a key construct, shaping individuals' expectations, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and the expression of love (Cavanagh, 2007). Young adolescent men may perform learned ideas and roles associated with acceptable ways of being a man within the romantic relationship, behaving in a manner that affirms their manhood. In contexts where manhood is associated with power and dominance over females, young adolescent men may control when and how sexual intercourse occurs, resulting in female's inability to negotiate safer sex and poor SRH outcomes (Cohen et al., 2003; Connolly & Goldberg, 2014; Viejo et al., 2013). Male power in romantic relationships has received widespread interest among researchers across the board (Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019; Rosenberg et al., 2015; Torrone et al., 2018).

When adolescents enter romantic relationships, they do so within diverse contexts that shape their ideas about romantic relationships, how these relationships function, and the notion of love. Young adolescent men may engage with multiple and complex structures in defining their manhood status, but masculine norms are not always what they desire. Literature in the US and South Africa shows that young adolescent men might subscribe to masculine expectations, while simultaneously embracing alternative practices of being a man (Allen, 2007; Bell et al., 2015; Bhana, 2017a).

South African research further shows that some young adolescent men may seek to move away from traditional masculine norms while some may continue to embrace these norms (Gevers et al., 2012; Graham & Mphaphuli, 2018; Langa, 2020). As such, these young adolescent men may struggle with conforming to and challenging prevailing discourses around what it means to be in a romantic relationship.

In a US study that explored young adolescent men's construction of romantic relationships, the findings show that young adolescent men held two types of positions in romantic relationships, which were intimate (warmth, caring, and emotional availability) and distancing positions (cold and invulnerability) (Korobov & Thorne, 2006). Research in South Africa shows that within adolescent heterosexual romantic relationships, love and intimacy coexist with battles of male dominance and power (Rasool, 2013; Ruark et al., 2017). A study among black young adolescent men in a South African university shows that in heterosexual romantic relationships, these young adolescent men grappled with romance and intimacy while at the same time finding ways to protect and preserve their manhood status (Hamlall, 2018).

Hegemonic masculinities

Although there are multiple forms of masculinities in any given context and time, different contexts also have dominant and most widely accepted forms of masculinities that are considered ideal and which all males should aspire to. These have been referred to as hegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell borrowed the term hegemony from Gramsci to describe the form of masculinities assumed to be normal and preferred within a given society and performances of masculinities that may qualify one to be a “real man” in their context (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Jewkes et al., 2015). Since then, in South Africa, the concept of hegemonic masculinities has been used to explain men’s performance of gender, including their health behaviours and violence (Jewkes et al., 2015).

Although there is no one fixed way of performing the male gender, in many societies, males are often pressured to assume certain performances that are meant to cement their manhood status in society. As young adolescent men seek to forge and maintain their manhood status, they may grapple with the pressure to perform in ways that maintain their aspirations of hegemonic masculinities and earn acceptance and respect among peers. In instances where being a man is having power and dominance over females, young adolescent men who do not subscribe to this form of manhood may experience a disconnect between pleasing their peers and forging allegiance and status through the rejection of intimacy, while on the other hand seeking and admiring intimacy in romantic relationships. The desire to abide by contextual ideals of what manhood is may lead to anxiety, especially when young adolescent men seek to affirm their manhood.

The anxiety and fear of not being deemed man enough, in contexts where manhood is associated with power, and dominance over females may lead to violence as young adolescent men might seek to prove and maintain their manhood (Reidy et al., 2015). In their aspirations to attain the ideal form of manhood in a context where sexual risk-taking is characteristic of the way males demonstrate their masculinities, young adolescent men may feel the need to demonstrate and verify their manhood through engaging in risky sexual behaviours (Hamlall, 2018; Ruark et al., 2017; Stern et al., 2015; Tabengwa & Waites, 2019). For example, a study in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, reports that to avoid being labelled as an *isishimane* (sissy) young adolescent men engaged in multiple sexual partnerships (Manyapelolo et al., 2019).

Hegemonic masculinities theories have helped provide insights into the performance of the male gender, yet some African scholars find these theories to be problematic. For example, according to Dery and Ganle (2019), “for many critical men’s studies theorists in Africa the notion of gender hegemony is a very slippery and unsustainable construct: multiple hegemonies coexist and none may claim absolute cultural legitimacy over others” (p. 85). Perhaps Dery and Ganle (2019) finds the concept of hegemonic masculinities to be problematic because the idea of homogenising

African men might be hard. Ganle and those who question the applicability of hegemonic masculinities in Africa speak of African masculinities, as discussed below.

African masculinities

Masculinities theories as we know them were developed for specific contexts that differ disproportionately from the African context (Connell, 2016). These masculinities theories may offer inadequate accounts of African masculinities and may not be useful in understanding black African boys' behaviour. They are embedded in Global North epistemologies, which, if used to understand young adolescent men in different African countries, may perpetuate the stereotyping of these young adolescent men. Theories in the Global North may perpetuate harmful and racist stereotyping of black young adolescent men in different African countries because they were developed for particular contexts, their use may not be replicable in the African (which differ significantly) or South African context, and doing so may result in findings that do not capture the true essence of young adolescent men in Africa, failing to account for different ways of African beings and the different cultural practices that shape the lived realities of Africans (Mfecane, 2018; Spronk, 2014).

“Theorising is itself a social practice with a politics” (Connell, 1987, p. xi). Such politics may shape how those studied are constructed and may overlook certain features of those studied (Mfecane, 2020). To account for the diversity and complexity of the lives of black males in Africa, there is a need to develop masculinities theories based on African worldviews and lived experiences. Although it might be difficult to find an African lens that will help understand the behaviours of black males in different African countries, an African masculinities lens might offer important and promising ways that may shift the narrative around black African males. African-centred masculinities theories will allow black Africans to speak their truth and lived experiences taking into account all elements – culture, context, and spirituality - that shape their ways of being.

Gender intersects with factors such as class and race. In the context of Africa, slavery and colonialism have left African men destitute, therefore neglecting this history and how it continues to shape the lives of African men today might result in an analysis that lacks depth, thus offering an incomplete description of black African masculinities. The realities of those who were colonised and enslaved differ from the realities of the coloniser, and these are important factors to note without coming across as pejorative. When we do not account for race and class differences, using one lens to understand the realities of these men might offer conflicting and incorrect analyses of their behaviours. To capture the realities of black African males, Mfecane (2018) argues that African scholars ought to develop theories of masculinities based on Africans' realities. African masculinities might bring us closer to Ratele's (2017) argument that there is marginality within hegemony. *Ulwaluko* among the Xhosa, which the study is based on, offers a practical example of how the idea of marginality within hegemony manifests. Within the Xhosa "real" man or *indoda* are those who have undergone *ulwaluko*, (traditional circumcision). However, among the Xhosa, although the most valued and appreciated men are those who have undergone *ulwaluko*, in a group of circumcised males among the Xhosa, men of lower socio-economic status might be marginalised. In this sense, these men are "contesting for hegemony among themselves", thus those who do not meet certain ideals are marginalised (Dery & Ganle, 2019, p. 85).

African-centred masculinities might offer a lens to understand and situate the social conditions and realities of Xhosa males (Mfecane, 2018; Ratele, 2017). Among the Xhosa, *ulwaluko* is not only a vehicle toward manhood but is also a tradition that evokes ancestral protection as one starts the journey toward manhood. An understanding of how ancestors shape male behaviour may offer a nuanced and complex picture of the behaviour of Xhosa males. A small body of research in South Africa reports on the significant influence of ancestors in keeping alive the practice of *ulwaluko* (traditional circumcision) among the Xhosa people (Mdedetyana, 2019; Mpateni & Kang'ethe, 2021; Ntozini & Ngqangweni, 2016). These studies show the link between ancestors, the desire to appease ancestors, or the fear of the wrath of ancestors, a phenomenon that may not be adequately

captured by theories from the Global North. Ntozini and Ngqangweni (2016) contend that one of the significances of *ulwaluko* is to formally introduce young adolescent men to their ancestors and ask for guidance as they enter this new phase of their lives. Perhaps the tradition of *ulwaluko* continues to gain relevance because young adolescent men fear not being introduced to their ancestors and having their guidance. Mdedetyana (2019) in a study conducted in a peri-urban area found that despite a decrease in the significance of *ulwaluko*, young adolescent men still wanted to undergo *ulwaluko* due to the belief that not doing so might anger ancestors and result in lifelong challenges. These findings show that despite many young adolescent Xhosa men being born, growing up, and relocating to urban areas because they link the tradition of *ulwaluko* with ancestors, the tradition remains relevant as they continue to want to adhere to this traditional practice.

African-centred masculinities might also offer a lens to understand and situate the social conditions and realities of Africans around other unseen forces, such as witchcraft, which has been shown to shape people's behaviours. Kunene (2010) and Wilson (2012) report that in some African societies, behaviour may be influenced by witchcraft. In some African contexts, there is a belief that when a man shows warmth, care, and love towards their partner, they are bewitched (Kunene, 2010). Several other scholars report that behaviours – of both males and females - can be ascribed to unseen elements. For example, Parle and Scorgie (2012) talk about *umhayizo* in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *Umhayizo* is when a man uses traditional medicine to bewitch a girl from a distance. The result of this is feeling a “sense of being ‘pulled’, like a magnet, to the home of the (alleged) bewitcher” and losing control over one's body (Parle & Scorgie, 2012, p. 854). Fear of witchcraft has also been found to influence acceptance of interventions in HIV research. For example, (Chitukuta et al., 2019) report that young women in sub-Saharan Africa were sceptical of using the vaginal ring for HIV-1 prevention for fear of being suspected of witchcraft by their partners. The literature shows that certain elements of people's behaviour can be a result of the fear of the brunt of ancestors, while some behaviour is due to witchcraft or may even be a fear of being

bewitched. It may therefore be important to understand aspects of behaviour shaped by these factors to have a fuller and richer understanding of black African males.

In this study, the use of theories relating to masculinities helped to guide the development of data collection tools and to guide the interpretation of the study results. In the analysis of the study results, these theories were helpful in (a) providing tools to unpack the flexibility, fluidity, and multiplicity of young adolescent men's masculinities and (b) identifying and discussing the limitations of employing the concept of hegemonic masculinities in the South African context. Theories relating to masculinities also offered insight into the operation, and social construction of the male gender and an understanding of the way young adolescent men are socialised and how such socialisation might impact how they express and perform their gender in the context of heterosexual romantic relationships. Further, the use of theories relating to masculinities allowed for an exploration of how young adolescent men's gender in the context of romantic relationships influences the way they construct, conform, and challenge gender stereotypes and their expected roles and responsibilities. In this study, I did not use theories of masculinities as a rigid framework guiding the structure of the overall findings. Instead, these theories helped in informing a more fine-grained analysis of the findings.

Conclusion

Heterosexual romantic relationships are gendered and the operations of gender in these relationships may influence SRH, including HIV and IPV outcomes. The chapter offers a brief conceptualisation of romantic relationships in this study and reviews the relevant literature on adolescent romantic relationships, with a particular focus on African adolescents. The chapter specifically zooms into SRH, HIV, and IPV, as some of the issues that may unfold in romantic relationships and offers an overview of the prevalence of these public health issues in the lives of adolescents, particularly, young adolescent men. The silence of love in adolescent research is also discussed, highlighting how the neglect of the role of love in adolescent romantic relationships

obscures a fuller and more nuanced understanding of young adolescent men. Further, the chapter presents masculinities theories as the theoretical framework used in the study, with a particular focus on how love may work to complicate the current understanding of the operations of the male gender. The next chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the research methodology and study design. The chapter details the decision-making processes and motivations for how the study was conducted.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

A qualitative research approach was conducted to explore young adolescent men's experiences of romantic relationships and how the relationship context shapes these young adolescent men's SRH, HIV, and IPV-related attitudes and practices. The aim of using qualitative research is to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, through the exploration of human experience and meaning (Donalek & Soldwisch, 2004; Punch, 2005). It emphasises the “how” and “why” of a phenomenon and how individuals understand and make meaning of their experiences (Mohajan, 2018). Interest is also in providing an in-depth and detailed analysis of individuals' behaviour, attitudes, experiences, and emotions (Austin & Sutton, 2014; Kaae & Traulsen, 2020). Before delving into the study research methods, I provide a brief overview of the setting in which participants who took part in this study resided.

Gugulethu, the study setting

Young adolescent men's beliefs and behaviours regarding romantic relationships are shaped by their socio-cultural and economic context. This study took place in Gugulethu Township; therefore, it is important to provide a brief historical background on Gugulethu and how that history continues to shape the lives of people living in Gugulethu today. Gugulethu translates to “Our Pride” and is among some of the largest townships in Cape Town, South Africa (Vuninga, 2018). The township is situated south-east of Cape Town city, approximately 18 km from the city. Areas for black people, like Gugulethu, were designed outside of the affluent areas, the idea was for these areas to be far enough away to not pose a threat to White people but close enough to provide a workforce when needed.

To enforce segregation, the apartheid government introduced the Population Registration Act of 1950, which served to classify South Africans into four racial categories, that is Africans/blacks

(individuals of African descent), Coloureds (people of mixed race), Indians (people from India or with Asian origin) and whites (people of European descent) (Jansen & Walters, 2020; Moorosi, 2021). Alongside this, the Group Areas Act of 1950 was also introduced, prohibiting the four different races from living together (Moorosi, 2021; Teppo, 2018). Gugulethu was reserved for black people, hence even today, the population is primarily black South Africans, who migrated from the Eastern Cape and other provinces in South Africa (Vuninga, 2018). In South Africa, racial categorisation persists almost two decades after apartheid (Jansen & Walters, 2020). Like many townships in South Africa, Gugulethu was established in 1985 (StatsSA, 2011), after the Native Urban Areas Act in 1923 and the Group Areas Act of 1950.

Gugulethu is not a homogenous community, it is home to many migrants, the majority of whom are from other African countries such as Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Somalia, and Congo. Xhosa is the dominant home language spoken in Gugulethu (Swanepoel et al., 2017). It is therefore important to note that young boys in Gugulethu grow up in a context where multiple cultures exist and interact. Young adolescent men may have different and competing ideas of being a man. The question then becomes, how do young adolescent men in Gugulethu contest, conform, and challenge the masculine ideologies from the different cultures?

Townships in South Africa have high rates of HIV and AIDS, rape, violence, and unplanned teenage pregnancies (Bhana & Mayeza, 2019; Frame et al., 2016). South Africa sits at 11% of the overall HIV prevalence and the HIV prevalence in townships is 21% (Shisana et al., 2005). Informal settlements in South Africa bear “historical inequalities, poverty, poor housing, high unemployment, and violence” exacerbate young people’s vulnerability to HIV (Bhana & Pattman, 2011, p. 962). According to the StatsSA (2001) report unemployment in South African townships is at 45% unemployment (Stats SA, 2001). In Gugulethu more than 55% of the people live below the poverty line (StatsSA, 2011).

Adolescents in Gugulethu experience several, multifaceted and intersecting challenges, including numerous public health concerns. The unemployment and poverty rates are high in Gugulethu and young people experience economic hardships due to a lack of resources and the majority of young people in township contexts experience hardship in achieving financial independence (Bhana & Pattman, 2011). The high unemployment rates in South African townships mean that young people, in particular, young men are left with no choice but to secure part-time or poorly paid jobs, which makes it hard for them to achieve their desires or the societal expectation that they should be providers (Bhana & Pattman, 2011).

The Gugulethu Township is a resource-poor setting and has limited resources to support the development of adolescents and youth. Poor service delivery has resulted in serious sanitation challenges, risking the health of many (Miraftab, 2004). Also, high rates of violence are found in urban informal settlements (Makongoza & Nduna, 2017). Township settings in South Africa are places where violence against women and girls is a consequence of a multiplicity of social factors ranging from history, economic tensions, cultural norms, and male economic weakness, which results in loss of power and the hegemony of male violence (Jewkes & Morrell, 2018). According to the South African Police Service (2018), 166 cases of rape were reported to the South African Police Services.

Gugulethu also has high rates of interpersonal violence (Makanga et al., 2015). In 2018 there were 180 reported murders (South African Police Service, 2018). IPV, with the majority of victims being women is also high in Gugulethu (Makongoza & Nduna, 2017). Benatar (2013) reports that in 2013, the rates of deaths due to violence were high in Gugulethu. The high rates of IPV and violence, in general, could be attributed to poor socioeconomic status and the high prevalence of gangsterism (Vameghi et al., 2017). IPV has serious health implications, including a heightened risk of HIV and poor sexual health (Jewkes et al., 2010). All this influences the high burden of health challenges such as HIV, poor SRH outcomes, and high rates of IPV.

Study population, sampling, and recruitment

Gugulethu has a lot of in-country migration among populations from the nine provinces of South Africa and a high number of migrants from other African countries in search of better living conditions and job opportunities. The study recruited young adolescent men who have lived and called Gugulethu a home for six or more months, despite their origins, yet in the end, only young adolescent men whose parents are from the Eastern Cape (EC) province were part of this study. Also, the study population for this study was young adolescent men aged 14–19 years, who were in a heterosexual romantic relationship or have been in a heterosexual romantic relationship.

Recruitment

I gained entry into Gugulethu and access to young adolescent men through the Movement for Change and Social Justice (MCSJ) and Igugulethu youth, situated in Gugulethu Township, Cape Town. MCSJ is made up of individuals from local NGOs, the University of Cape Town staff from the Division of Social and Behavioural Sciences (DSBS), and Sonke Gender Justice, who are interested in public health issues (Colvin et al., 2020). The movement's focus has been on responding to the health needs of the community of Gugulethu. MCSJ has also established a men's forum, with a specific focus on men and HIV and a range of other gender-transformative activities. Igugulethu Youth was established in 2019. The focus of the organisation is on general human rights, specifically children's rights. The organisation does public awareness about children's rights in schools, churches, and other social platforms in the community. As part of engaging with children and adolescents, the organisation hosts weekend outings.

I held a meeting with the MCSJ team and another with the Igugulethu team to introduce myself and explain the nature of the study. During these meetings, both the MCSJ and Igugulethu Youth gave their support and approval for the study, and both assigned a contact person who would work closely with the researcher. Following this, I together with the contact persons in the respective

movements held brief meetings to ensure that they understood the recruitment needs of the study. The contact persons also used the study pamphlet (Appendix A) to advertise the study in the community. The pamphlet contained information on the study, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the duration of the study as well as the researcher's contact details. All young adolescent men who are part of MCSJ and who met the criteria and were willing to participate were asked to respond via email, a text message, WhatsApp message or to simply inform the management at MCSJ that they were interested in the study.

After the initial meeting, 16 young adolescent men showed interest in the study. I then scheduled a meeting with the young adolescent men. During this meeting, I introduced and explained the aim of the study. I also explained what participation in the study would entail and that those who were willing to take part in the study would first have to sign an informed consent before taking part in any activities in the study. Further, the discussion entailed the study logistics in terms of how the study will unfold, what is expected from participants, and what participants can in turn expect from the researcher.

Young adolescent men had to opportunity to ask for clarification and those who wished to have a private discussion with me were granted the opportunity to do so after the bigger meeting. All COVID-19 safety protocols were strictly adhered to during the meeting. Seating arrangements ensured social distancing; there was no physical contact; masks were provided to all persons entering the venue; windows and doors were kept open at all times to facilitate the flow of air; sanitiser was provided at the door and available to all persons in the venue throughout the meeting; all surfaces such as door handles, tables, and chairs were disinfected before the meeting; all materials such as pens were sanitised before and after use and there was no sharing of pens during the meeting. Young adolescent men who expressed an interest in taking part in the study were

given informed consent forms to take home for them to read and sign. I asked them to take a picture of the informed consent and send it to me once they had read and signed the forms.

Study sampling

I used purposive sampling, wherein I chose young adolescent men with the research goal in mind and based on their experiences of heterosexual romantic relationships (Creswell, 2009; Etikan, 2016). All young adolescent men who were at the first meeting and showed interest in the study were screened for eligibility. The use of purposive sampling involves participants' availability, their willingness to take part in the study and to talk about their experiences on the topic being studied (Etikan, 2016). Additional young adolescent men were recruited through snowball recruitment, whereby some of the 16 young adolescent men who were part of the initial meeting to introduce the study shared the study details with their peers, who showed interest in taking part in the study. Referred young adolescent men who showed interest in the study were given the option to either contact me directly or inform their peers that they were interested in taking part in the study. I contacted and screened all referred young adolescent men to ascertain if they met the study inclusion criteria and were willing to participate for further engagement on what the study is about. This process also involved attaining consent (the study applied for a waiver for parental consent) from young adolescent men to take part in the study. During this process, I also discussed the study's logistics in terms of how the study would unfold, what was expected from them, and what they could expect from me.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The study included young adolescent men aged 14 – 19 years, who had lived in Gugulethu for more than 6 months and therefore were somewhat familiar with the norms around Gugulethu. Only adolescent boys who have experience in heterosexual romantic relationships were included in the study. This was done because the study was interested in young adolescent men's experiences of heterosexual romantic relationships, as such, young adolescent men were included if they were or

had ever been in a heterosexual romantic relationship which may be characterised by different gender dynamics to those of same-gender partners. To ascertain if young adolescent men had been in heterosexual romantic relationships, the study pamphlet asked “*Are you a young adolescent man between the ages 14 – 19 years? We want to hear about your experience of being in a romantic relationship with a girl*” (Appendix A). In the end, all young adolescent men who took part in the study were black, spoke IsiXhosa as a first language, and had lived in Gugulethu since their childhood.

Younger adolescents (10 – 13 years) were excluded from the study because, as indicated earlier the social and cognitive capabilities of younger adolescents differ from those of young adolescent men (14 – 19 years). Also, the dating and sexual behaviours of younger adolescents are different from young adolescent men, who begin to form more stable dyad and sexual romantic relationships (Connolly et al., 2014). Sexual decision-making, including sexual negotiation in romantic relationships, is an important focus of this study, hence younger adolescents, who as shown above are less likely to have sex have been excluded. The study acknowledges that research on young adolescents remains an important area of study. It would be important to understand how these relationships function, how they develop, progress, and are experienced and negotiated. However, this is outside the scope of this study.

Young adolescent men who are married were excluded from the study. This is because the marriage dynamics of married young adolescent men may differ from those who are dating. Also, the social expectations of married young adolescent men might differ from those who are not married. Further, the relationship dynamics between dating and marriage differ significantly. For example, while young adolescent men who are not married might still be fascinated by getting the time and quiet space to spend time with their romantic partners, married young adolescent men on the other hand are more likely to live with their partners, have children and thus have the responsibility to provide for their wives and children (Misunas et al., 2019).

Snapshot of young adolescent men who took part in the study

Instead of having a separate section on my findings chapters where I describe the characteristics of the young adolescent men who took part in this study, I have decided to include the description of young adolescent men in the methods section. This will allow the reader to have an idea of the young adolescent men who took part in this study right after reading about the population and inclusion criteria of the study, the sampling technique used, and the recruitment process.

This section provides an overall summary of the characteristics of the young adolescent men who took part in the study. This snapshot is consolidated information that was shared by the participants and includes the researchers' observations during interactions with the young adolescent men. As described previously, young adolescent men aged 14 – 19 years took part in the study and young adolescent men resided in Gugulethu. Four young adolescent men were 19 years old and five were 14 years old at the time of data collection. Many of the young adolescent men were between the ages of 16-17.

All young adolescent men identified as Xhosa, and their parents were originally from the Eastern Cape (EC). Many still had close relatives in the EC and there was a constant move between the EC and Gugulethu, particularly during major school holidays, where young adolescent men would visit the EC for the duration of the holidays. None of the young adolescent men had undergone *ulwaluko*, even though some, for example, the 18- and 19-year-old young adolescent men were already at the age where they were old enough to undergo *ulwaluko*. Some young adolescent men had friends who were already undergoing *ulwaluko* and they spoke about the responsibility bestowed on them to take care of their friends who were in the mountain/bush (*Ulwaluko* is performed in a secluded place, often the mountain or the bush). Some of this responsibility included taking food and other essentials daily to their friends in the mountains.

The living arrangements and types of homes that young adolescent men came from differed significantly. Although all young adolescent men had adults present at home living with them, these were not always their parents. Some young adolescent men stayed in homes with their biological parents and siblings. Some stayed with one parent, usually the mother, and in some instances, young adolescent men stayed with extended family, such as aunts and uncles. Some young adolescent men lived with their grandparents, while their parents lived and worked in other cities. Regardless, all young adolescent men expressed that they had an older male figure in their immediate lives in the form of a father, uncle, or older brother.

In terms of socioeconomic status, some young adolescent men could be categorised as coming from middle-class families; they lived in modern housing, with running water, their parents had cars, they had smartphones, and went to school in town. Other young adolescent men came from indigent families, they lived in shacks (informal houses, built using zinc) and some in government-free housing. Many shacks and government-free houses have poor sanitation such as not having running water and poor ventilation. Young adolescent men from low-class status families did not have smartphones, in some instances, those who had access to a smartphone, such a phone worked more like a house phone, which was used by all members of the family, and some did not have access to phones at all. Further, young adolescent men from indigent families went to local schools in the township, which were often free, and had a high number of learners compared to teachers, compromising the quality of education received.

The majority of young adolescent men were still in school, and a few had completed grade 12 (high school education). Those who had completed grade 12 were from indigent families as such, due to lack of financial restrictions, none had enrolled at a tertiary institution to further their education. Although South Africa has a National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) for students from poor backgrounds, it does not pay for the financial costs required to apply at a tertiary institution. Also, if one can successfully apply for entry into a tertiary institution, is not always

guaranteed that all poor students will receive funding. Due to financial restrictions, some young adolescent men were seeking short-term employment, while some had already found short-term work to secure funds to apply for entry into a tertiary institution.

There were no self-reported incidences of substance misuse. Alcohol consumption featured in recreational activities for some of the young adolescent men, while some young adolescent men did not drink alcohol at all. None of the young adolescent men smoked. Many also spoke about partying, which seemed to be prevalent, particularly on weekends and school holidays. Social gatherings, what the young adolescent men referred to as parties were also spaces where some young adolescent men met girlfriends or hooked up with girls. The difference between meeting a girlfriend and hooking up was that hooking up meant having once-off sexual intercourse with a girl at the party, whereas meeting a girlfriend developed into a romantic relationship. In addition to attending parties, spending time with a romantic partner was also cited as one of the ways young adolescent men spent their free time. All young adolescent men had experienced dating a girl. Some young adolescent men were new to dating, while others were more experienced. Being a novice in dating was not associated with age, some older young adolescent men i.e., 18 years were new to dating, while some younger ones i.e., 14 years, had more experience in dating. Similarly, experience in dating was not associated with having sex, for example, although all the young adolescent men were dating, a few had not had sex, even though they had dated for some time and the majority were already having sex.

Some of the young adolescent men attended afternoon and sometimes weekend programmes developed for them by MCSJ and the Igugulethu youth. As part of the activities organised by MCSJ and Igugulethu youth, some young adolescent men were part of soccer teams. Even young adolescent men who were not part of the soccer teams said that during their spare time, they enjoyed playing soccer as a hobby. Other young adolescent men said that they preferred reading or listening to music during their spare time. In terms of the young adolescent men's overall

demeanour, they presented a calm and polite attitude. They seemed to be conscious of the idea of respect, particularly for older people. The sense of respect also manifested during group discussions, wherein young adolescent men followed rules to respect one another, they were not disruptive, even when they did not agree with what was shared by their fellow group members. A total of 28 young adolescent men took part in the study. Below is a table indicating participant demographics such as age, dating status and living arrangements.

Participant demographics

Table 1: Participant demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Dating status & Sexual experience	Education	Living arrangements
Sipho	15 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 9 Local school	Lives with both parents and siblings
Lethu	19 years	Dating Sexually active	Completed grade 12 Local school	Lives with mother and siblings
Abonile	19 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 9 Local school	Lives with mother and siblings
Anda	17 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 10 Attends school in town	Lives with both parents and siblings

Athule	14 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 8 Local school	Lives with both parents and siblings
Bee	14 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 8 Local school	Lives with mother and siblings
James	14 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 8 Local school	Lives with both parents and siblings
Kwakhanya	15 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 9 Local school	Lives with mother, aunt, siblings and cousins
Lihle	15 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 9 Local school	Lives with both parents and siblings
Litha	16 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 10 Local school	Lives with mother and siblings
Lukhaya	14 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 8 Local school	Lives with mother siblings
Lwando	19 years	Dating Sexually active	Completed grade 12 Local school	Lives with mother and siblings
Lwazi	18 years	Single and a Virgin	Grade 11	Lives with both parents and siblings

			Attends school in town	
Mabox	16 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 10 Local school	Lives with mother and siblings
Manga	17 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 11 Local school	Lives with aunt and cousins
Odi	16 years	Single Sexually active	Grade 11 Attends school in town	Lives with both parents and siblings
Sane	18 years	Single Sexually active	Grade 11 Local school	Lives with both parents and siblings
Sihle	17 years	Dating Virgin	Grade 11 Local school	Lives with both parents and siblings
Simamkele	17 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 11 Local school	Lives with mother and siblings
Siphesihle	18 years	Single Sexually active	Grade 12 Attends school in town	Lives with both parents and siblings
Wole	14 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 8 Local school	Lives with mother, aunt and siblings

Zolani	18 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 11 Local school	Lives with mother and siblings
Zwelo	18 years	Dating Sexually active	Grade 12 Local school	Lives with both parents and siblings
Fana	18 years	Dating Sexually active	Completed grade 12 Local school	Lives with grandmother and uncles
Luzuko	19 years	Dating Sexually active	Completed grade 12	Lives with both parents and siblings
Nkosi	18 years	Dating Sexually active	Completed grade 12 Local school	Lives with both parents and siblings
Sabelo	18 years	Dating Sexually active	Completed grade 12 Local school	Lives with aunt, uncle and cousins

Data collection

I recruited young adolescent men into the study from June 2021 and this was done until no new data came from participants, which was December 2022 (Guest et al., 2006). I used individual in-depth semi-structured interviews, diary entries, and focus group discussions (FGDs) to collect data.

All data collection was done in Xhosa. Initially, the study was meant to be a virtual study facilitated via WhatsApp. All individual interviews, diaries, and FGDs were to be conducted via WhatsApp. WhatsApp as opposed to traditional face-to-face interviews would have been advantageous for this study because it is cheap, easily accessible, user-friendly, and is a space that adolescents are highly familiar with navigating. As such, adolescents' "familiarity with this technology empowers them through easier access to the research interview, greater freedom to talk about sensitive issues, the ability to express themselves via text and the possibility of exercising greater control over the interview" (Gibson, 2022, p. 1). Also, the use of internet-based technologies like WhatsApp is less formal and may have lessened the power discrepancies between boys and the researcher (Fox et al., 2007), and allowed participants to easily interact with the researcher. The idea that adolescents are comfortable and familiar with WhatsApp and that this would increase their interest in taking part in the study made the use of WhatsApp more appealing (Gibson, 2022).

Facilitating the study via WhatsApp proved to be a challenge, for instance, I experienced challenges getting hold of the young adolescent men. WhatsApp messages took longer to be delivered and to show the read status, while some never got delivered. This was understandable considering that the young adolescent men might not have had data. On the other hand, some messages were delivered instantly and clearly showed that they had been read through the blue double ticks. In both instances, some participants ignored these WhatsApp messages, while some would respond with a date and time. While it is understandable that these are young people and that a lot is going on in their lives, their non-response made it challenging to move forward with the study activities, the project was stuck, with no progress.

I decided to speak to the people at the organisations to find out what they think might be the challenge regarding getting hold of the young adolescent men. One of the people at the Igugulethu youth said that the young adolescent men in Gugulethu change numbers a lot. When they are approached by network companies for promotional sim cards (that come with free data and airtime)

most of these young adolescent men do not hesitate to change their numbers to benefit from such promotions. He also mentioned that a lot happening in the lives of these young adolescent men, township life can be challenging therefore, they are dealing with a lot of challenges in their lives. The contact at Igugulethu Youth also said that the phones that the young adolescent men have are mostly old phones, and hand-down phones, which is why they struggle with these phones as they might have poor battery life and broken screens.

To mitigate these challenges, the study ended up being a virtual and in-person study. I applied for a study amendment to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at UCT and it was granted. The amendment stated that FGDs and diaries would shift from virtual to in-person and that remaining individual interviews would be conducted via traditional calls as opposed to WhatsApp calls. A total of 28 young adolescent men took part in individual interviews, and of these, 13 took part in diaries. A total of eight FGDs, with a minimum of four young adolescent men per group, was conducted. The idea was to use the same young adolescent men for all three data collection methods and young adolescent men were asked to take part in all three data collection methods. Using the same young adolescent men would have allowed me and the young adolescent men to establish a strong rapport throughout the study. Young adolescent men were further informed that participation in all three methods was voluntary and that they had to consent separately for each. It became challenging to have the same young adolescent men take part in all activities. This was because some young adolescent men were at some point preparing for their final matric (Grade 12) examinations and as such could not get time to do the study activities. In the end, what happened was that, depending on young adolescent men's availability, some participated in two activities, while some in all activities.

I asked an experienced Xhosa-speaking young male researcher to be part of the interviews and FGDs, to assist me (a female researcher) with data collection for the study. This was a young male researcher in his early twenties, who has experience in working with young adolescent men and in

conducting qualitative research. I had anticipated that some young adolescent men might feel uncomfortable discussing such issues with a female. There are concerns about female researchers' ability to work with male participants (Lefkowich, 2019). This is because males are viewed as violent, powerful, and domineering, as such, there is an assumption that women have difficulty accessing males' spaces and cannot effectively study them. This viewpoint is largely informed by the fear that males, due to their masculinities, might find it demeaning to talk to women about their issues, particularly sensitive issues on sexual matters. However, due to network and connectivity issues, it was a challenge to conduct WhatsApp video calls with the young adolescent men and the male researcher. Also, in some instances, a young adolescent man would schedule a time for an interview only to find that the male researcher was not available at that particular time. It came to a point where, if the male researcher could not join the WhatsApp video call due to either network and connectivity issues or because he was engaged, I would continue with the interview. This was done for two reasons, first, it was a challenge getting the young adolescent men to schedule and stick to a time and date for the interview. Second, I wanted to find out how young adolescent men would feel about talking to a female researcher about sex and dating. I quickly realised that the young adolescent men were comfortable talking to me and comparing the interviews I had done with the male researcher and the ones I had done alone, there was no substantial difference. Following this realisation, I continued to conduct the majority of the interviews by myself. This included conducting the in-person focus group discussions alone. The male Xhosa speaking researcher was part of the first five individual interviews, all individual interviews after that were conducted by the study researcher.

The minimum time young adolescent men spent taking part in the study was three hours, including introductions and ascertaining if the participant met the study criteria, setting up a time for either IDIs or FGDs and the consent process. The maximum time spent is roughly about a month and six hours (three hours setting up for IDI and another three setting up FGDs) and some young adolescent men participated in diaries which lasted for a month. There were sometimes gaps in

engagement and these were roughly around a few weeks to a month, depending on which activities participants were involved in and how long it took to plan such activities.

Semi-structured in-depth individual interviews

I conducted a total of 28 individual interviews, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of young adolescent men's perceptions, feelings, and experiences of romantic relationships. Interviews lasted between a minimum of 40 minutes to a maximum of one hour. Semi-structured individual interviews involved a set of pre-determined questions (Patton, 2002), enabling me to explore in an in-depth manner young adolescent men's unique experiences and perceptions of romantic relationships and how these shape SRH, HIV, and IPV-related attitudes and practices (McGrath et al., 2018). Interviews probe and encourage self-reflection on behaviour and related issues and I asked all young adolescent men to reflect on their experiences of taking part in the individual interview (Breen, 2006).

Traditionally, qualitative researchers have used in-person face-to-face interviews with participants. However, the rise in new ways of conducting interviews in qualitative research, facilitated by technology cannot be ignored (Krouwel et al., 2019), as such, this study was initially interested in facilitating individual interviews via WhatsApp video calls. The first five semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were conducted via WhatsApp video call. The use of video calls allowed young adolescent men and the researchers to see each other while geographically separate, thus resembling in-person face-to-face interviews (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013; Krouwel et al., 2019). Having the video on during the interviews recreated a personal interaction, characteristic of face-to-face interviews. However, having video calls made network issues more challenging, as such I together with the young adolescent men often settled for WhatsApp calls. In addition to having to settle for only WhatsApp calls, upon realising that some young adolescent men had no WhatsApp-enabled phones, I decided to conduct the remaining individual interviews through traditional phone calls.

Themes covered in the interview guide (Appendix B) included: *love and sex, expectations of love and sex, perception of safe sex, frequency of sexual intercourse, multiple concurrent sexual partners, condom use, approaches to pregnancy prevention, HIV and other STIs and the frequency of HIV testing*. I also explored notions of *being a man in a relationship, young adolescent men's expectations of their partners, the meaning of romantic relationships, and the expression of love*.

Focus-group discussions (FGDs)

Initially, I had intended to facilitate FGDs via WhatsApp, but due to several issues such as network and boys not having WhatsApp-enabled phones, I ended up conducting traditional face-to-face FGDs. I met young adolescent men at a predetermined time and place for the FGDs and FGDs were conducted until saturation was reached. In total, I conducted eight traditional in-person FGDs, with each lasting between 40 minutes to one hour thirty minutes. Each group comprised of a minimum of four and maximum of seven young adolescent men, a number supported by previous scholars (Makanga et al., 2015; Makongoza & Nduna, 2017). FGDs were grouped according to age, for example, (14 – 15-year-old); (16 – 17-year-old), and (18 – 19-year-old). I did this to cater to age disparities, which might have led to poor data quality. For example, grouping 14-year-old young adolescent men with 19-year-old young adolescent men might have been challenging in that 14-year-olds might be shy to share their perspectives and beliefs and they might feel threatened and overshadowed by the older young adolescent men.

FGDs allowed me to understand young adolescent men's interactions in a group setting and to elicit in-depth, group perceptions and group consensus on a topic (Kite & Phongsavan, 2017). They offered an opportunity to produce data and insights central to group interactions that are otherwise not accessible through individual interviews (Morgan, 1997). I explored the following themes (Appendix C) during FGDs: *young adolescent men's discourses around love and sex, sexual negotiation and sexual decision-making, sexual consent and sexual coercion, negotiating sex when in a relationship, and understanding and appreciation of sexual consent*. Additionally,

FGDs explored *notions of being a man in a romantic relationship, man's power in a relationship and young adolescent men's role in the relationship, young adolescent men's and girls' expected behaviour in a relationship, power, and decision-making in the relationship, young adolescent men's perceptions of IPV, circumstances where IPV might be likely to occur, their experiences of IPV perpetration, young adolescent men as victims of IPV in current or past relationships and the way IPV is handled in romantic relationships.*

By the time FGDs were conducted, COVID-19 restrictions in South Africa had eased, as such, no disruptions were experienced. However, it was noted that the virus was still a threat, and young adolescent men were informed of this. As such, maintaining social distancing, washing hands, and wearing a mask were encouraged during study activities (Appendix D) for a COVID-19 protocol.

Diary entries

I asked the young adolescent men to keep diary entries. A total of 13 young adolescent men took part in the diary activity. Young adolescent men taking part in the diary activity were asked to write about their reflections, experiences, and perceptions of romantic relationships. Asking participants to keep a diary, as a form of data collection was suitable for this study due to potentially sensitive questions (Kenten, 2010; Sitch & Day, 2015). Diaries were chosen because they can produce more in-depth information on sensitive issues and participants might have found it easier to write about their romantic relationships as opposed to talking about them, especially to me, as an unfamiliar person (Bedwell et al., 2012). In addition, diaries were relevant in helping participants capture their everyday practices and experiences (Kenten, 2010), they afforded participants the autonomy to decide on which words and style to use in communicating their lived experiences.

I informed all young adolescent men that I would read and analyse all diary entries for research purposes (Jacelon & Imperio, 2005). Diaries entries were structured, wherein I gave participants a pre-set of questions to guide their entries (Furness & Garrud, 2010). Each young adolescent men completed 10 diary entries, which lasted for one month. Although the diary lasted for a month, the focus of these diaries was young adolescent men's daily lived experiences rather than changes observable over time. As such, data on changes for the month were not collected. I collected diary entries every week on Friday afternoons, wherein I took pictures of young adolescent men's diary entries. For the first, third, fifth, seventh, and ninth diary entries, all young adolescent men received the same questions. For the second, fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth diary entries, young adolescent men were asked questions, probes, and follow-up questions based on their previous entries. Young adolescent men received prompt/follow-up questions based on previous diaries on Fridays when I met with them to collect diaries. Follow-up interviews were done with five of the 13 young adolescent men after the diary entries. The diary focused on some of the more sensitive topics. The following themes guided young adolescent men's entries (Appendix E): *experiences of love, what love is and how it is expressed, love and intimacy in romantic relationships, notions around manhood in romantic relationships, young adolescent men's interpretation of their role in the relationship, power, and decisions making in the relationship, young adolescent men's experiences of IPV as perpetrators and victims, drivers of IPV in a romantic relationship and how is handled in romantic relationships.*

Data analysis

I kept detailed field notes and post-interview notes from all interviews and FGDs, and this formed part of the ongoing data analysis. My supervisors and I had occasional check-ins to debrief. My supervisors also played an important role in guiding and helping me identify my underlying assumptions about the data. Debriefing was also done to identify and workshop some of the key ideas and themes emerging from the data. This also allowed my supervisors and I to explore if the interview questions might need to be adapted.

I recorded all interviews and FGDs, which were done in Xhosa. I transcribed and translated verbatim all interviews, diary entries, and FGDs from Xhosa to English. Following this, I checked, cleaned, and loaded data into NVIVO for coding and identification of themes. Data analysis was guided by theories relating to masculinities and the socio-ecological framework and was analysed using thematic analysis and discourse analysis (DA). Thematic analysis allowed for an understanding of some basic ideas about how young adolescent men experience romantic relationships, what they are looking for in romantic relationships, their basic ideas around romantic relationships, and how they describe their emotions. Through thematic analysis, I was able to closely engage with the data, intensely explore young adolescent men's perspectives, and identify and highlight some of the emerging similarities and differences in young adolescent men's responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). A thematic approach provided a structure that allowed me to summarise large data sets, facilitate the production of well-defined themes, and a comprehensive reporting of the results (King, 2004). Braun and Clarke's (2006) process of thematic analysis, which involved identifying, analysing, and reporting emerging themes within data, was used. I first read through the data to familiarise myself with the data set. This was followed by the generation of codes from the data set. Codes were used to develop themes emerging in the data. I then worked on refining the initial codes and themes and coming up with the final themes. From this process, a description of the study findings was then generated.

The use of a thematic approach did not allow me to make claims about how young adolescent men used language to make meaning of their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To mitigate this, I employed elements of DA to understand young adolescent men's underlying assumptions and ideologies around notions of being a man in a romantic relationship and the type of language they used to talk about love, sex, and romantic relationships. DA was used to explore how young adolescent men use language to produce, reproduce, and contest their masculinities in the context of romantic relationships. The use of DA allowed me the opportunity to explore how certain topics were talked about, for example, how young adolescent men experienced and talked about sex,

love, and manhood (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2021). In DA, language becomes a powerful instrument used to understand individuals' behaviour in each context, it carries both meaning and power. However, language is not fixed, it is moulded by the social context and as such differs depending on context and culture. The use of DA centred on young adolescent men's language in the context of Gugulethu, what was said, how it was said, and how language shaped their behaviour and maintained their power and privilege in romantic relationships. As such, using DA allowed me to capture the subtle processes through which young adolescent men either comply or resist hegemonic masculinities in their contexts.

Data management

The study data was kept in a password-protected computer and only I and my supervisors had access. All hard copy data – such as young adolescent men's diary entries, my notes and reflections, and young adolescent men's consent forms – were scanned and kept in a password-protected computer for easy reference. Data collected was immediately anonymised to protect the confidentiality of all participants. To keep participants anonymous, all young adolescent men were asked to choose a pseudonym and only these are reflected in the study documents. Following the conclusion of the study, all data will be archived for a maximum of five years and will be permanently erased thereafter.

Dissemination of research findings

Some study findings have been shared and disseminated via UCT seminars and other research events, including the 2022 graduate conference at the Makerere Institute of Social Research, the annual School of Public Health Research Week, and a symposium at Brown University at the Watson Institute. More sharing and dissemination will be done via academic journals, conferences, and seminars at other research institutions. The opportunity to share study findings through the media will be sought. In addition, study findings will be shared with young adolescent men who took part in the study and other community members through an interactive dialogue, including

with MCSJ. The full final thesis will be available on the UCT library website for academics and other students to access.

Methodological rigor

To showcase the trustworthiness of the study, I used Lincoln and Guba's (1985) five criteria, which are credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity criterion. Frequent debriefing meetings between myself and my supervisors who were involved in the interpretation of the data from the onset were held to ensure credibility. Doing so allowed me to reflect on my values and interests and expand my vision of the study through sharing my experiences and perceptions. In addition, presenting preliminary findings and ideas at other academic forums helped challenge my subjectivity and may have helped maintain some objectivity. To ensure dependability, I provided a rich and logical report of the study methods (Nowell et al., 2017). This included a detailed report on some of the deviations from the original proposed plan. To achieve confirmability, I provide detailed information on the study process and reasons on how and why decisions were made. In addition, frequent debriefing meetings with supervisors and peers assisted in ensuring that I was not biased but remained neutral. I ensured transferability through a detailed contextual background of the study setting, which would allow other researchers to ascertain whether the study findings can be applied to their settings and contexts. Lastly, to achieve authenticity, I use direct quotations from interviews with young adolescent men to ensure that I present their experiences in a just and truthful manner (Elo et al., 2014). In addition to the 5 indicators, to enhance the study's trustworthiness, I critically reflected on my position and influence throughout the study.

Triangulation was integral throughout the study data analysis process and was part of an ongoing iterative analysis with my supervisors. As part of this process, we discussed and combined the information emerging from the different data collection methods. As such, the three different forms

of data collection tools used helped achieve a meaningful level of data saturation and triangulate emerging data.

Reflexivity

My subjectivity and how this subjectivity might influence the research was managed through the process of reflexivity (Palaganas et al., 2017). Individuals' perceptions of the world influence what they investigate, thus making research a political (Green, 1993). Much of the work I have done has been on adolescent girls, as such, I had little experience with young adolescent men. Even though I had been part of mixed gender studies, my role in these was to collect data among female adolescents, while a male colleague would interview young adolescent men. Considering this, a reflection on how my perceptions of the young adolescent men might have shaped the research was crucial, it was key for me to reflect on my experience of the research and feelings arising from this experience of working closely with boys.

This was important to do because I am a human being who brings my history, values, ideals, and beliefs into the research process (Lumsden, 2009), and remaining neutral may be impossible. Not only do I possess these things, but I also possess multiple, intersecting, and inseparable identities, such as gender, religion, class, race, and ethnicity, which shape my lived experiences (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). My identity is that of a young black 34-year-old Swati-speaking woman, born and bred in the Mpumalanga province. I am an older sister to three boys, aged 29 and 16 (twin boys) and this is part of the reason why research on this topic is important to me. Also, having worked in adolescent SRH, I found that we are often lost in addressing SRH issues for girls, while this is necessary, I started asking questions "What about young adolescent men?" and this is what motivated my interest in young adolescent men. I often worried that the work I was doing did not have an impact on my brothers and failed to help me understand my brothers' choices and behaviours regarding romantic relationships. With this research, I hoped to get a better understanding of young adolescent men's experiences of romantic relationships. While my

research was based in Gugulethu, which is a thousand kilometres away from home, Mpumalanga. I hope findings from this study will be used to improve the lives of all young adolescent men, including my brothers, through the development of programmes and interventions specific to young adolescent men.

Throughout the research process, I reflected on my background and position as a researcher and how my multiple and intersecting identities influenced my interaction with boys in this study. My multiple identities led to me assuming the insider as well as the outsider status. My blackness placed me as an insider since all the study participants were black boys. The fact that I was a sister to young adolescent men made the young adolescent men who took part in the study perceive me as their sister, hence they referred to me as “sis or sis Tsidi” during data collection. Although I am fluent in Xhosa, my gender identity and ethnicity might have placed me as an outsider because all young adolescent men were males and Xhosa. I had to reflect on how my blackness facilitated positive interactions with young adolescent men and how interactions might have been weakened by my identity as a woman who is from a different cultural background. Further, although I have done work in South African townships, I have never resided in a township and perhaps that placed me as an outsider.

The insider/outsider status of a researcher has also evoked debates about whether young adolescent men are best studied by an outsider or by an insider. There are challenges that insiders face when studying their groups. Such challenges include the lack of probing, as information shared by young adolescent men might seem normal/acceptable to the researcher. This means that things that would be otherwise found abnormal might be questioned by an outsider. I found that working with Xhosa young adolescent men, even though I am a Swati woman, there were a lot of similarities in the cultures. This might be explained by the fact that both tribes fall under the Nguni tribe. This might also be due to my familiarity with the Xhosa culture because I am married to a Xhosa man. It was challenging for me to question certain perspectives or assumptions that the young adolescent men

held, most of the time it felt like I was accepting what was shared by the young adolescent men but debriefing with my supervisors helped me to raise some questions about certain behaviours that I might have otherwise thought were “normal”.

Because we have viewed young adolescent men using the same lens as adult men, young adolescent men are thought to be against the idea of sharing, particularly sharing with a female. Because of this, I sought the assistance of a male researcher. I did this without question because other researchers have said that young adolescent men tend to not want to talk to female researchers. As such, I am also guilty of perpetuating this narrative. Despite doubts at first, I found that it was easy to talk to young adolescent men about dating and sex. It also helped that many of the young adolescent men were open about their experiences.

In societies where men and women are unequal, female researchers maintain subordinate positions even though their job as researchers places them as superior to the participants in social class terms (Walker, 1998). It certainly did not feel like I held a subordinate position with the young adolescent men, they also did not seem to be threatened by the fact that I was a woman. On my side, this might be explained by the fact that I have experience interacting with adolescents (my three brothers) and talking about sex and dating. I have always maintained an open communication relationship with them. My experience with this study tells me that, it is not always the case that males may be demotivated to share sensitive information about sex and dating with female researchers. Young adolescent men mentioned that they liked the fact that they were talking to a woman about these things.

Research ethics

Ethical approval (Appendix F) was sought and granted by the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) (HREC REF: 146/2021). HREC

also approved a parental waiver for minors in the study. Permission to access young adolescent men was sought from MCSJ and Igugulethu youth based in Gugulethu. The following ethical considerations and procedures were followed throughout the study.

Justification for parental consent waiver for minors in the study

In South Africa, persons under the age of 18 are minors and classified as vulnerable. The study young adolescent men were adolescent boys aged 14 – 19 years. Within this age range, those aged 14 to 17 are classified as minors and vulnerable due to their age and legal status as such they must be protected. Also, in research, this age group requires parental consent. Seeking parental consent for certain types of studies, for example, studies on romantic relationships which include discussions around sexual intercourse and sexual health may be challenging. As such, a waiver for parental consent for all participants under the age of 18 years was requested and granted by the HREC at UCT. According to an SOP prepared by the Human Research Ethics Committee (2013) at UCT, a committee may approve the use of “unassisted consent” if a study meets four conditions, that is the study is no more than minimal risk; the nature of the research is acceptable to the Committee, parents or legal guardians or the community at large. The Committee’s opinion must be based on information from the community concerned and lay Committee members; there is sufficient justification for why adolescents are needed in the study and justification for why adolescents should consent unassisted (Appendix G).

Potential harms, harm prevention, and mitigation

Loss of privacy – I could not control the extent to which WhatsApp conversations were kept private on participants’ phones. All young adolescent men were warned of the possibility that other people in their environment might be able to listen to their messages. I was not familiar with the young adolescent men’s homes and thus I could not guarantee privacy during interviews. Therefore, all young adolescent men were asked to find a space they usually use when they want to maintain a

private conversation. In instances where young adolescent men felt that their privacy was compromised in a space, they were allowed to pause and find a safer space to talk.

All study data was kept confidential, and the data set was stored in a safe and secured password-protected file. After transcription, all data was deleted from WhatsApp, and all identifying data was removed from the transcripts. For the diary entries, young adolescent men's diaries were stored using the pseudonyms of the participants.

Experiencing discomfort and emotional distress - I informed young adolescent men of their right to skip questions they did not feel comfortable responding to. I asked all young adolescent men to indicate if any discomfort arose due to the study. Information on counselling services by professional counsellors was prepared for any young adolescent men showing emotional distress (Appendix G). In addition, a distress protocol to be followed was developed in the case young adolescent men exhibited extreme signs of distress during the interviews and FGDs (Appendix H). In cases where young adolescent men become distressed due to past experiences of abuse, a protocol for reporting cases of abuse or violence was put in place (Appendix I). None of the young adolescent men reported experiencing any discomfort. I also did not pick up any signs of discomfort from the young adolescent men.

Informed consent

Participant consent forms (Appendix J). I first explained the study using a language young adolescent men preferred. During this explanation, young adolescent men had the opportunity to raise issues or questions. I gave all young adolescent men the opportunity to read and familiarise themselves with the study and some took time to decide whether or not they were interested in taking part in the study. Individual consent for individual interviews was done via WhatsApp or telephonically. I asked young adolescent men to sign and take a picture of the signed consent form

and send it through WhatsApp. I asked all young adolescent men to consent to the audio recording of interviews and FGDs. For FGDs and handwritten diary entries, consent happened in person. Throughout the study, I emphasised that participation is voluntary and the right to withdraw from the research at any point, with no penalties.

Confidentiality

I informed young adolescent men of the limits to confidentiality. I asked them that during the interview, they needed to find a quiet and private space to talk. They also needed to inform me if there was a need to pause the interview in cases where they felt their privacy and confidentiality were threatened. During the FGDs, I advised young adolescent men not to disclose personal information they did not want to be known by others. I also informed young adolescent men that some of them in the group may discuss information shared during the FGD with others outside of the group. I then emphasised the importance of confidentiality. All young adolescent men signed a confidentiality form ensuring that disclosures are kept within the group. I further discussed disclosures, vulnerability, and mutual respect with young adolescent men and the importance of gauging the ‘risk of disclosure’ in that context. For interviews conducted via WhatsApp, I informed and reminded young adolescent men that WhatsApp’s end-to-end encryption is considered the highest level of data security but is not 100% safe (Rastogi & Hendler, 2017).

Reimbursements/Incentives, Potential Benefits

The results of the study will help improve our understanding of young adolescent men’s romantic relationships and how romantic relationships shape their SRH and IPV-related attitudes and practices. They will facilitate the development of programmes and initiatives tailored to respond to the health needs of young adolescent men. Young adolescent men who did individual interviews via WhatsApp were reimbursed with R60.00 airtime vouchers and 2GB data for their time and access to the internet. I sent data directly to young adolescent men’s preferred cell phone numbers. Young adolescent men who did individual interviews telephonically received R60.00 airtime

vouchers for their time. Young adolescent men who participated in in-person FGDs, and diary entries received R60.00 (33.3 USD) cash for their time. For diary entries, young adolescent men also received notepads and pens.

Conclusion

This chapter has justified the study design and its appropriateness in helping answer the study's research question. The chapter also provides an overview of the study site to give the reader an idea about the context in which the study took place. Further, the data collection process, challenges around data collection in the field, the recruitment process, and its associated challenges are discussed. Following this, a presentation of how data analysis, methodological rigour, including researcher reflexivity are provided. Lastly, the chapter details the ethical considerations for the study and justifies why a waiver for parental consent was applied for and granted by the HREC UCT. The data analysis and ethical considerations for the study are also discussed.

The next four chapters provide an in-depth analysis of the study results that emerged from the study methods employed in this study. In all four chapters, I present the study results using two approaches. In some instances, I provide quotes to back up a claim, while in other instances, I give a summary of what was shared by the young adolescent men. I use the second option in instances where it is hard to get a shorter and succinct quote and in instances where I am trying to paint a picture of things that came up at different points of the interview, which might be hard to put into one quote.

Chapter four sets the foundation for – young adolescent men's engagement with gender norms, expectations and power dynamics as they navigate their romantic relationship. It highlights how the romantic relationship may be a context wherein young adolescent men's ideas about manhood are played out or contested. Chapter four highlighted how young adolescent men's notions of being

a real man were tied to sex. While not completely ignoring elements of risky and harmful sexual behaviours among young adolescent men, **chapter five** pays attention to young adolescent men's understanding of sex, their decision-making processes around sex, how they navigate their sexual worlds as well as the dilemmas presented by engaging in sexual intercourse. While sex is not necessarily risky, it may expose young adolescent men to poor SRH outcomes, as such, it would be disingenuous of this study to talk about sexual decision-making and be silent about the risks that come with particular sexual decisions that young adolescent men make. Considering this, **chapter six** pay attention to young adolescent men's SRH outcomes (STIs, HIV, pregnancy) based on the sexual decision-making processes and capabilities. Love emerged as a key feature in young adolescent men's discussions about sex, **chapter seven** thus seeks to draw attention to how love and sex are deeply intertwined, while also exploring the vulnerabilities and anxieties that young adolescent men experience as they seek to love and to be loved by their romantic partners.

CHAPTER 4: YOU ARE NOT A MAN, BOY: PERCEPTIONS OF MANHOOD, POWER AND IPV IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

Heterosexual romantic relationships may be an important context in which young adolescent men negotiate and enact or challenge learned ideas about manhood, power dynamics, and their roles and responsibilities. Previous studies in South Africa have reported on adolescents' romantic relationships as driven by young adolescent men's performance and negotiation of masculinities, emphasizing their power and dominance within these relationships (Christofides et al., 2014; Closson et al., 2022; Jewkes et al., 2010; Teitelman et al., 2016). Young adolescent men's power and dominance are important variables associated with IPV. Some studies have shown that males' perceived superiority over females is a critical factor in sexual decision-making, thus impacting females' sexual and reproductive health outcomes, including HIV outcomes (Closson et al., 2020; Conroy et al., 2016; Fleming et al., 2016).

Having a nuanced understanding of the operations of gender and power in heterosexual romantic relationships may be key in SRH, HIV, and IPV. However, in South Africa, the emphasis in adolescent research in public health is on SRH, including HIV and IPV outcomes, barely taking note of how romantic relationships may shape these public health challenges. This emphasis is also predominantly focused on girls and young women and their health outcomes. Drawing on young adolescent men's socio-cultural context, this chapter provides an overview of how young adolescent men make sense of their gender and forge their sexual identities in romantic relationships without painting them as inherently problematic. The focus is on how gender, in the context of heterosexual adolescent romantic relationships, manifests and influences the way young adolescent men construct, conform, and challenge gender stereotypes, their expected roles and responsibilities, and how these subsequently shape ideas around IPV. The chapter sets the foundation for how young adolescent men grapple with gender norms and expectations, power

struggles, and IPV, while simultaneously having to navigate other aspects of the romantic relationship, such as love and sex, which are discussed in the subsequent chapters.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Put together, these sections seek to contextualize the meanings and motivations that shape young adolescent men's sense of being. They highlight the significance of gender in heterosexual romantic relationships and offer a nuanced and complex understanding of the operations of gender in heterosexual romantic relationships as a context within which adolescents may experience sex – which may shape their SRH outcomes and risk to HIV - and violence. First, the chapter explores young adolescent men's construction of and ideas about manhood; the socio-cultural norms that shape ideas about manhood, and the roles and actions that may qualify one to be a man. The second part of the chapter highlights the complexity of negotiating power dynamics in young adolescent men's romantic relationships and explores how these young adolescent men understand issues of power and control in their romantic relationships. The second part of the chapter also highlights the manifestation of power dynamics in young adolescent men's romantic relationships and how these young adolescent men grapple with and manage issues of power in these relationships. The third section of the chapter offers insights into young adolescent men's attitudes around IPV, their experiences of IPV, how IPV manifests, and the factors that shape the perpetration of IPV in heterosexual romantic relationships.

Construction of manhood

This section discusses how young adolescent men construct their manhood, highlighting the role of observation and the role of peers as central in their construction of manhood. *Ulwaluko* also emerged as both a way to learn about manhood and as a keyway to qualify to be a man. Further, young adolescent men's construction of manhood necessitated the need to assume the protector and provider roles.

Observing the behaviour of adult men was key in teaching young adolescent men about what is expected of a man. In the quotes below, Sane and Luzuko speak about how they learn about what a man is and what is expected of a man. For these young adolescent men, how their parents performed their masculinities was central in shaping their ideas about how a man is supposed to be.

Sane: From our fathers or let me say my father because he played the role of a man. I saw we didn't go hungry with him here. He would get up and go to work... (IDI, 18 years)

Luzuko: ...from our parents. We see how they treat each other and if your father is an abusive man, then you are also going to become one [an abusive man] (Diary entry, 19 years)

During such observations, young adolescent men did not simply absorb all that is associated with manhood, as illustrated in the quote below.

Zolani: You see, many things that we do as young boys, no one teaches us. We see how things are done, then we try to do those things. It's bad that some boys choose bad things, for example, they would choose to be violent to their girlfriends, drink a lot, and drop out of school. Even this thing of romantic relationships, no one teaches us, we hear and see things here and there, and then it's your choice as an individual what you want to do (Diary entry, 18 years)

In this context where there was no clear guidance on what was expected, as indicated by Zolani, Luzuko and Sane's excerpts above, young adolescent men learned about expectations through observation. As such the decision about what to take and what to reject from what was observed was solely theirs. Doing so may be risky, for example, when certain harmful masculine traits are applauded, this may mean that young adolescent men might also aspire to enact those traits to be afforded the status of a real man. Masculine norms tend to discourage vulnerability among young adolescent men, as such young adolescent men in this study grappled with the idea of crying and whether doing so may jeopardise their manhood status. Some of the young adolescent men challenged the view that young adolescent men should be invulnerable, as highlighted in the quote below by Zolani.

Zolani: ...For me, I feel men should be humans first, they also have feelings, and they also get hurt. When I am hurt, I am not going to lie, I do cry. Men must lead through their actions (Diary entry, 18 years)

Zolani's narrative challenges the view that young adolescent men should be strong and remain invulnerable. Other young adolescent men agreed with Zolani's views, arguing that young adolescent men should and do cry, as shown in the excerpts below.

Afika: ...Sometimes I might be strong and just laugh things off then there are those who would cry.

Ndilane: You are crying because you are hurt. You actually feel backstabbed and don't believe that this person really did that to you.

Ruto: But you can't cry in front of your girlfriend, she will go around telling people that she made you cry. I can cry in my own private space.

Ndilane: Yes, you cry when you are alone (FGD, 18-19 years)

Notwithstanding the general agreement that young adolescent men do cry, they seemed to imply that crying is a sign of weakness and it seemed that being emotional was something that needed to be displayed in private, among trusted friends, or otherwise risk “damaging” one’s reputation as a “real man”.

In addition to vicarious learning, ideas about manhood were also co-constructed with friends, making friends central in teaching young adolescent men about what is expected of them. However, such teachings were often in the form of peer pressure to act and behave in a certain manner. In a group discussion, Lulo, Athi, and Vangani concurred that friends tended to pressure each other to do certain things. Fana also spoke about how friends can easily pressure others in the name of advice. He said that his friends advised him to try certain things. While Fana appreciates the advice and support, he got from friends, he still felt that he needed to make the final decision himself. Kwakhanya recounted similar experiences, saying that he gets pressured by his friends to cheat on his girlfriend. He said that he has considered this advice because, after all, he does not know what his girlfriend does when she is not with him. Even though currently Kwakhanya has one girlfriend because his friends advocate for having more than one girlfriend, his stance might change, and he might end up having more than one girl.

Young adolescent men also attempted to describe what a man is and what they deemed to be manhood. They used homophobic language to distance themselves from homosexual young adolescent men and mark themselves as “real man”, emphasize their heterosexuality and thwart homophobic perceptions that might threaten their manhood status. In the excerpt below, Cedu and

Ndilane grapple with the idea of what a man is and use heterosexuality and homosexuality to try and make a distinction between what a man is:

Cedu: We call them brother-sister because there are those gays who wear women's clothes. You find them wearing bum shorts and you ask yourself what the hell is going on because you can tell it's a guy by his structure. Even the tone of the voice, you can tell it's a man. Then there are those who confuse you, you end up not knowing whether he's a man or not because he looks like a woman.

Ndilane: We can't say that a gay person cannot be a man, because a man is a man through his actions. So, just because you're gay it doesn't mean you're not a man. Gay people can be man ish. We act like we aren't man through the things that we do. Have you ever seen a broke gay, they work, but us straight guys most of us are broke. And if you don't have money, you're not a man because you can't provide. Most gays can provide; therefore, I do call them men. So, the fact that you're gay doesn't mean that you're not a man (FGD, 18 – 19 years)

Both Cedu and Ndilane reside in the same community. Their engagement about manhood demonstrates a negotiation and possible rejection of the influence of socio-cultural norms around manhood and who qualifies as a man. This negotiation also emerged in a group discussion where some young adolescent men clearly expressed their disapproval of gays particularly having a gay friend, while some have evolved and are in the process of accepting gay friends.

Cedu: To me, no. It's not acceptable, I actually don't like gays because if you're my friend and you're gay, I feel like I should distance myself from you. I don't want to be stared at and talked about when I'm walking with you on the streets.

Ndilane: I also felt like him for some time, but then I realised that you can't judge. A person is what they are at the end of the end and if they share a certain connection, let them share that connection.

Afika: I'm not biased, it's fine to be gay. It's your life, it's your choices.

Ruto: I feel okay about gays because there are people who are born with it, and we can't judge them (FGD, 18-19 years)

In the excerpt below, James also shared that he does not have issues with young adolescent men who identify as gay but was also quick to express his discomfort with receiving attention from these young adolescent men who identified as homosexual in fear that doing so might threaten his “real manhood” status.

James: Ah, there is nothing wrong with it. As long as they don't come for me [gay boys] I am fine with that.

James: Hai Hai, joh hai. I don't want them near me because other people will think that I am also gay (IDI, 14 years)

Young adolescent men's talk about what a man is shows how they tried to prove their heterosexuality by distancing themselves from gays. Although they maintain that they are welcoming of gays, they still use homophobic language to talk about gay young adolescent men.

Ulwaluko: Qualification to manhood

Although some young adolescent men seemed to question the authenticity of other young adolescent men's manhood identities, based on their gender identities, it seemed in the Xhosa

culture homosexuality does not disqualify one from qualifying to be a man through *ulwaluko*. Young adolescent men in the study all identified as Xhosa and within the Xhosa tribe, *ulwaluko*, (traditional circumcision) marks the shift from boyhood to manhood. Becoming a man was thus defined by specific *ulwaluko* rituals which a male ought to undergo in order to be considered a man. Such rituals could be undertaken by any male, regardless of their sexuality, this means that being a man among the Xhosa is beyond one's sexuality or who an individual prefers to have sex with.

Nkosi: I heard people say that they go there with gay people. But I am not sure what we can call them after that, because they don't want to be men but when you go to the bush, after that ceremony, you are a man. Even if they are known that they are gay, they are allowed to go to the mountain. So, after going to the mountain gay people become men (IDI, 18 years)

It seemed among the Xhosa, there are no hierarchies between homosexual and heterosexual males, instead, what makes one a man is undergoing *ulwaluko*. In instances where a heterosexual male has not undergone *ulwaluko* and a homosexual male has, the homosexual male is deemed more of a man than the uncircumcised heterosexual male. This is highlighted in Sabelo's quote below.

Sabelo: Obvious, the real man is the gay boy who went to the mountain (IDI, 18 years).

In a group discussion, young adolescent men wrestled with the idea of homosexuals undergoing *ulwaluko* and that automatically placed them as men. Ndilane, one of the young adolescent men in the group discussion reiterates Sabelo's sentiments above, stating that "*if you [heterosexual boy]*

don't go, people will say you are not a real man even if you are not gay". These young adolescent men's sentiments show that among the Xhosa, manhood is more than just about sexuality.

Manhood attained through *ulwaluko* not only transcended sexuality but also transcended the politics of age. The number of years lived – lived experiences - were not enough to afford one a manhood status. Simply being an adult male who might have learned about what it means to be a man through observation and lived experiences was not enough to qualify one as a man. For example, some young adolescent men said that it does not matter what age an individual is, if they have undergone *ulwaluko*, they are considered men. In the quote below, Sabelo speaks about how being a man is not about biological age but more about undergoing *ulwaluko*.

Interviewer: And what happens if a boy doesn't go to the mountain?

Sabelo: You'll be a child to us who have gone. He will remain a child to us who have been there. So, he will remain as a child (IDI, 18 years)

Although aware of the significance of *ulwaluko*, some young adolescent men seemed to battle between manhood as a performance and manhood as reliant on undergoing the culture of *ulwaluko* and attaining a bodily mark to prove one's manhood. For example, despite being aware of how one qualifies to be a man among the Xhosa, there were young adolescent men who felt that they were at a point in their lives where they could already consider themselves a man, as narrated by Fana in the quote below.

Fana: I'm still a boy, I haven't gone to the initiation school yet. But ja, I would consider myself as a man because ja I do what men do. It's just that it's the culture that doesn't allow me yet. But err in reality I consider myself as a man. Because of the way I behave,

the way I think, the way I talk. I consider myself a man, it's just that the culture doesn't give me that credit (IDI, 18 years)

Fana's narrative shows that being a man is not only about how he perceives himself, but it is also about traditions that qualify one to be a man. Fana was aware of this, as such, he said that the practice of *ulwaluko* remains significant, and discussions about manhood and what it means to be a man were connected to culture, as illustrated in the quote below.

Ruto: It's all about leaving your childhood behind and knowing that you're about to face responsibilities and be able to stand on your own. Now you won't be reprimanded at home.

Afika: When you go to the bush, you are willing to let go of the past, and you start a new chapter, as a man (FGD, 18 – 19 years)

For young adolescent men, *ulwaluko* was not just a tradition that they had to undergo, but the practice carried significance in terms of showcasing one's bravery, strength, and endurance of pain.

Sane: They say, those who say that they are men when they talk. They say it's pain, they say a man must endure. So, it's the pain that they go for there. They say they go through pain, and they have to endure it. They call themselves men because they were able to endure. The whole process that happened, they were able to go through it.

Interviewer: OK, go ahead

Sane: It's like passing through crocodiles or lions and you don't know what will happen. It's either you go or die. That's how it is (IDI, 18 years)

Speaking on the pain that comes with *ulwaluko*, Luzuko said this was not just any ordinary pain, it was pain that could kill. As such, overcoming such pain said a lot about one's endurance pain. It seemed that even though Luzuko questioned the significance of *ulwaluko*, perceiving this as a waste of time and a deadly tradition, they still felt they had no choice but to partake in the tradition, as narrated by Luzuko in the quote below.

Luzuko: I wouldn't say it's important, right now the only important thing is money. If it wasn't a must to go there, I wouldn't go. I'd prefer to do it at the hospital. If you go there, there is a possibility for you to not come back. But then it's a must, so I must go there (IDI, 18 years)

Beliefs about what happens to those who do not undergo *ulwaluko* may enforce adherence to culture. For example, in the quotes below, Fana and Sane speak about the link between *ulwaluko* and ancestors, arguing that such a link makes the *ulwaluko* a tradition that cannot be avoided and something that they will have to go through.

Fana: There would be complications in your life cos that's a culture you cannot avoid. You can't run away from that, especially when you're a black person you see. You find out that things aren't going as planned in your life. There's another guy here in my hood, that guy didn't go to initiation school, but now he's like a mad psycho, he's drinking too much, talking to himself, you see. He's doing stupid stuff now. That's where I saw that this culture is really important, as black people we can't avoid it, you can't run away from that cos it

ends up catching up with you in a bad way. You won't like the consequences of that, ja. Personally, I wouldn't run away from my culture (IDI, 18 years)

Sane: ok. It's a tradition that is what they say. They say the ancestors will not be with you [turn their backs on you] and stuff like that. I don't know, I won't lie. But I think it is not something that you can decide not to do

Interviewer: So personally, do you think you will go to the mountain, or have you been to the mountain?

Sane: Yes, I will go, I will go. I don't have a choice. It is tradition and when the time comes, I will go (IDI, 18 years)

Ulwaluko was a significant cultural practice in young adolescent men attaining the status of manhood. Undergoing this practice significantly elevated one's status even among sexual partners. There was something about circumcised young adolescent men that made girls believe that those circumcised performed better at as such, some young adolescent men shared that females tended to prefer to have sex with circumcised males in the view that circumcised males perform better at sex. This perception is further elaborated in the next chapter about male sexual performance and the meanings ascribed to it.

The role of a man in a romantic relationship

Although young adolescent men seemed to place great significance on the practice of *ulwaluko* to attain a manhood status, it seemed qualification into manhood – through *ulwaluko* - needed to be supplemented through certain actions. Such action usually involved assuming certain roles to prove one's manhood. Young adolescent men identified a range of male responsibilities. Some

were traditional roles that males ought to assume in their romantic relationships, including the provider and protector roles, while some roles fell outside of the traditional roles of males.

Make her happy, not make her cry: affectionate roles in romantic relationships

Some young adolescent men wanted to make valuable contributions to the lives of their girlfriends and to do this, they felt they needed to portray a sense of warmth, care, and affection and make their girlfriends happy. In the quote below, Zolani shared what he thinks his role is in the relationship, he said that,

Zolani: So, for me, my role as a boyfriend is to care for and love my girlfriend. Also, this thing of bullying girls and being violent is wrong, my role is to be gentle with my girlfriend, to understand her and make her happy, not to make her cry (Diary entry, 18 years)

Zolani questioned the suffering of girls at the hands of their romantic partners. Young adolescent men in a group discussion recounted similar views regarding their ideas about the role of a man in romantic relationships.

Moses: [...] It is your role to make her happy so that she doesn't entertain other boys

Ntokozo: I would say that the role of a guy is to make a girl happy in a relationship. Make all those exciting and happy moments. Make sure it means a lot to her.

Thulani: I agree, a girl must be happy in a relationship. She must not be bored by you, you need to spend time with her, take her out, spoil her, and let her know that she is loved and appreciated. That is your role, if you do that, the relationship will be fine (FGD, 18-19 years)

Young adolescent men's talk about their roles reveals a sense of warmth and softness in romantic relationships, suggesting the complexity of cultural constructions of masculinity and the continuous negotiation and reconstruction of masculinity. When young adolescent men see themselves as responsible for the happiness of their romantic partners, this shows a sense of care towards the emotional well-being of their partners. While some young adolescent men describe their male roles to be characterised by elements of soft masculinities, some of the young adolescent men's descriptions of their roles in romantic relationships were also characterised by a strong sense of traditional roles, such as the protector and provide roles.

The provider role: A man must provide for himself and his family

Aside from the fact that culturally young adolescent men are not yet men, young adolescent men in this study still identified some typical traditional roles reserved for males, as illustrated in the quote below.

Fana: It's just general information from the way you're taught and the things I also see. Let's say you have a kid, for example, then that kid is your responsibility. You must do everything in your power to make your kid look great. All that stuff. You can't as a man make a child then you can't provide for that child.

Interviewer: Let's say you are 14 years old, and you make someone pregnant, would you be expected to still provide for the child?

Fana: No, 14 you're still young, obviously they would understand. Your parents will provide for you, but when you're older, let's say you reach 18, then you have to plan, your parents won't be around forever... (IDI, 18 years)

Fana also speaks about taking responsibility for one's actions, yet at the same time, he acknowledges that not all young adolescent men can assume such responsibilities, due to age.

Indeed, young adolescent men were aware that not all young adolescent men could assume the provider role due to economic hardships. Despite such realisation, the inability to provide for their girlfriends brought feelings of uselessness, as shown in the quotes below.

Mathole: I don't want to lie; they look at you like they don't know you. But when you have money, they all want to come to you. That's why they say money is power.

Ayanda: They say that the voice of a man without money is not heard. When you want them, and you don't have money they don't want you next to them (FGD, 15-16 years)

Mathole and Ayanda argue that girls are the ones who maintain the idea that young adolescent men should be able to provide for them. However, even when a girl did not expect their boyfriend to provide for them, young adolescent men still beat themselves up for not being able to provide for their partners, despite the girl saying that they understood and therefore did not expect anything. In a diary entry, Lakhe an 18-year-old boy recounted how he felt useless and not man enough when he could not buy a birthday gift for his partner. He recounts that his partner understood and accepted that he could not afford to buy a present, yet this did not spare him from feeling less of a man and concerned about the possible desertion if he failed to provide for his partner. Lakhe seems to place pressure to perform certain roles even when these are not expected of him.

Not all young adolescent men were preoccupied with providing for their partners knowing their economic situations. For example, for Abonile, the fact that he was poor and could not provide financially for his partner did not bother him, as narrated by Abonile in the quote below.

Abonile: I once dated this hot girl who was wanted by everyone. She chose me even though I didn't have money and she had just broken up with a guy who took her out and gave her

money all the time. It was nice to know that despite everything, this girl chose to be with me. She even said to me that I must not worry myself about trying to buy nice things for her or to take her out. She told me that she loved me for me, and she chose me knowing that I didn't have money. It was nice being in a relationship with her, she was sweet and caring (IDI, 18 years)

Abonile is relieved and appreciates the fact that his partner understood his economic situation and therefore diminished any need to want to assume the provider role by giving money and buying gifts. Young adolescent men put unnecessary pressure on themselves to assume the provider role. Such may depict how societal norms about young adolescent men and their roles bully them into thinking of themselves as providers and failure to do so places one's masculinity in jeopardy. The idea that a man should provide seemed to go hand in hand with the idea that a man should be a protector.

The protector role: "he's strong so he has to protect"

In addition to the provider role, young adolescent men spoke about their duty to protect their girlfriends, as illustrated in the quote below.

Asapho: Protection at all times is also a role of man in a relationship. Say for instance we are sleeping at my place and there's a break-in. Obviously, I'm the one who's going to get up and look be on the lookout and ensure her safety.

Thando: He's the man of the house and he's strong so he has to protect. A man is the breadwinner.

Asapho: You can't compare a man with a girl. A man is strong enough and can withstand anything (FGD, 14 – 15 years)

Ideas about young adolescent men being protectors are in line with masculine views that depict young adolescent men as strong and brave. Because the ability to protect was seen as a brave thing to do, young adolescent men frowned upon the idea that a female partner could protect their boyfriend, as shown in the quotes below.

Phiwe: There is a problem. Because the guy is the strong one, he's the head of the house and is supposed to be the protector.

Ncude: Yes, because your friends will always laugh at you saying that your girl fights for you.

Phiwe: It's better to get a girl that is a coward when you're a coward yourself, rather than having a stronger partner than you (FGD, 14-15 years)

Not all young adolescent men wanted to assume the protector role. Some challenged the perception that girls are fragile and therefore need to be protected. These young adolescent men felt that assuming the protector role could be dangerous.

Vusi: Also, you need to know that fighting can be dangerous, so it is best to just run sometimes, instead of wanting to act brave and then lose your life.

Yihlo: Imagine you get killed because you wanted to be brave [sgora], and then she will move on with other people when you are dead. No, it's better I run away (FGD, 14 – 15 years)

Ideas around the provider and protector roles are patriarchal unrealistic ideas that seek to place boys at the top of the hierarchy and subjugate girls by making them rely on them for material resources, their livelihood, and protection/safety. Such ideas may also breed feelings of being powerful and the desire to be in control in romantic relationships.

Power and control in romantic relationships

The provider and protector roles as described above may complicate issues of power and control in adolescent romantic relationships. Although young adolescent men said they aspired for equality and did not want to control or dominate their partner in their romantic relationship. As shown in this section, sometimes their aspirations to protect and provide came across as controlling. Discussions revealed that young adolescent men were concerned about the safety of their partners, particularly considering the high rates of violence in South African townships, such concerns meant that they wanted to know about their girlfriends' whereabouts, as illustrated in the quote below.

Lwando: ...They must know where you are going, with whom and when you will be back. This is especially important for girls because it is not safe out there. But men have been doing this thing of going up and down for a very long time, maybe women are just tired of being left in the house while the men go out and have fun. I also think that you don't just get to a point where you can expect your girlfriend to inform you about their plans and whereabouts, these are things that one gains through trust. Also, you are likely to let your

partner go anywhere if they have proven that they can be trusted when they are out there
(Diary entry, 19 years)

Although Lwando's concerns are valid, they may be easily understood as his desire to monitor his partner and use his concerns for safety justify this. Another way young adolescent men's concerns about the safety of their partners illuminated elements of control was their desire to protect their partners from preying eyes and hyenas, as they called it. Young adolescent men were worried about how their partners dressed, stating that dressing in revealing clothes for example can easily attract other young adolescent men.

Asapho: There are hyenas looking at her. You don't trust even your own friend. You hear them complimenting your girlfriend by mistake.

Thando: People are not the same. There are those who when wearing shorts, you think to yourself she's beautiful and won't think about how other people will stare at her or how they'd sneak up on her. Then some don't like it when their partners wear shorts.

Babalo: They are a magnet. A person that leaves the house in shorts, that's not right (FGD, 14 – 15 years)

Young adolescent men in the group discussion are concerned about how other young adolescent men lust over girls when they wear revealing clothes and how such may attract purvey attention from other young adolescent men, their talk also alludes to objectification of women and how, in some instances, they are perceived as helpless and in need of a rescuer.

Further discussions around issues of power and control revealed how young adolescent men position girls' power in romantic relationships. Young adolescent men shared that girls should

have more power than usual. In the quotes below, Zolani and Luzuko recount their ideas about power and control in romantic relationships.

Zolani: We hear a lot of things like men must have power in a romantic relationship and that they must be respected, but a man's power is through his actions, not this thing of violence or wanting respect by force. Some relationships end because of how men want power and respect. For me, I feel like when women take the lead in a romantic relationship, then the romantic relationship will last longer. Especially with girls who know what they want. I am happy to be told what to do by such girls because that creates peace, you just do what they want, as long as they are not making you do stupid things... (Diary entry, 18 years)

Luzuko: if you love her, then you will do what she says because you don't want her to feel sad and unloved (Diary entry, 19 years)

Luzuko and Zolani's narrative above rejects the idea that young adolescent men have absolute decision-making power over their partners. Such thinking disrupts masculine norms that seek to paint all young adolescent men as obsessed with power. In contrast to Zolani who felt that girls should have more power, there were some instances where young adolescent men felt that power couldn't be shared and as such, girls got away with having more power than them, as illustrated in the quote below.

Thula: Girls also like telling boys who to be friends with. They don't want us to be friends with girls.

Ncude: Yes, they do that a lot. And that causes a lot of fights in relationships because sometimes, you meet this new girlfriend who wants you to stop being friends with people you have known for a while.

Vusi: But because we love them, we listen to them, and we start distancing ourselves from female friends (FGD, 14-15 years)

Young adolescent men's narratives above reveal that when they stumble across issues of power in their interactions, they re-construct these ideas with their romantic partners. This demonstrates that young adolescent men are not rigid in their approach and attitudes but instead are amenable to adopting attitudes that will benefit their romantic relationship. For example, Lakhe said,

Lakhe: No one should feel controlled and feel that they must ask for permission but one's feelings should be considered when deciding on what you want to do (Diary entry, 18 years)

It seems that while one might not be necessarily told what to do and when, for Lakhe, being in a romantic relationship means thinking about how one's actions would impact the other and therefore, individuals in romantic relationships ought to control themselves and their behaviour least they hurt their partner's feelings.

Young adolescent men's attitudes and practices around IPV

In this study, when young adolescent men spoke about power and control, they also spoke about violence and abuse in romantic relationships. The romantic relationship can be a context of power, dominance, and control and a context where traditional gender norms are reproduced. The infusion of power, dominance, and control may be the most compelling factor in IPV. Traditional gendered norms about manhood may also influence perception towards IPV. This section explores young

adolescent men's attitudes and practices around IPV and their motivations for the perpetration or non-perpetration of IPV in their romantic relationships.

Young adolescent men's narratives around IPV in romantic relationships highlighted their consciousness of how common IPV is in romantic relationships in their context. Some young adolescent men recounted instances when they had been violent towards their girlfriends. For young adolescent men who had been violent towards their girlfriends, the reasons for using violence varied. For some young adolescent men, violence was used in an attempt to discipline their girlfriends. In the quotes below, Zolani justifies his use of IPV.

Zolani: Yes, I once beat up my girlfriend, the problem is, she was talking to me like I was a madman. I get angry quickly; I didn't mean to hit her. I asked for forgiveness, but she didn't want to listen. We broke up. I regretted it. I told myself that from now on, I will only use words (IDI, 18 years)

While Zolani's reaction might be a case of impulsiveness, his reaction shows that in his world, males ought to be respected, and the lack of respect from a romantic partner warrants discipline. The idea that when a young adolescent man feels disrespected by their partners, they have to use violence was pervasive and young adolescent men continued to use disrespect as a valid reason for violence. Nkosi, an 18-year-old young adolescent man said that if a girl cheats, beating her up will teach her that cheating is wrong. Young adolescent men in the quote below described instances where it could be justifiable.

Ndilane: It's never necessary to resort to violence to solve your issues. It's not necessary. But I'm sure because violence was used, it's because of the matter. For example, the

girlfriend drinks and he tells you that he's chilling with his cousins but when you get there you find girls and boys, yet she never mentioned anything about boys. Then when you try and take her away from there she refuses, that's where the violence starts.

Ruto: It depends in most cases. Say for instance these people are in a marriage and the wife knows for example that the husband is short-tempered and still does things to make him angry instead of avoiding making him angry (FGD, 18 – 19 years)

These young adolescent men are from a context characterised by high rates of violence in general, therefore, their ideas about violence and how they may be quick to respond using violence reflect how much violence has been normalised in their context. Aside from Lwando and Zolani who had perpetrated violence towards their girlfriends, it was worrying to note how easily justifiable the use of violence was for some of these young adolescent men.

Contextual norms might drive young adolescent men's behaviour, however, not all young adolescent men will adhere to these norms, just as much as not all young adolescent men resort to violence in the face of disrespect. Some young adolescent men were against IPV even in the face of disrespect or in instances where their partners were physically violent. In the excerpt below, young adolescent men in an FGD argue that even when faced with verbal violence, there is no justifiable reason why one should use physical violence.

Babalo: There are times when you feel really angry but opting for violence is not the answer.

Asapho: It's possible at times. The way some women speak can push you to be violent towards them. But violence is not a solution, rather walk away until you come down and come back once you're calm.

Zamani: I agree, there are times when you can see that this person is testing you. The best way is to just remove yourself from the situation because even when a woman is wrong, violence is not the answer (FGD, 14 – 15 years)

The young adolescent men in the FGD acknowledge that there may be instances where one feels verbally abused and disrespected but still maintain that violence is wrong. These young adolescent men are challenging gender norms that place males on the pedestal of respect. James felt the same way, stating that it is never an option to respond with violence in a romantic relationship. Anda, a 17-year-old young adolescent man also spoke about how he would never retaliate with violence, whether provoked or disrespected. It is not that young adolescent men who did not use violence were not conscious of how their non-violence may be perceived by others in their community. For example, Anda said that he knew that his decision to remain non-violence would result in him being labelled as a fool, that people might laugh at him, retaliating with violence would result in bigger troubles for him. Young adolescent men may desire to be non-violent, yet their choice to remain non-violent results in negative labels for them. Young adolescent men who experience physical violence at the hands of girls may be labelled as fools, while those who might choose to retaliate, will have to bear the label of an abuser. Such attitudes depict the double standards that societies might bear around violence.

A practical example of the double standard around IPV is the response of both the community and the police to males who experience IPV. Young adolescent men's narratives revealed that there seemed to be tolerance for females who unleash violence, yet the same tolerance is not reserved for IPV perpetrated by males towards females. Perhaps some young adolescent men did not want to or cautioned against the use of violence, even in the face of violent provocation because they understood that the repercussions for young adolescent men who perpetrate IPV are harsher. Young adolescent men were not expected to retaliate when hit by their girlfriends but at the same time they could not report the abuse to the police, as highlighted in the quotes below

Anda: [laughs] If you want the police to make fun of you, then you go there and tell them that a woman hit you. You will regret it...Yes, even if it is known that a wife abuses his husband, the neighbours will not say anything. But if it's the woman, joh, you will be arrested...I don't know. It is just this way. That is why, as a man you have to be strong. No one will help you (IDI, 17 years)

Interviewer: What happens when a woman uses violence?

Afika: It won't be seen as an issue. There won't even be a case. Even if you go and report her, they won't open a case.

Cedu: That's not even an option, the police will laugh at you, and you will regret going there (FGD, 18 – 91 years)

Anda and the young adolescent men in the FGD have learned that males ought to be invulnerable no matter the situation. This narrative shows that young adolescent men have no avenues to deal with abuse, as they cannot retaliate, nor can they report the abuse. These young adolescent men's narratives highlight how gender norms in Gugulethu do not perceive males as eligible to be victims of violence, this is also shown in how police may react to male victims. While refusal to acknowledge males as victims further victimises males who speak up. Young adolescent men themselves were of the view that the victims of IPV were largely female. Perhaps this might explain responses towards male victims, as shown above.

Young adolescent men's attitudes that females bear a disproportionate burden of IPV perpetrated by male partners mirrors that of the larger society. To highlight how this view manifests in the larger society, young adolescent men use the term GBV. They argue that GBV has come to be associated with violence against females, as shown in the quote below.

Ndilane: Even the term GBV relates to girls being beaten by men, you can't say GBV then it relates to men being beaten by girls

Thulane: In South Africa, it's clear that it's the male. Because most GBV cases are mostly spoken against men (FGD, 18 – 19 years)

Fana: ...I think it's because many reported cases about couples, it's usually the guys who beat women up and even kill them, you see. It's rare to find a boy who's being beaten up by a girl or a boy who's killed by a boy you see. I think that's why GBV is based on women, because every time a woman dies, a guy is the reason for that (IDI, 18 years)

In the quote above young adolescent men acknowledge the pervasiveness of IPV in South African communities. Fana's narrative speaks to the degree of IPV experienced by males and females. Gender is not synonymous with females, yet, because it is mostly males who are violent, the term GBV has come to be associated with violence directed at females. When terms such as GBV become synonymous with violence experienced by females, what does this mean for help-seeking behaviours for males who might be victims of violence? There is a necessity to understand young adolescent men's experiences of IPV, not in binary to or in comparison to the experiences of adolescents. Doing so may show the depth of violence in communities and may dilute the concerning view that it is only males who are violent in romantic relationships.

It seems that experiencing abuse at the hands of a female romantic partner is something that young adolescent men ought to be ashamed of and perhaps that is why their experiences of abuse are rarely shared. The idea that young adolescent men who experience IPV acquire derogative labels is shared by young adolescent men in the quote below.

Thula: Girls abuse men in relationships too. Some even beat their boyfriends and people will laugh and say you are a coward

Phiwe: When a girl beats up her boyfriend, they say you are a fool.

Yihlo: Even if a girl beats you, you can't do anything about it because you will be arrested if you beat her up. They laugh at you; you can't do anything about it.

Phiwe: Yeah, you can't. just walk away (FGD, 14-15 years)

Other young adolescent men recounted their experiences of IPV. For example, Abonile and Siphon recount violent encounters with their girlfriends, as shown in the quote below.

Abonile: She said we must go home, I was like "how? when we are still having fun". Joh my sister, you don't want to know what happened after that, she tore my shirt. She poured wine on me, and she tore my shirt up. I had to restrain myself, I said OK fine let's go. But I was very angry that day. We left; I did not even talk to her on our way home. When I got home, I slept, I could see that she wants to have sex, but I told myself, I am not going to do that, this girl really humiliated me (IDI, 18 years)

Siphon: Yes... she hit me. I told her if she ever hit me again, I will leave her (IDI, 15 years)

In the excerpts below, Zolani and Lihle recount instances of verbal abuse from their girlfriends.

Zolani: ...I could not recognise her voice, so she started shouting, telling me that I must open the door, or she will kill both me and the slut that I am with. I only realised later that it was her, and when I opened the door, she was already angry. When I opened the door,

she realised that I was with my friend, she said, “oh I thought you were with some slut. Hey, I was going to beat her up”. But she calmed down... (IDI, 18 years)

Lihle: No, I’ve never been hit before. Where she swears at me? I’ve been sworn at before to a point where I was really pissed off, but I’ve never reached a point where I hit her (IDI, 17 years)

The idea that young adolescent men can be victims of violence in Gugulethu was not foreign, Litha recounts how his friend was beaten by his girlfriend, yet the friend did not respond violently.

Interviewer: And what did your friend do, when he was hit by a girl?

Litha: He told her to stop what she was doing, because he doesn’t want to do something he’ll regret. Then she stopped. (IDI, 16 years)

While some young adolescent men refrained from reacting violently to their experiences of violence, in the quote below, Kwakhanya shares how after being hit by his girlfriend, he also responded by hitting her.

Kwakhanya: We had an argument; she saw me with another girl then she thought I was cheating. She slapped me twice then I slapped her back then I apologized after.

Interviewer: Uhm, so how did you feel after slapping her?

Kwakhanya: I didn’t like it, I only hit her because she hit me first (IDI, 15 years)

Thinking about individuals' behaviour in societies should reflect how the context they live in channels them into patterns of certain behaviour. Violence is a structural problem and young adolescent men's narratives of their experiences of IPV introduce them as victims of larger societal structures that refuse to acknowledge their victimhood while also illuminating society's double standards surrounding norms around IPV.

Conclusion

This chapter explored young adolescent men's construction of manhood, their attitudes towards manhood, and how such attitudes may shape ideas around power and control and IPV. The findings highlight the complexity of being a young adolescent man, challenge and disrupt harmful and simplistic ideas about young adolescent men. The findings also underscore the role of the socio-cultural context as young adolescent men forge their manhood identities, showing that as young adolescent men continue to draw masculine ideas from their context and culture, they do so while simultaneously contesting and conforming to these cultural ideas. The findings further emphasise the complexity of issues around power, dominance, and IPV and illuminate the potential dissonance between young adolescent men's self-perception of themselves as perpetrators and victims of IPV and how young adolescent men straddle between questioning social norms around IPV and getting to a point of non-violence even when met with violence to avoid consequences. Such a finding rejects the binary view of hegemonic versus nonhegemonic, demonstrating that young adolescent men's manhood identities were in-process, multiple, and shifting.

CHAPTER 5: “MATING BIRDS”: SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS OF YOUNG ADOLESCENT MEN

Introduction

In South Africa, public health research places more focus on young adolescent men’s risky sexual behaviours and has portrayed this population as only interested in sex (Baisley et al., 2018; Nicol et al., 2023; Shefer et al., 2015). Risky sexual behaviour is having sex without a condom and having sex with multiple sexual partners which increases the chances of unwanted and unplanned pregnancies, HIV and STIs infection and transmission. South African studies report peer influence and masculine norms as some of the factors that discourage young adolescent men from using condoms and having one sexual partner (Manyaapelo et al., 2019; Duby et al., 2021). The focus on young adolescent men’s risky sexual behaviours is appropriate and necessary considering the high HIV rates, STIs, and poor SRH outcomes. However, while a focus on risky sexual behaviours is important, Harden (2014) contends that having sex is more than just about risk. Public health’s emphasis on sexual risk may obscure an understanding of young adolescent men’s motivations for having sex and may contribute to the problematisation of young adolescent men’s sexual endeavours.

In this study, having sex emerged as a key marker of manhood. Young adolescent men’s notions of being a man were tied to sexual intercourse, rendering sex an important expression of their manhood and related identities. In adolescence, young adolescent men, similarly to young women, are still forging their sexual identities and learning about their sexual preferences. Heterosexual romantic relationships may thus be important in understanding young adolescent men’s ideas about sex, sexual expectations, and meanings. Such an understanding might place the heterosexual romantic relationship context as a key entry in the development and design of “age and developmentally appropriate prevention programmes that promote healthy adolescent dating and sexual relationships” (Righi et al., 2019, p. 8290). Insights from this chapter contribute to the

limited body of research in South Africa that challenges the construction of young adolescent men as largely interested in risky sex and unaffected by emotional connections (Bhana, 2017b; Dlamini, 2023; Hamlall, 2018; Mudaly, 2013; Shefer et al., 2015).

While not completely ignoring elements of risky sexual behaviours among young adolescent men, this chapter moves away from problematising young adolescent men's sexual behaviours but instead seeks to understand their sexual encounters beyond the typical discourse of risk. The discourse of risk may be simplistic and overlook the complexities of why partners might behave or make the sexual decisions they make. As much as sexual norms are informed by the broader social context, sex happens in a dynamic context between two people. The chapter thus places significance on romantic relationships as a crucial context in shaping sexual behaviour for young adolescent men. A focus on the romantic relationship context may complicate the current understanding of young adolescent men's sexual endeavours by highlighting the intersection of the emotional and sexual dimensions in young adolescent men's lives and how these inform sexual behaviours.

This chapter is made up of three sections. The first section discusses young adolescent men's motivations and experiences of first sex, focusing on the link between sex and manhood and explores the complex nuances and uncertainties that young adolescent men may experience as they experiment and forge their sexual identities. The second section focuses on young adolescent men's sexual anxieties and fears in their romantic relationships and highlights how these young adolescent men understand and navigate issues of sexual consent. The third section examines young adolescent men's attitudes and practices around sex with multiple concurrent partners and their motivations for the type and number of sexual partnerships they have.

The meaning of sex: A rite of passage into manhood

First sexual intercourse was described as an experience that marks a shift from boyhood to manhood. Even young adolescent men who had not had sex perceived sex to be a significant entry into manhood, for example, Sihle, a 17-year-old young adolescent man who was a virgin shared that having first sexual intercourse makes young adolescent men feel old and marks a shift in young adolescent men. Sihle further stated that the onset of sexual intercourse means that a young adolescent man is growing and therefore needs to behave as such and start hanging around older people. The real or assumed change that happens once a young adolescent man starts having sex, as described by Sihle indicates how ideas of being a man revolve around sex and how sexual experience is associated with initiation into manhood.

Having their first sex might kickstart young adolescent men's journey towards manhood and some young adolescent men expressed victory after their first sex because this elevated their status and meant that they would no longer be disrespected. Odi described his first sexual intercourse as a mission accomplished, he said,

Odi: [...] To boys, it's like a "status" when you've had sex before. It's a big deal in boys. As is said, when boys talk or have conversations about sex and you're quiet. You'll be exposing yourself and showing them that you've never had sex before. So, you don't want them to make a mockery of you. That's why most of the youth consider relationships without sex pointless at this age. Friends influence each other, and you also don't want to be laughed at by friends (IDI, 16 years)

Odi's narrative shows that having sex was not only about him but also about the status it affords him, such as being recognised as a man and earning respect from his peers. Like Odi who has

accomplished a mission, Litha, felt brave after his first sex because he had proved a point that he is a man. Litha speaks about his first sex as a conquered mission, which required bravery and resulted in some form of recognition from peers. Not all young adolescent men described feelings of victory or bravery around their first sex. In the quote below, Lakhe shares how he felt after his first sexual experience.

Lakhe: ...sex for the first time felt weird and embarrassing. But it was nice (Diary entry, 18 years)

Like Lakhe, Simamkele shared that first sex was accompanied by feelings of loss. Simamkele said that although he liked the feeling of having sex, he felt lost during his first sexual intercourse. When asked what he meant by this, he said that he did not know how to explain it, but he could not believe that he was having sex. Simamkele might have not been ready for such an experience but had to do it because he knew that having sex came with certain privileges that virgin young adolescent men could not enjoy. Also, he might have felt lost because he was anxious about having first sex, particularly because the girl he was having sex with was not a virgin. Notwithstanding the feeling of loss, Simamkele did not share this with his peers for fear of losing face among his peers.

It seemed it was common for young adolescent men to be anxious during first sexual intercourse. Anda described feelings of discomfort during his first sexual intercourse. He said that sex is nice when you are comfortable, but it can be hard to be comfortable when having sex for the first time because you do not know if what you are doing is the right thing or not, but once you have done it a couple of times, you become comfortable and you are relaxed when doing it. Likewise, Lwando and Lethu shared that they were nervous and scared when having sex for the first time. These young adolescent men's experiences show that they don't always have the confidence to navigate

sexual encounters. Instead, there are a lot of anxieties and self-doubt that young adolescent men have to deal with as they make decisions around sex, particularly decisions around first sex.

The anxiety that came with having sex for the first time did not mean that young adolescent men did not enjoy the sexual encounter. James shared that although he was nervous and wanted to back down, he enjoyed his first sexual intercourse. Siphon affirmed James' sentiments, saying that although he was scared and nervous, he enjoyed his first sex. On the contrary, Luyakha said that he was so nervous during his first sex that he did not enjoy it. These young adolescent men's narratives highlight the ambiguity, vulnerability, and insecurity that come with first sex.

Sex was an important tool in young adolescent men's construction of their manhood and in proving their heterosexual identities. It seemed some young adolescent men used sex, to fit in, to affirm their manhood status and to be recognised by other young adolescent men as real men, and to prevent suspicions of being gay.

Lulo: You don't want to be left out of your friends

Alulutho: The reason you don't want to be left behind is because if you are left behind your friends will say you're gay and stuff, so you don't want to appear as that weak person, so you will end up doing it.

Vangani: You are doing things to fit in (FGD, 16-17 years)

Lulo, Alitho, and Vangami confirm that there is a certain level of recognition and respect reserved for young adolescent men who are having sex. Having sex thus thwarts any ideas that a young adolescent man might be gay, as illustrated in the excerpt below,

Phiwe: They say when you don't have sex, you're not a boy you're gay and you end up not hanging out with people that are having sex and chilling with girls. When you don't have a girlfriend, they call you by names even if you don't like it.

Ncude: ...a gay person doesn't think to sleep with a girl and boys think a gay person doesn't get horny

Phiwe: A girl can get undressed in front of a gay because a gay won't have sex with a girl but when you're a boy and a girl gets undressed in front of you even if you know her, you will want to have sex with them (FGD, 14 – 15 years)

The fact that some young adolescent men had sex not because they wanted to but because they wanted to affirm their manhood status meant that they had to have sex even if they did not see any significance in having sex. Siphon and Sane shared that they did not have any significance for having sex, but this did not mean that they could stop having sex because doing so would raise suspicions of being gay or risk being the subject of mockery among peers. Siphesihle shared similar views, while Siphesihle finds sex to be fun, he said that he has sex because he does not want to feel left out when his friends are having discussions about sex. These young adolescent men's ideas about sex highlight the constant pressure to prove their masculinities by producing receipts in the form of sexual action and talk.

Peer pressure to have sex was real for many young adolescent men, so much so that those who used the excuse of not having a private room to have sex were offered rooms by their friends. Although the act of borrowing a room might have helped some young adolescent men sustain their relationships by having a private space to spend time with a girl, some young adolescent men were sceptical about this gesture from their friends, saying that sometimes a friend could sabotage them due to jealousy. Another reason for scepticism was that friends may embarrass them, by making it

known to the girlfriend that this is not their space but a borrowed space, resulting in their girlfriend dissolving the relationship because their boyfriend does not have a room.

Although young adolescent men felt that sex qualified them as real men, young adolescent men knew that because they had not undergone *ulwaluko*, they were not real men. As such, some young adolescent men who had not undergone *ulwaluko* felt that girls would mock and label them as “boys”. Girls did not want to date and have sex with young adolescent men who had not been circumcised as they perceived them as children, as shown in the quotes below.

Sihle: Okay, apparently the problem with us is that we are uncircumcised/ have a foreskin (“polo neck”). Older guys do not have “polo neck”/foreskin, that’s why they don’t want us

Interviewer: What is “polo neck”?

Sihle: It’s that thing they remove when you go to the mountain for initiation (IDI, 17 years)

Achieving manhood status was a never-ending battle. Simply having sex was not enough for young adolescent men to be deemed as real men. Young adolescent men had to be circumcised to be considered real men. Perhaps Sihle remained a virgin because he felt that the assumed real man status that comes with having sex was not real, instead, real men were those who were circumcised. The idea that girls prefer young adolescent men who have undergone *ulwaluko* was also discussed by young adolescent men in an FGD, claiming that circumcised men perform better sexually.

Lulo: ...they are no longer attracted to young boys they want our elder brothers or those that are from initiation school because they know how to have sex.

Alulutho: Their penises are the right ones. There's a time during sexual intercourse when boys hurt their skin then they must limit themselves. That doesn't happen to older guys because they are already circumcised, you see (FGD, 16 – 17 years)

These excerpts highlight the mockery that some young adolescent men risk being subjected to for being uncircumcised. Although young adolescent men felt that having sex made them men, being mocked and called a “child” because they are uncircumcised reminded young adolescent men that at the end of the day, a real man is the one who has undergone *ulwaluko*. These young adolescent men are introduced early on to some of the expectations that girls might have around sex. Another expectation that girls seemingly had, as described by young adolescent men was that they had to perform well sexually, resulting in sexual anxiety for many young adolescent men.

Sexual anxiety in the lives of young adolescent men

The making of a man through having sex was not an easy task for young adolescent men. Having sex exposed young adolescent men to multiple anxieties and fears. First, young adolescent men experienced sexual performance anxiety. Second, sexual consent made young adolescent men anxious because they did not want to come across as coercive when initiating sex. Third, young adolescent men were anxious about being deemed less of a man if they were not having sex, as such, they found themselves making pre-mature decisions about sex.

Performance anxiety

Young adolescent men's narratives around sexual performance highlighted the anxieties around their sexual performance. It seemed young adolescent men were expected to perform well sexually or risk being the talk of the town. The desire to appear sexually competent creates unnecessary pressure for young adolescent men to be or to appear to be sexually experienced and competent. Some young adolescent men shared that satisfying a girl sexually was important for them because they did not want to be accused by girls of “fumbling” in bed. These young adolescent men went

on to share how being accused of “fumbling” can decrease one’s self-esteem. While girls were among those who policed young adolescent men’s sexual performance, for some young adolescent men, their fears were evoked by the constant messages they received from older guys in their lives. Manga said that adult men in the community spoke to them about making sure that they are not only “playing” with the girls that they are sleeping with but pleasuring them. The emphasis by these older guys suggests to young adolescent men like Manga that sexually pleasuring girls is important and the inability to do so is seen as “playing”. Having heard this, Manga felt that it was important for him to sexually pleasure his girlfriend.

To pleasure their girlfriends sexually, some young adolescent men said it was important to talk openly with their partners to understand what they liked and didn’t like. Odi said that to satisfy his girlfriend, he asks her what she likes. He was determined to make sure that his girlfriend was sexually satisfied, so much so that during sex, he only did what she liked. In his attempt to escape being laughed at or labelled as someone who doesn’t know what he is doing in bed, Odi was willing to forgo what he liked and preferred during sex so that his girlfriend would be satisfied and comfortable. Asked if there is something he enjoys doing during sex, but his girlfriend doesn’t, Odi said that even if there was, his main concern is making sure that his girlfriend is comfortable and enjoys sex.

The desire to perform well sexually was not always about young adolescent men wanting to come across as sexually competent, some young adolescent men said that sexual competence was necessary for them to satisfy their girlfriends sexually. For example, Wole said that he makes it a point to satisfy his girlfriend, but he doesn’t only do it to avoid being talked about in his community, instead, he does it because he believes that both he and his girlfriend should enjoy sex. Wole’s narrative challenges the view that young adolescent men only care about their sexual pleasure.

In their pursuit to sexually pleasure and satisfy their girlfriends, some young adolescent men said that they ask their girls directly if they enjoyed the sex. For example, Manga asked his girlfriend this question and she responded that she did enjoy the sex. Sometimes, girls did not wait to be asked if the sex was good, instead, girls would volunteer to share this information with their boyfriends, as shown in the quote below,

Lwando: My girlfriend also tells me what she likes when we have sex. She tells me that she has dated fools in the past, boys who didn't care about her feelings, boys who just did sex for themselves and did not bother to pleasure/satisfy her (IDI, 19 years)

In addition to communication, young adolescent men spoke about other ways to know if a girl is sexually satisfied or not. One way was through non-verbal cues, if for example, she slept after sex, that signals that she is satisfied, said Manga. Kwakhanya said that he does not need his girlfriend to tell him that she is sexually satisfied, the fact that the girl sometimes asks for sex without him initiating it means that she enjoys having sex with him.

Being with a girl who is not a virgin made young adolescent men anxious. Ideas about girls' virginity revealed young adolescent men's anxieties around possible humiliation for being with girls who are not virgins. Perhaps this was the case because they felt experienced girls would harshly judge their sexual performance. Thulane, Bee, Athule, and Wole preferred virgin girls, they said that they did not want to be humiliated by the number of young adolescent men their girlfriends had slept with. For these young adolescent men, respect, and honour were associated with being with a girl who is a virgin, such sentiments reflect patriarchal societies' views on girls' sexuality. Athule and Woles' preferences for virgin girls were informed by the belief that a girl's body can be damaged by having sex. For example, Athule said that a girl's vagina stretches from having sex and he did not want to have sex with a girl who has a stretched vagina. Such sentiments

reinforce some of the double standards illuminated by Odi and Moses above, showing the general lack of emphasis on male virginity.

Despite their anxieties about being with an experienced girl, young adolescent men were also conscious that their partners and adolescent girls in general are challenging the expectation that they should reserve their virginity. Some girls made it known early in the relationships that they were not virgins to distort any ideas about their sexual history or lack thereof. For example, Athule shared that although he would like to get a girl who is a virgin, his current girlfriend declared early in the relationship that she is not a virgin. Even though Athule preferred a virgin girl, he continued to be in a relationship with a girl who was not a virgin. This might be because he found the girl to be beautiful, as he would continuously proclaim during the interview. Also, he might have continued with the relationship because deep down, he was of the view that expecting girls to be a virgin is an unreasonable expectation. He said, *“Its fine... very few girls are virgins these days”*. A view that was uttered by other young adolescent men in the study.

Not all young adolescent men were anxious about being with a girl who was not a virgin. For Lihle and Odi being in a relationship with a girl they loved and one who loved them back was more important than the anxiety that some young adolescent men exhibited regarding being with a girl who was not a virgin. Lihle and Odi are rejecting patriarchal norms that tend to police girls’ sexuality by encouraging them to remain virgins until marriage. Like Lihle and Odi, Manga was not worried about being with a girl who is not a virgin, he said *“there are no virgins anyways”*. Manga shows a sense of disillusionment with the possible existence of virgin girls. It seems he is less bothered by girls who are not virgins because he would not be able to find a virgin, not because he is not interested in virgin girls. Manga narrative exhibits a sense of managing his expectations.

Some of the young adolescent men's narratives foreground their sensitivities about how their performance may be evaluated. Such narratives suggest that some of these young adolescent men approach sex as a performance, whereby they must give certain performances. When young adolescent men become preoccupied with pleasuring girls to thwart mockery by girls and older men in the community, a concern they have shared, that leaves the question of who pleases them, do they even consider their sexual pleasure to be important? Gendered sexual expectations leave young adolescent men with unrealistic expectations when it comes to sexual performance, where young adolescent men are expected to perform and girls to be recipients of such performances.

Negotiating sexual consent

In their bid to be sexually competent and to pleasure a girl, young adolescent men had to be careful not to come across as coercive. Some young adolescent men like Mabox and Siphon displayed consciousness around issues of consent. They said that when they initiate sex and their girlfriends decline, they are left with no choice but to understand because any attempt to persuade the girl is rape. Sihle also shared that consent was important

Sihle: Sometimes when I touch her in a certain place, she'd say 'no I told you not to touch me there, we can't'. So, I'm already used to the fact that I have to wait for her until she is ready (IDI, 17 years)

Young adolescent men's ability to understand and respect girls' sexual consent is important considering the high rates of sexual violence in general and in romantic relationships. Some young adolescent men shared that consent to sex was sometimes non-verbal, thus not always clear-cut. For example, they said that if a girl does not stop you or say no that signals consent to have sex. Odi was one of the young adolescent men who held this perception and justified this view by saying that when a girl agrees to come to a young adolescent men's place, they already know what

is going to happen, so why would a girl come if she does not want to have sex? For Odi, when a girl refuses to come over to his place or spend time in a private space, that is her way of saying no to sex. Like Odi, Zolani's ideas about what it means to have a girl come over confirm some of the disturbing ways in which these young adolescent men understand consent.

Zolani: I would ask her to leave. I won't chill with someone who doesn't have sex with me. You see, she likes kissing me a lot and her kiss turns me on, so if she kissed me but did not want to have sex, hai I'd tell her to leave. My penis won't get peace when she is still there, it will stay up and hopeful that it will get what it wants (IDI, 18 years)

While Zolani said that he would not force a girl who refuses to have sex, his response to his girlfriend's refusal to have sex might send the message to his girlfriend that if she refuses sex, she will be kicked out and possibly dumped, thus indirectly placing pressure on the girl to agree to have sex even when she does not want to.

Despite some young adolescent men believing that a girl coming over to a young adolescent man's place is an indication of consent to having sex, some said girls can withdraw consent at any point in time. Simamkele shared how he had invited his girlfriend over to his place and he was hoping that they were going to have sex, but the girlfriend refused. He said that he was sad when his girlfriend said no to sex even though she had agreed to come visit him. Despite his disappointment, he said he did not force his girlfriend to have sex because he wanted sex to be consensual. Unlike Zolani and Odi, some young adolescent men like Simamkele were aware that a girl agreeing to come over was not consent, which is why, when a girl did come over but still refused to have sex, such young adolescent men refrained from forcing or begging a girl to have sex. Perhaps this was the case because some young adolescent men also lived with the uncertainty and fear of being accused of rape by a romantic partner. While young adolescent men were in romantic relationships

with their girlfriends and seemed conscious of issues of sexual consent, they did not trust that a girlfriend would not falsely accuse them of rape despite having consensual sexual intercourse. This meant that young adolescent men constantly had to check and police themselves to make sure that they were not committing crimes.

Consciousness around rape and the fact that rape can occur in a romantic relationship left young adolescent men fearful of being accused of rape by their girlfriends. For example, Lwando narrates how, after hearing stories around the community he had developed a strategy whereby, after sex, he would prepare water for his girlfriend to wash. Lwando did this because he did not want to be accused of rape, when in fact he had consensual sex with his girlfriend. One might have thought that this was to erase evidence of rape; however, this was not Lwando's rationale, instead, Lwando felt that his girlfriend would not have had time to wash or even agree to wash after sex if she was indeed raped. Even though Lwando was in a romantic relationship with his girlfriend, he still did not trust that she would not accuse him or be forced to accuse him of rape as some young adolescent men reported hearing that some girls were forced by their families to lay false rape claim charges.

Lwando was conscious of how young adolescent men have been constructed as potential rapists. What does it mean to be a young adolescent man in a romantic relationship yet constantly live in anxiety and fear of being accused of rape? For young adolescent men in the current study, this meant consciously policing oneself. For example, Athule shared that he wants to have consensual sex with his girlfriend because it happens a lot that young adolescent men force girls into having sex, and girls open rape cases. This awareness has shaped Athule's ideas around consensual sex and has made him sensitive and deliberate about getting consent to have sex, even when in a romantic relationship. Like Athule, Mabox recounts how he feels when he initiates sex, and his girlfriend refuses to have sex. For him, any attempt to influence a girl when she has already said no can be classified as coercion. Although battling with his fears and uncertainties around false rape claims, Lwando tries to understand why girls might take such action. He said that young

adolescent men like to be players, sleeping with different girls and ‘treat them like “shit”’, therefore, when a girl catches feelings (falls in love), only to realise that the young adolescent man does not love them, they might lay false rape claims just to get back at the young adolescent man.

Young adolescent men’s fears of being accused of rape suggest two things: first, young adolescent men are conscious of how they are constructed as potential rapists in their societies; and second, young adolescent men have internalised the idea of being possible rapists. Both scenarios place young adolescent men in situations where they constantly must find ways to police themselves and make sure that sexual intercourse is consensual. Notwithstanding young adolescent men’s consciousness around rape and their efforts to not pressure their romantic partners into having sex, some of them expressed that they were not willing to wait for too long before having sex with a partner, particularly a new partner. ‘Too long’ was subjective, ranging from one to three weeks. Some of these young adolescent men shared that, if forced to wait for “too long” they might need to find someone else to sleep with, while the girlfriend was still making up her mind.

Although young adolescent men’s impatience was not overt pressure for girls to make quick decisions around sex, the thought of losing a boyfriend because of sex is a form of influence. Siphesihle reported that if he were to wait for a girl to take as long as she wanted, he would have nothing to talk or boast about to his friends. Even though Siphesihle would not force a girl to make up her mind if he had to wait too long to sleep with a girl, it was not worth the effort, hence he said he would just leave the relationship. Young adolescent men are influenced by broader social and cultural norms that dictate gender roles, dating rituals, and expected behaviours in romantic relationships. Therefore, if the expectation is for young adolescent men to have sex, not having sex because a girl is taking her time might threaten young adolescent men’s status among friends.

As much as young adolescent men were battling with issues of consent, discussions with young adolescent men also revealed that girls were not conscious of consent-related issues in romantic relationships. It seemed girls could not understand young adolescent men's refusal to have sex. If young adolescent men declined sex, girls became suspicious and accused them of cheating, as shown in the extract below.

Kwakhanya: She gets disappointed and sometimes thinks that I'm probably cheating on her because I don't want to have sex. But then I tell her that it's not like that, I'm just not okay on that particular day. Or at times I'm busy doing house chores (IDI, 15 years)

Neglecting teaching girls about consent may lead to girls' unrealistic expectations when it comes to sex, like expecting their boyfriends to want sex whenever they initiate sex. This is problematic because young adolescent men might find themselves engaging in sexual intercourse not because they want to but because they are afraid of their girlfriends' reactions.

Not all young adolescent men were met with hostility and suspicions for refusing to have sex, some young adolescent men shared that they have declined sex initiated by their girlfriends. Luyakha said that he's also withheld consent from his girlfriend multiple times when he did not feel like it. Young adolescent men's refusal to have sex disrupts the social norm that seeks to position them as always up for sex. Although young adolescent men like Luyakha had the agency to refuse sex, some, particularly those who were still virgins found it hard to refuse sexual advances, highlighting that in some instances, first sex for these young adolescent men was not entirely self-willed.

Young adolescent men's first sexual intercourse: coerced or self-willed?

Young adolescent men were anxious to thwart any claims that sought to portray them as less of a man. For many of the young adolescent men, the conditions and circumstances under which they had their first sex were laden with subtle, sometimes overt forms of coercion. Because young adolescent men wanted to fit in, be respected, and be recognised as real men, they succumbed to pressure and coercion and, as such, prematurely decided to have sex. Circumstances that resulted in young adolescent men making premature decisions to have sex were not blunt, instead, certain things said and done diminished their agency and placed them in positions where they felt they had no choice but to start having sex. Lethu recounts how he ended up deciding to “*just*” have sex due to pressure from his friends. Lethu’s decision to have first sex was not voluntary, but he knew that remaining a virgin was not an option if he wanted his friends to respect, recognise and take him seriously. From young adolescent men’s narratives, the drive to belong, to be revered, and to be seen as manly is evident and drives them to have sex even when they are not ready.

Bee narrates how his first sex was a result of coercion by his friends who responded to his girlfriend’s text without his consent. His girlfriend had sent him a text saying that she was ready to have sex with him, but before he could respond, he showed the text to his friends who responded to the text saying the girlfriend should come the following day. All this was done without Bee’s awareness or consent, he said that when he tried deleting the text his friends said he shouldn’t do that because that is what cowards do. Although Bee claims that he was ready to have sex, what his friends did fast-tracked his first sexual experience because, after the text, he said he felt he had no option but to go ahead with having sex or else risk being called names. Bee who was the only virgin in the group said he was happy when he finally had sex because when he was still the only virgin his friends would laugh at him and would disregard his opinion because he was a virgin. Bee, by being a virgin, was not afforded the same status as his peers and was stripped of certain privileges, such as airing his opinions, this might be another reason that led him to have sex.

Similar to Bee and Lethu, Mabox's decision to have sex was premature, as shown in the quote below,

Mabox: in my first relationship, this girl wanted to have sex, and then I said I don't want to have sex because I was still a virgin, then she made me watch porn. We watched porn together and then she said you see, this is how you have sex, let us try it together, then we had sex. That's how I learned (IDI, 17 years)

Mabox did not say that he did not want to have sex because he did not know how sex is done, he said he was not ready because he was still a virgin. Despite having not protested in having sex, Mabox was not entirely ready to have sex, his experience is a depiction of some of the subtle forms of sexual coercion. Following his exposure to porn, he did not communicate to his girlfriend that he is still not interested in having sex nor that he is still not ready to have sex, therefore, this might have been read as consent.

Like the young adolescent men above, Lihle recounted the undermining and mockery by older men that led him to decide to have sex because he did not want to be viewed as less of a man. He said that he and his friends were mocked in front of their girlfriends for not knowing what to do with the girls they were dating. In response to this, Lihle and his friends decided to have their first sex. Not living up to masculine ideals in their contexts exposes young adolescent men to vulnerabilities and fears that their masculinities might be questioned. When young adolescent men feel that their current behaviour, in this case, not having sex is considered unmanly, they might be propelled to assume a certain image that will afford them the status of being a real man and squash any insults that may come their way.

Sex qualified young adolescent men to think of themselves as real men, so much so that those who had chosen to remain virgins were perceived to be less of a man and as such, were at the receiving end of mockery and possible exclusion. Young adolescent men who delay having sex find themselves at the centre of scrutiny by both peers and other members of the community. However, even with mockery and possible ostracisation, Sihle and Lwazi were resolute in their decisions to remain virgins. This shows that young adolescent men don't blindly comply with group behaviours and attitudes. This young adolescent men's refusal to succumb to the pressure to have sex discredits the construction of young adolescent men as sexual predators and their uncontrollable sex drive.

Strategies used by young adolescent men to resist the pressure to have sex varied. Lwazi said that he faced his peers' mockery about his virgin status head-on. Because Lwazi had shared that he was still a virgin, his friends would laugh at him and ask him when he was having sex and if he had any problems. To ask if Lwazi has any problems insinuates two things, (a) it questions the functionality of his penis/sexual libido, and (b) the question suggests that Lwazi might not be sexually attracted to girls. Notwithstanding all the mockery and being made to feel embarrassed for being a virgin, Lwazi refused to prematurely decide to have sex.

Sihle, on the other hand, said that he was not going to be pressured into having sex but also did not reveal to his friends that he was still a virgin. Sihle might have been aware of what happens to young adolescent men who do not conform to expected gender norms and have sex, hence his decision to keep his virgin status a secret. Perhaps Sihle kept his virgin status a secret, in the hope that doing so would afford him the right state of mind to make decisions about when and how to have sex, as opposed to being rushed because of mounting pressure from friends. Also, although his stance contests the idea of basing his manhood on having sex and resists set gender scripts, perhaps the fact that he felt the need to hide his virginity status meant that he subscribed to ideas that measure manhood through having sex.

Vibing and having sex with multiple partners

Discussions about sex also included discussions about having sex with a girl who is not a romantic partner, commonly known as hooking up. In young adolescent men's local language, vibing refers to the act of having sex with a girl who is not a romantic partner. Young adolescent men who had a girlfriend but still vibed with other girls were engaging in sexual intercourse with multiple partners. The terms vibing, hooking up, and friends with benefits describe the same phenomenon, which is the act of engaging in sexual intercourse with someone who is not a romantic partner. The culture of vibing was both contested and accepted. Some young adolescent men were on their journey to break free from vibing, while some were vibing while in romantic relationships, resulting in having sex with multiple partners.

Young adolescent men provided different motivations behind the practice of vibing, in some instances, vibing was motivated by young adolescent men's desire to experience sex with different girls. Kwakhanya said that some people sleep with multiple girls because they are experimenting and curious to know how it feels like to have sex with other girls. He further stated that vibing was due to the belief that vaginas are not the same and that some girls are nice while some are cold. Kwakhanya's narrative suggests that sexual satisfaction is reliant on a girl's vagina. Such a view is dangerous as it influences young adolescent men to have sex with different partners in search of better vaginas. Although young adolescent men spoke about "cold" girls, they also acknowledged that a girl can be cold to one person but not to the other. The view that a girl can be "cold" is what motivates girls to use vaginal products to make their vaginas "hot and tight".

In other instances, vibing was due to partying and alcohol. Lethu recounted how he would vibrate with girls at parties even though he had a girlfriend. Lethu said that vibing with someone does not mean that you love them. Odi held similar views as Lethu, saying that he was also vibing but the girls he was vibing with were aware that they were not in a romantic relationship. Asked if the

girls understood the nature of the vibing relations, Odi said they do, which is why some people start by vibing, and then when romantic feelings develop, they can decide to get into a romantic relationship. Zolani was also vibing while he had a girlfriend. But Zolani was not vibing with random girls, he had been vibing with this one girl for a long time and his vibing was not because of alcohol. He said that girlfriends have come and gone but he has continued to hook up with this girl. He further said that the girl he is hooking up with knows that he has a girlfriend, and the girl also has a boyfriend. Despite both having romantic partners on the side, Zolani said they have maintained their vibing relationship since childhood.

Some young adolescent men were not vibing, but this did not mean that they did not aspire to. For example, asked if he would have sex with a girl he was not in a romantic relationship with, Manga said yes, if it is the girl who initiates or asks to have sex with him, he would do it. This shows that despite not actively engaging or looking for opportunities to have sex with other girls, this young adolescent man did not distance himself from the act of sleeping with more than one girl and did not see anything wrong with this action.

Some young adolescent men were on the journey towards breaking free from vibing in fear that their girlfriends would end the romantic relationship. Siphos said that his girlfriend told him that she would not tolerate cheating, and that is when he decided to stop sleeping with other girls on the side. Like Siphos, Abonile said he had stopped vibing and his primary concern was that his girlfriend would eventually find out about these hook-ups and dump him. The fact that these young adolescent men were able to stop a practice that is deemed a key marker of masculinity shows that young adolescent men's decisions and attitudes in romantic relationships are not simply driven by their desires to be praised by other young adolescent men. This means that young adolescent men can make decisions in romantic relationships based on care and respect for their girlfriends.

Being in love made young adolescent men want to stop vibing, even though such a decision exposed them to mockery. For example, for Kwakhanya love meant changing one's behaviour.

Kwakhanya: ...she also made it clear that she didn't appreciate that she had to share me with others. So, I also thought about it and left them for her sake. Because I love her, I left all of them and focused on her (IDI, 15 years)

Kwakhanya used love to justify what may otherwise be labelled as deal breakers for young adolescent men, i.e., not having multiple girlfriends. His decision indicates a rejection of masculine norms that dictate that a real man must have many girlfriends. This shows that young adolescent men do not blindly conform to masculine norms about how to perform their gender. Kwakhanya's willingness to change in the name of love shows a sense of investment in his romantic relationships.

Conclusion

This chapter explored young adolescent men's sexual worlds, paying particular attention to their decision-making processes, sexual pressure, expectations as well as the dilemmas presented by engaging in sexual intercourse. The chapter moves away from the construction of young adolescent men's sexual encounters as a risky activity but rather focuses on the complex processes and motivations that shape and inform these young adolescent men's sexual behaviours. Findings show that ideas around sex are shaped by multiple webs of influence, rendering sex complex, and challenging the stereotypical thinking that the sexuality of these young adolescent men is inherently risky and therefore, in need of fixing. On one hand, sexual intercourse marks a shift from boyhood to manhood, and young adolescent men are "qualified" as real men for having sex. On the other hand, having sex exposed young adolescent men to an array of anxieties. Exacerbating young adolescent men's anxieties was the constant pressure and expectation to prove their

manhood, which included improving their sexual performance while remaining sensitive to issues of sexual consent. The findings show that young adolescent men battled with the uncertainties and anxieties that come with having sex, while simultaneously resisting and conforming to gender norms.

CHAPTER 6: THE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH OUTCOMES OF YOUNG ADOLESCENT MEN IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

Sexual intercourse is an essential part of healthy adolescent development and although it is not necessarily risky, having sex can expose adolescents to negative sexual health outcomes such as unintended pregnancies and STIs, including HIV. As young adolescent men start engaging in sexual intercourse, they may need to develop a healthy sexual self-concept, characterised by less risky sexual habits and positive SRH outcomes. South African research shows that young adolescent men's sexual practices are risky (Khumalo et al., 2021; Stern et al., 2015). These studies paid insufficient attention to the romantic relationship as a factor that may shape sexual decision-making. As such, they do not offer insights into what the sexual practices of young adolescent men in romantic relationships characterised by love and intimacy look like. Research that has paid attention to the influence of love on young adolescent men's sexual behaviours shows that in romantic relationships these young adolescent men are not only driven by their "uncontrollable sex drive" (Bhana, 2017a; Hamlall, 2018). This means that sexual practices and attitudes are malleable, but to do so, factors that shape young adolescent men's sexual practices and motivations for having sex need to be understood.

The three sections of the chapter foreground the romantic relationship as an important context and examine young adolescent men's sexual health practices and attitudes, motivations, and logic that inform sexual decision-making. The first section examines young adolescent men's perceptions, attitudes, and practices around condom use, looking at what motivates condom use and how decision-making around condom use is made. The second section explores young adolescent men's knowledge about STIs, their perceptions of the risk of HIV and STI, and their attitudes towards HIV testing. The third section focuses on young adolescent men's views around pregnancy prevention, who is responsible for preventing pregnancy, and methods of pregnancy

prevention. Throughout all three sections, the manner in which support from young adolescent men's social networks around sex and dating may influence perceptions, attitudes, and practices around condom use; HIV and STI risk, and attitudes towards family planning are also explored.

Exploring the dynamics, assumptions, and complexities of the romantic relationship may shed some light on young adolescent men's sexual health practices and attitudes, motivations, and logic that inform sexual decision-making. Conventionally, romantic relationships are characterised by love, trust, commitment, and a sense of loyalty, and these elements shape and may complicate sexual decision-making, particularly, safer sex practices between partners. This means that romantic relationships characterised by these elements may shape young adolescent men's perceived risk of HIV. As such, understanding the romantic relationship context is key if SRH and HIV programmes and interventions are to work (Belus et al., 2020).

There are two reasons why it is vital to engage young adolescent men and understand their SRH norms and attitudes. First, young adolescent men are constructed as transmitters of HIV (Jacques-Aviñó et al., 2019; Jewkes et al., 2015). Yet, SRH research, programmes, and interventions continue to be driven by the conventional view that SRH issues are mainly a concern for girls, as such, SRH efforts are rarely directed towards young adolescent men. Engaging young adolescent men may help to explain their sexual behaviours, how they make sexual decisions, who makes these decisions, and the factors that shape sexual decision-making. Second, the active engagement of young adolescent men around issues of SRH may be a key step in increasing their consciousness about sexual behaviour and related SRH outcomes. Such consciousness may improve sexual decision-making in romantic relationships and may subsequently improve the SRH of their romantic partners (Starrs et al., 2018).

Young adolescent men's perceptions, attitudes, and practices around condom use

Condoms can be an effective strategy to protect young adolescent men against STIs, including HIV when used correctly and consistently. For some young adolescent men, decision-making around condom use was made by their girlfriends. Young adolescent men spoke about girls' agency to decide whether to use a condom, which seems counter to the norms that young adolescent men ought to make decisions around condom use. Mabox said that sometimes he wears a condom and sometimes he does not, as illustrated in the quote.

Mabox: Because most of the time I hear from her [girlfriend] whether she wants to use a condom or not. When she says she does not want to use a condom, then we don't use it (IDI, 17 years)

Seemingly, girls' agency to decide on whether to use a condom was widespread. Luyakha also shared that condom use in his relationship is decided by his girlfriend. Therefore, even though young adolescent men may be complacent in using condoms inconsistently because they did not challenge their girlfriends' decisions not to use a condom, it may be incorrect to place inconsistent condom use on young adolescent men. These young adolescent men's discourses challenge the mainstream view that males have the power to make sexual decisions in romantic relationships.

While for Mabox and Luyakha, their girlfriends' decision-making around condom use was not consistent, sometimes the girl would want to use a condom and sometimes not, some young adolescent men, were in relationships with girls whose decision-making around condom use was consistent, as shown in the quote below,

Abonile: She doesn't want us to have sex without a condom, I told her that I don't like a condom but hey, she said no condom no sex. I told her that I can't feel a thing with a condom, but she doesn't want to listen, so every time we have sex, we use a condom (IDI, 18 years)

Although Abonile tried protesting the use of a condom, his narrative shows that his girlfriend has the agency to resist non-condom use with their romantic partners.

Not all young adolescent men left condom decision-making to their girlfriends. Some shared that they actively and consciously decided to always use a condom when having sex and this was not negotiable because they were afraid of either impregnating their girlfriends or contracting STIs, including HIV. Bee, a 14-year-old young adolescent man said that he always used a condom when having sex. Like Bee, Sihle also shared that he always uses a condom. He said that, if a girl insists on not using a condom, he would rather not have sex because if the girl fell pregnant, he would be forced to take care of the child, even though he did not want one. Young adolescent men like Sihle are adamant in their decision to consistently use condoms, despite the view that young adolescent men do not like condoms.

Sometimes, young adolescent men's decision to consistently use a condom was frowned upon by peers who undermined these young adolescent men's decisions and sought to sway them into having unprotected sex. However, young adolescent men like Litha and Wole were adamant that for them, no condom, no sex. Wole and Litha said that they always use a condom despite their friends persuading them to try sex without one. Wole and Litha's decision-making around condom use was driven by concerns and fears of contracting HIV and other STIs and/or getting a girl pregnant. For example, Litha said he is afraid that he might try having sex without a condom and

be “unlucky” and get infected. Similarly, Wole resisted trying sex without a condom, citing the fear of infections, or getting his girlfriend pregnant as reasons.

In some instances, young adolescent men’s motivation to consistently use a condom was a result of seeing friends either contract an STI or make someone pregnant. Anda, who at the beginning of his romantic relationship was not using condoms consistently, shared that after his friend made a girl pregnant, he started using a condom all the time when having sex. Similarly, Siphesihle shared that he had friends who contracted STIs, and although Siphesihle had always insisted on using a condom, knowing that his friend contracted STIs further motivated him to always use a condom. Other motivations to use condoms included trust in the romantic relationship. As young adolescent men began to trust their partners, they seemed to transition to a belief that condom use was unnecessary. Some young adolescent men said that they would use a condom the first time they had sex with a new romantic partner and as time passed, condom use was neglected, using trust as a justification.

Zolani: Yes, I trust her. I can also see that she is not someone who goes around sleeping with many people (IDI, 18 years)

Similarly, Kwakhanya said that the first time he had sex he used a condom but as time went by, he stopped because both he and his girlfriend trusted each other. Kwakhanya and Zolani decided to stop using condoms without having undergone an HIV test, but simply believing that their partners were HIV negative and had no STIs.

Some young adolescent men said that it was important to know a partner’s HIV status before transitioning to unprotected sex. However, for these young adolescent men, knowing did not mean

having proof, it simply meant taking a partner's word that they do not have HIV or STIs. Luyakha said that he and his partner did not use a condom even though he did not know her HIV status. He said that he trusts that his girlfriend is HIV-negative because she said so even without seeing medical records to prove that. Largely, girls are considered sexually naïve thus resulting in young adolescent men undermining their risk of contracting STIs. Perhaps this is the reason why Luyakha might have trusted that his girlfriend doesn't have HIV or STIs.

Trust was exhibited in different ways, for example, for Siphos both trust and knowing his partner's HIV status was important in deciding whether or not to use a condom. Siphos refused to simply take his partner's word that she is not HIV-positive or has other STIs. Even though Siphos said that he trusted his girlfriend, this was not enough to warrant the neglect of condom use without proof of a negative HIV status. Siphos exhibits a sense of caution when it comes to neglecting condom use, he was not willing to take the risk of contracting STIs, for him, he had to have solid proof that his girlfriend was HIV-negative, and this meant going to test for HIV together with his girlfriend.

Just as much as trusting a partner led to the neglect of condom use, lack of trust in a romantic relationship facilitated consistent condom use. Siphosihle and Sane insisted on using condoms because they did not trust their girlfriends. Siphosihle shared that he always used a condom because he doesn't trust girls and wanted to take charge and be responsible for his health, hence condom use was not negotiable for him. Sane shared similar sentiments, stating that he always used a condom with his girlfriend because he did not trust his girlfriend. Other young adolescent men shared that they only used condoms with side chicks. A side chick is a girlfriend who is dated in secret from the main girlfriend. Another word for a side chick is mistress. These young adolescent men said that a side chick could not be fully trusted. Speaking on this, Lihle stated that he used a condom with girls he was not in a romantic relationship with. Similarly, Zolani said that he used a condom with his side chick. Although these young adolescent men think that using a condom with a girl who is not a romantic partner is safe and protects them from contracting infections, the

fact that they were not using condoms with their girlfriends is worrying, especially considering the high rates of HIV, STIs, and unintended pregnancies among youth.

Young adolescent men's knowledge and attitudes towards HIV and STI risk

As young adolescent men start engaging in sexual activity, they might be at risk of HIV and STI infection and transmission, particularly if they do not use condoms or use them inconsistently. In section (a) young adolescent men's knowledge about STIs (b) their perceptions of the risk to HIV and other STIs and (c) attitudes and practices towards HIV testing are explored.

Knowledge about STIs

Some young adolescent men displayed poor knowledge about STIs and related symptoms. They did not know that there are different types of STIs; they did not know how STIs can be contracted and how they can be cured if they are curable. For example, some young adolescent men believed that not having a discharge was a sign that they were STI-free, notwithstanding that some STIs can be asymptomatic. There was also the misconception about what constitutes an STI. While young adolescent men believed that drop, an informal word for gonorrhoea is a disease that one acquires through unprotected sex, they also believed that a drop was not an STI. For example, Zolani seemed to hold the view that a drop was not an STI, he said that he told his girlfriend that he once had a drop but has never had an STI. Asked if a drop is not an STI, Zolani said no, a drop is not an STI, and he would not know the difference between a drop and an STI because he has never had an STI.

Unlike Zolani, other young adolescent men were of the view that drop is an STI. Despite these young adolescent men correctly categorising drop as a type of STI, they continued to display poor knowledge about how it is transmitted or contracted. In the quote below, young adolescent men respond to the question "what causes an STI?"

Litha: When you have sex with a girl that's dirty inside. Or when you're having sex, she tightens you inside, you will get it whether you like it or not. You don't know how her blood is, or whether she's unhygienic or not.

Niva: And when she's in her period, you can get it.

Interviewer: When you have sex with her when she's on her period?

Niva: Yes, without using a condom. But it also depends on how her blood is (FGD, 16 – 17 years)

Inaccurate information about STIs might cloud young adolescent men's perception of their risk to infections and is dangerous to the health of them and their partners, particularly when young adolescent men rely on symptoms like discharge to ascertain if they have an STI or not. In South Africa, teachers are mandated to provide information through life orientation (LO) which provides adolescents with reliable and accurate information essential for their sexuality and sexual behaviour. Although all young adolescent men said they had taken an LO class, it seemed LO was not effective in teaching young adolescent men about STIs.

Some young adolescent men had a problem with how LO content was delivered, they said that the LO has a clear focus on HIV and violence but lacks in psychological aspects. It seemed teachers tended to adopt the danger, risk, and disease approach. While this approach might be useful in educating adolescents about some aspects of sex, it also fails to acknowledge adolescents' holistic development, including the development of positive romantic relationships. Abonile accused teachers of being unable to provide in-depth information on sex because they do not know "these things". He said that the LO information intended to support them was basic information as opposed to in-depth information. As such, they relied on other sources like their friends to complement information received from school.

Abonile: Obvious. We all know that we need to use condoms, even though some of us don't like using them. So that is common information. But when you are a young boy, you need to hear from other men about sex and how to treat women. They don't do that at school. Ey those teachers, they are not friendly, it's like they know if they are friendly, we will ask them too many questions [laughs] (IDI, 18 years)

Similarly, Siphos shared his concerns, saying that he needed more information than just the cautionary messages they received from teachers. These boys desired more in-depth and holistic knowledge about sex. They desired sex education to go beyond information about sex and contraceptives, to include more than just the scare tactics and negative consequences of sex. Surprisingly, even though young adolescent men said that LO has a high emphasis on HIV and STIs, their knowledge about STIs was limited and worrying.

Not all young adolescent men had a problem with the LO curriculum. Young adolescent men like Lwando said that despite the vagueness of this information, they found the little information they received to be helpful because they got to learn about condoms and contraceptives. Lwando might have felt that the information was helpful because, after all, that is what he was used to, receiving cautionary sexual information, particularly from adults. Also, Lwando might have found the vague information helpful in fear that deeper discussions might illicit feelings of shame and embarrassment.

In addition to teachers, parents could also potentially provide support to their children's sex and dating needs. However, for young adolescent men in the study, informational support about sex and dating received from parents was sketchy, vague, and involved scare tactics. Siphos said that he has been told that he should not put sex forward. Similarly, Abonile was told that he should take care of himself. He reported that he could never go to his mother for support if, for example,

he contracted an STI because he has been told multiple times to take care of himself. While the information described by Siphon and Abonile sought to caution them from the negative consequences of sex, such information was vague and did not help these young adolescent men in any way. In the case of Siphon, one may want to know what the meaning of not putting sex forward is and how this might look like in real life. Similarly, in the case of Abonile, how does taking care of oneself look like in the context of dating, is it using a condom or is it abstaining from sex altogether?

Because of this vague messaging, young adolescent men may choose not to talk to their parents about sex and dating even when their parents show an interest. Some young adolescent men said they felt embarrassed, ashamed, and uncomfortable and that talking about sex and dating with their parents felt like they were disrespectful. Wole shared that he was not comfortable talking to his mother about dating and sex, although his mom had asked him if he was dating. Wole felt like this, even though his mother said that he must be comfortable telling her about his girlfriends. He further said that even if his mother initiated the discussion, he would still not talk. Lihle shared similar sentiments, he recounted how his mother had tried talking to him about girls and sex after seeing him with a girl in his room. He said that he ignored his mother because he did not feel comfortable talking to her. Likewise, Mabox said that his mom knew that he was in a relationship, but he did not want to talk to his mother about such things because the thought of it made him feel uncomfortable. Because of this discomfort, shame, and feelings of disrespect, young adolescent men missed the opportunity to have open discussions about sexuality with their parents.

It seemed parents' presumed disapproval of young adolescent men dating played a role in discouraging discussions about sex and dating. For example, Manga, Simamkele, and Lwazi shared that they could not tell their parents that they were dating because their parents would disapprove, stating that they were too young to date. Lwazi recounted how he had an opportunity to tell his mother that he was dating but decided not to because he felt he could not talk to his

mother about dating. For some young adolescent men, it was not that parents were not approachable or against dating, instead, these young adolescent men felt that parents generally did not care about their dating lives and, as such, did not bother to talk to their children about dating.

Litha: To be honest, parents that we have don't even bother. Even though they know that these are the things we do. They don't want to seem like they are encouraging us to do these things. We'd also appreciate being advised by our parents because these are the things they also went through. I feel like our parents are selfish because they also went through the same things, and they spoke to their parents about it (IDI, 16 years)

Fana and Sane shared similar views, saying that parents lacked interest in the dating and sex lives of their children. In some instances, young adolescent men said their parents were uncomfortable discussing dating and sex-related matters, for example, Litha recounts how his mother opted to ask other people about his romantic relationships as opposed to asking him.

Unlike parents, other adult members of the family were perceived to be somewhat open to discussing sex and dating compared to parents. For example, for other young adolescent men, it was other adult family members, such as siblings that provided informational support. Mabox shared that instead of talking to his mother, he would rather talk to his sister, whom he described as “chilled”, and hence he felt comfortable talking to her about girls and dating. Mabox might have found his sister to be easy to talk to because of the age gap. Anda shared similar sentiments, saying that he gets support from his brother, who tells him everything he needs to know about sex and dating and advises him to always use a condom, hence he has never had sex without a condom. Anda further stated that because of his brother’s support, he always knows what to do.

It was not always the case that siblings provided support, in some instances, even when older siblings knew that young adolescent men were dating and having sex, they were not proactive in supporting their brothers. Zolani shared that his sister had seen him with a girl in his room but had never spoken to him about dating and sex. Zolani could potentially benefit from his sister's support, particularly when it comes to issues relating to girls. The sister's silence might speak to the issue of gender, the sister might feel uncomfortable talking to her little brother about sex but might also feel that her brother might not be comfortable talking to her about sex and dating.

In addition to siblings, aunts and uncles also provided support. Sabelo had benefited from his aunts and uncles' support on issues relating to dating. For women-related issues, such as where to take his girlfriend or how to soften his girlfriend after an argument he said his aunts were better placed to offer such support. For things relating to his romantic relationship in general, Sabelo said that he got support from his uncles.

Young adolescent men's insufficient knowledge about HIV and STIs exposed them to a high risk of acquiring HIV or STIs. Also, the silence, vague messages, and poor support received from parents and teachers – who are mandated by the South African government to provide sex and dating support – further exposed young adolescent men to HIV and STI risk. Young adolescent men's insufficient knowledge about STIs has serious repercussions for their health in general, but specifically for their SRH.

Young adolescent men's perception of the risk to HIV and STIs and their attitudes toward HIV testing

Insufficient knowledge about HIV and STIs might make young adolescent men feel like they are not at risk of acquiring STIs and HIV. Indeed, young adolescent men perceived themselves to be at a lower risk of acquiring these diseases.

Interviewer: If you don't use a condom, how do you protect yourself from HIV and STIs?

Simamkele: Eish, I don't know. We don't usually think about those things.

Simamkele: Because most of the time, we are in a rush. Sometimes even when the condom is there, I don't use it because raw sex is nice, and people say sex with a condom is not nice. But I wouldn't know because I have never used a condom (IDI, 17 years)

Unlike Simamkele, Zolani said that his biggest health concern was contracting HIV. However, despite this fear, Zolani had two girlfriends and used a condom with only his side chick but not with his main girlfriend because he believed, without solid proof that the “trusted” girlfriend was HIV-negative. Zolani might feel he is not at risk of contracting HIV or other STIs from his “main” girlfriend because in some societies, the focus is placed on guarding and controlling the sexuality of girls, as such, girls are not free to date, and sleep around, resulting in the assumption that they do not have HIV or STIs. Indeed, some young adolescent men believed that there were “good and quiet” girls. The idea was that these “good and quiet” girls were not vulnerable to HIV because they were “always at home”. Dating such a girl gave young adolescent men the false impression that these types of girls are not at risk of acquiring HIV or other STIs, hence the belief that they are also automatically not at risk. Thus, decreasing their levels of HIV testing.

HIV testing was low among young adolescent men, perhaps because they did not consider themselves to be at risk of HIV. For some young adolescent men, low levels of HIV testing were informed by consistent condom use. Some young adolescent men said that they did not see the need to go for an HIV test because they had always used a condom. Athule shared that he always used a condom and therefore has never tested for HIV. Similarly, Siphesihle insisted on condom use whenever having sex to avoid contracting STIs, including HIV or pregnancy. Consistently using a condom meant that there was no need to do an HIV test. Although condoms are meant to protect from acquiring HIV, the view that just because one consistently uses a condom, therefore,

they are not at risk of acquiring HIV has some shortfalls considering that a condom is not 100% safe.

Some young adolescent men tended to hold the belief that if their partner is HIV-negative, then that also meant they are HIV-negative. This thinking discouraged HIV testing among these young adolescent men because if a partner had tested for HIV, they also automatically assumed that they were HIV-negative. For example, Kwakhanya seemed to make sense of his risk to HIV by relying on his partner's self-assessment of the disease. Lihle also believed that one partner's HIV-negative status automatically means the other is also HIV-negative. He said that he does not worry about his girlfriend's HIV status because he believes that his girlfriend is also HIV-negative. He further said that if the girl was HIV-positive, he would also be HIV-positive. Similarly, Mabox said that he is confident he is HIV-negative because of his girlfriend's tests and her results always come back negative. Litha echoed Lihle and Mabox's sentiments, arguing that the reason he has never tested for HIV is because his girlfriend does test for HIV and she is negative, meaning he is also negative. This young adolescent man's belief that if one partner is HIV-negative, that means the other is also HIV-negative is problematic considering the high rates of HIV among adolescents. When young adolescent men are not undergoing HIV testing because they believe they are HIV-negative by association, they place themselves at higher risk of spreading the disease and/or delay initiating treatment if positive.

Not all young adolescent men held the view that a partner's negative HIV status meant they were also HIV-negative. Some said that they tested with their girlfriends, as illustrated in the quote below.

Sipho: Yes, we have to go together. I have to be there to see her HIV results and she must also see mine. I can't just take her word for it. I must see it with my own eyes that she is HIV-negative (IDI, 15 years)

Abonile also spoke about how he was asked by his girlfriend to go to the clinic to do an HIV test. Although Abonile lacked the agency to go to the clinic by himself, he understood the importance of going for an HIV test when prompted by his girlfriend. This shows that romantic partners can be used as an avenue to promote and motivate adolescents to go for HIV testing. When afforded the right information, romantic partners can also be an avenue to better SRH outcomes, including the delay of unintended pregnancies.

The will and agency to go for an HIV test is the first step, the second step, which will determine whether young adolescent men continuously go to the clinic to test for HIV or other SRH matters is the way they are received by nurses at the clinic. Young adolescent men in the study reflected on their experiences of accessing health services in general. Young adolescent men's narratives highlight some of the hostility from HCWs and how these indirectly discouraged them from accessing SRHS. In the excerpt below, Kwakhanya, who had gone to the clinic for an STI treatment recounts his experience at the clinic.

Kwakhanya: They shouted at me, because of my age asking me why I don't use condoms at my age. They told me that I'm almost at the age where I'm supposed to go for initiation. How is it going to look for someone my age taking ARVs and risking my life at initiation school [...] (IDI, 15 years)

Instead of nurses treating Kwakhanya's condition and using his visit as an opportunity to counsel him on healthy sexual habits, he was shouted at. Sane also described nurses as people who like shouting, resulting in a breach of confidentiality as other people end up hearing your business. Such behaviour from nurses is worrying because when young adolescent men undergo such negative experiences, they may not want to go to the clinic again. If going to the clinic means that young adolescent men will be made to feel uncomfortable, then chances are they will stay away from clinics or only present when their condition worsens. This is even more problematic considering that STIs, if left untreated may lead to serious complications. Also, considering that young adolescent men who present at a clinic for STI treatment may be in a vulnerable situation due to the sickness, the nurses' attitudes, particularly, the shouting might exacerbate these feelings of vulnerability. Some young adolescent men showed some level of stoicism regarding nurses' hostility and perhaps this was because they felt that once sick, once had no choice but to seek healthcare and endure nurses' hostile attitudes. Abonile maintained that he would go to the clinic, he said that even though he will be shouted at for having acquired an STI, there is nothing he can do about nurses' rudeness, all he wants is help, therefore, he would have to keep quiet and endure whatever treatment he receives.

Not all young adolescent men perceived nurses to be rude. Lihle and Fana said that nurses can also be nice. They said that sometimes you can be attended to by a nice nurse, with some using your illness and humour to offer informational support, such as the importance of using condoms. When nurses are nice to young adolescent men presenting for SRH-related matters, this provides them a counselling opportunity, as they may feel at ease and thus ask questions or seek clarity about other matters. Also, when nurses are nice to young adolescent men, this may encourage them to actively support contraception use by accompanying their girlfriends to the clinic for contraception services.

Young adolescent men's perceptions and attitudes towards family planning.

This section discusses young adolescent men's perceptions and attitudes towards family planning. This is important because effective family planning programmes and interventions can reduce unintended pregnancies among adolescents, including the negative economic and psychosocial implications that come with unintended pregnancies, particularly for adolescents from poor resource settings. Three key themes are discussed in this section (a) who bears the role of preventing pregnancy (b) young adolescent men as contraceptive users and (c) young adolescent men's perceptions of modern contraceptives.

Perceptions on pregnancy prevention

Discussion around pregnancy revealed that, generally, young adolescent men tended to hold the view that it was their responsibility to prevent pregnancy. Lwando felt that it was his responsibility to make sure that his girlfriend did not fall pregnant, arguing that he was the one who penetrates his girlfriend. Like Lwando, Lethu also felt that the responsibility to prevent pregnancy in his relationship was his, as illustrated in the quote below.

Lethu: It's mostly my job to protect against pregnancy as a guy because I have to make sure that when I am about to ejaculate, I just take it out if I am not using a condom. Or if I am using a condom, I make sure that I don't thrust too rough and stuff so that the condom will not break. Because I am the one inserting the penis inside her vagina, so, I am the one that is supposed to be more careful because the blame will be put on me, even though we had sex together and we took the decision that we are having sex, that, ok we are doing this now, so this and this could happen, you know (IDI, 19 years)

Although Lethu and Lwando felt that the responsibility to prevent pregnancy rested with them, young adolescent men are rarely targeted as contraceptive users. Instead, family planning

continues to be directed at girls, such an approach may hinder young adolescent men's involvement in the prevention of pregnancy. These young adolescent men's stories challenge the mainstream view that family planning is an issue concerning girls.

In addition to young adolescent men who viewed pregnancy prevention as their responsibility, some young adolescent men said that preventing pregnancy should be a shared responsibility. For example, Bee shared that both he and his girlfriend had a role to play in the prevention of pregnancy. He said that his role was to pull out, while his girlfriend's role was to use contraceptives. However, Bee was reluctant to introduce the topic of contraceptives to his girlfriend as illustrated in the quote below,

Bee: No, I did not, I am scared to tell her...I don't know how to tell her. Maybe she doesn't like using them. Some people say they are not good and that you get fat and sometimes you can even have too much water in your body (IDI, 14 years)

Bee's concerns about some of the side effects of using modern contraceptives are valid, although not accurate. But also, his reluctance to talk to his girlfriend about contraceptives highlights that for some young adolescent men, there are no open discussions about SRH-related matters. Because Bee was not comfortable asking his girlfriend to use modern contraceptives, he had to bear the burden of preventing pregnancy by pulling out. The use of the pull-out method was common among young adolescent men, as discussed below.

“Mastering the pull-out game”: Young adolescent men as contraceptive users

Young adolescent men in the study cited the pull-out or withdrawal method as a trusted way to prevent pregnancy. They believed that if they did not ejaculate inside the girl, there would be no sperm to fertilise the egg and there would be no pregnancy.

Lihle: I don't ejaculate inside her. I can feel when the sperms are coming, so I pull out.

Yes, it does because the sperm doesn't enter her, so she can't get pregnant (IDI, 15 years)

Mabox: so, when we don't use a condom during sex, I take out my penis before I come. I can feel when I am about to come, so I quickly take out my penis and don't come inside her. It really works because we have used it multiple times and she is not pregnant, so it works (IDI, 16 years)

Having effectively used the pull-out method for a long time, young adolescent men believed that pulling out was an effective family planning method. They acknowledged that the pull-out method was not an easy thing to do, they spoke about it as an art that one had to master. The desire to learn and master the pull-out method to prevent pregnancy shows that young adolescent men are not passive about pregnancy prevention. Young adolescent men actively using the pull-out method disrupt the idea that family planning is a women's domain. Although Mabox vouched for the effectiveness of the pull-out method, Anda no longer believed it worked, as shown below.

Anda: no, I don't do that. I actually stopped when my friend made a girl pregnant. Joh that scared me, so I stopped it and now all I use is a condom (IDI, 17 years)

Like Anda had a distrust for the pull-out method, it seemed James also had difficulties trusting the effectiveness of condoms in preventing pregnancy. Although condoms can be effective in the prevention of pregnancy when used right, James was anxious that one day the condom might break, and his girlfriend would be pregnant. Despite his concerns about the condom, James seemed to not know of any other pregnancy prevention methods.

James: Yes, I do enjoy sex, but not too much. I always worry that the condom might break, you know they are not 100% safe, and then she might be pregnant or get diseases.

Interviewer: What other ways are there to prevent pregnancy?

James: It's a condom, that is the only way (IDI, 14 years)

Notwithstanding advocating for shared responsibilities in the prevention of pregnancy, it seemed some young adolescent men were only okay with modern contraceptive use if they were not the ones to use them. When asked if they would use modern contraceptives, there was a pushback. The fact that young adolescent men would not want to use contraceptives available to them because they do not want to deal with the side effects of these contraceptives places the burden of preventing pregnancy on girls. Young adolescent men's reluctance to use modern contraceptives communicates that they are only interested in taking part in the prevention of pregnancy if doing so will not place them at risk.

Young adolescent men's perceptions of girls' use of modern contraceptives

As discussed above, Bee had concerns about the side effects of modern contraceptives. While some young adolescent men like Bee felt that contraceptives were damaging girls' bodies, young adolescent men like Zolani and Moses were fine with their partners using contraceptives, because their main concern was preventing pregnancy. Some young adolescent men said that although they had started by using condoms, along the way, they suggested that their girlfriends consider using contraceptives so that they could stop using condoms.

Sipho: I asked her to start using contraceptives. I then accompanied her to the clinic the first time to get an injection to make sure that she really did get it. She didn't want to at first, but she ended up agreeing, saying she is doing it for me (IDI, 15 years)

To support his girlfriend, he accompanied her to the clinic. While this – accompanying the girlfriend to the clinic – shows a sense of support and shared responsibility, it can also be a form of monitoring and making sure that the girl is indeed on contraceptives. Kwakhanya also shared that he encouraged his girlfriend to start using contraceptives.

Young adolescent men's fears of impregnating a girl played a big role in them being okay with their girlfriends using modern contraceptives, despite having revealed that these may lead to infertility and other side effects. The fact that young adolescent men are happy for girls to use contraceptives that have potentially damaging side effects demonstrates (a) how young adolescent men viewed having a child as a bigger concern for them than the potential risk of using contraceptives and (b) the main concern is enjoying sex without a condom while not worrying about pregnancy. While it is good that these young adolescent men perceive contraceptives to be an effective way to prevent pregnancy, the use of contraceptives meant the neglect of condom use, thus potentially exposing themselves to contracting HIV and other STIs. Of course, the idea that they might be at risk of contracting HIV or other STIs was not something that young adolescent men thought they were at risk of, as shown in the previous section.

Engaging young adolescent men is critical (a) in improving the SRH of all adolescents, increasing access to the use of family planning services and ultimately family planning outcomes and (b) shifting negative masculine beliefs and behaviours around family planning and the view that family planning is girls' responsibility. Young adolescent men will need support to manage the complexities of romantic relationships and to make healthy and informed decisions.

Conclusion

Sexual intercourse is an essential part of healthy human development and young adolescent men need support to improve their SRH outcomes. The findings revealed that young adolescent men's

ideas around the use of condoms are not fixed, and decision-making is more nuanced. Young adolescent men's discourses reject the narrative that they discourage contraceptive use or that contraceptive use is not something that young adolescent men concern themselves with. Decision-making around family planning is shaped by both resistance and conformity to a range of social and cultural norms and young adolescent men displayed a sense of agency in family planning, embracing the idea of shared responsibility in pregnancy prevention. Although young adolescent men do have social networks at their disposal to assist with navigating the adolescence phase and issues related to dating and sex, they seem to navigate this phase ill-equipped, making them vulnerable to risky and uninformed sexual decisions. Support from social networks was sketchy, loaded with scare tactics, and characterised by pressure, highlighting that these social networks are ill-equipped to cater to the needs of young adolescent men.

CHAPTER 7: LOVE AND VULNERABILITY IN THE ROMANTIC LIVES OF YOUNG ADOLESCENT MEN

Introduction

In the midst of forging their manhood identities, learning about their sexual preferences, and making sexual decisions, how do young adolescent men in Gugulethu experience love in their heterosexual romantic relationships? This chapter examines the different emotional components of young adolescent men's affective worlds, their experiences, ideas, and desires of love, and pays attention to how love manifests and shapes these young adolescent men's performances of their masculinities in romantic relationships. The focus is also on examining the specific vulnerabilities and uncertainties that come with being in love. A focus on love and how young adolescent men experience and make meaning of love in their romantic relationships could potentially strengthen efforts toward shifting negative gendered norms and sexual violence (Bhana, 2013; Randell et al., 2015). By zooming in on young adolescent men's experiences of love, the chapter paints a face of young adolescent men that is rarely seen because the role of love in shaping young adolescent men's performance of their masculinities has largely been overlooked (Bhana, 2017a).

Though public health research in South Africa has generally overlooked the intersection of love and masculinities and how these may work to shape sexual health outcomes, including IPV, South African scholars have begun to note the role of love in young adolescent men's masculinities, moving away from the risk and deficit perspective when researching young adolescent men. Work by these scholars introduces the idea of young adolescent men who aspire to love and to be loved and shows that in the process of negotiating their masculinities, young adolescent men are not devoid of love. Such work also disrupts the simplistic construction of young adolescent men as unfettered by emotional attachments (Shefer et al., 2015). Langa (2020) studied young adolescent men in an informal settlement in Johannesburg and found that because of love, some young adolescent men assumed attitudes that were otherwise deemed unmanly such as forgiving

infidelity and stopping the habit of being with many girls. Similarly, Gibbs et al. (2014) report that young adolescent men are emotionally invested in their romantic relationships. These studies are important in masculinities research as they challenge the view that young adolescent men lack emotional intimacy and love.

Some scholars contend that silence around love among African people and the depiction of African peoples' sexuality, particularly, African males as less invested in love and intimacy is a result of colonialism (Cole & Thomas, 2009; Ruark et al., 2017; Tamale, 2011). "Slavery and colonisation were ruthless, world re-configuring forces" (Ratele, 2020, p. 2). Under the colonial gaze, black peoples' sexuality was constructed as savage, lustful, and immoral and research continues to approach black boys from a risk and deficit perspective (Bhana, 2017a; Mudaly, 2013; Ruark et al., 2017). Public health research on African sexual health follows a similar trajectory, wherein emphasis is on risk, damage, and danger, overlooking the link between sex, intimacy, and affection, making it seem like sex is devoid of meaning (Spronk, 2014).

This chapter adds to an emerging literature that disrupts the colonial-informed construction of the sexual and affective worlds of African people. Section one foregrounds young adolescent men's experiences of romantic relationships and how love is understood, experienced, and expressed in these romantic relationships. Within this section, three emerging issues are discussed (a) young adolescent men's experiences of romantic relationships (b) their aspirations to love and to be loved, and (c) their expression of love. The second part of the chapter focuses on young adolescent men's fears and the specific challenges, complexities, and vulnerabilities that come with being in a romantic relationship. Thinking about young adolescent men tend to overlook anxiety and vulnerability, as such, these concepts have been feminised and viewed as a sign of weakness and dependency (Gilson, 2016). "Performing masculinity and related sexual practices is more complex, uncertain and infused with vulnerability than merely simple, physical and uncontested" (Shefer et al., 2015, p. 106). To highlight young adolescent men's vulnerabilities, the section

zooms into how love exposes these young adolescent men to some anxieties and fears before the relationship is formally established and even when the relationship has been established.

The romantic lives of heterosexual young adolescent men

This section provides an understanding of how young adolescent men experience romantic relationships and how love is understood and expressed in these romantic relationships. To do this, the section is divided into two sub-sections namely (a) young adolescent men's understanding of romantic relationships, their experiences of these relationships, and aspirations to love and to be loved, and (b) how love is expressed.

Young adolescent men's experiences of romantic relationships

Young adolescent men in the study said that being in a romantic relationship is common in their community and that dating starts very early, around the age of 12 years, the latest 13 years. They described a romantic relationship as a union between two people who love, respect, care, and are loyal to each other. In the excerpts below, young adolescent men in a group discussion talked about what a romantic relationship is or is not.

Afika: A relationship is when two people love each other, then they decide to date.

Ndilane: It's when you like a girl, and you want her to be your everything. Sometimes...a lot of time two people who love each other also have sex.

Cedu: ...you can like someone and not ask them to date you, then that is not a relationship. It's a crush

Afika: if you don't ask her, other boys will then you will want to cry (FGD, 18 – 19 years)

The discussion - above highlights the significance of having a mutual agreement with a girl before two people can claim to be in a relationship. Cedu introduces the idea of crushes, commonly referred to as one-sided feelings. Indeed, it seems simply having feelings or liking someone was not characterised as a romantic relationship. In addition to liking a girl, young adolescent men had to *shela* (propose love) _ the girl for them to be in a romantic relationship, as narrated by Athule.

Athule: It's when a boy asks a girl to date her. If she agrees, the two are now in a relationship (IDI, 14 years)

Despite expressing that romantic relationships are common in their community, young adolescent men noted that not all young adolescent men were allowed to be in romantic relationships by their parents. For example, some young adolescent men were in romantic relationships with girls who come from families where dating is discouraged, as such they had to resort to sneaking around and girls lying to their parents about their whereabouts. Litha was in such a romantic relationship and recounted some of the challenges he was faced with because he was not able to freely see his girlfriend. He recounted how he had not seen his girlfriend in four months.

Litha: We only talk on the phone. And then when I suggest that we end things, she cries. She calls me crying, begging me not to end things. Because nothing really works when we don't see each other. Nothing will work. It's not bad for me because I understand her situation. Because when I was growing up, they were strict at home. They were strict, so it's a must that I understand her situation. But now the problem is that err, the problem is when I'm with my friends and they are with their partners they always laugh at me. Then I also put pressure on her to come here (IDI, 16 years)

While Litha might be prepared to wait for the “lucky” days when his girlfriend can sneak out, being ridiculed by his peers might result in him cheating to be seen to be dating. Like Litha, Manga also had challenges spending time with his girlfriend and for Manga, the issue was exacerbated by distance. Manga’s girlfriend stayed in another area, which made seeing each other a challenge because the girl could not afford to be away from home for long periods, and because of this, she could not visit Manga. Manga could visit his girlfriend by either taking a taxi or walking, but even these two options were challenging considering that Manga did not always have money for a taxi fare, and if he chose to walk, he ran the risk of being abused by gangs. Manga said that the situation with his girlfriend frustrated him to the point where he was looking for another girlfriend.

Although Manga and Litha have girlfriends, the fact that they cannot see or spend time with their girlfriends is a problem and this can lead to the questioning of these young adolescent men’s relationship status. Perhaps Manga and Litha had issues with not being able to see and spend time with their girlfriends because seemingly being able to see his girlfriend made the relationship experience more concrete, as it evoked a lot of unexplainable feelings, as illustrated by the quote below.

Mazisi: When you love someone, when you see them, when you look at them you truly believe. That’s how I am when I love someone, when I see the person I love, there’s a feeling, I don’t know where it comes from and why, but it’s just there. I don’t know what happens inside you when you look at that person [...]

Themba: They make you feel a certain way when you are with the person you love. You just want to spend time with them, you can even end up neglecting your friends because all you want is to be with this person (FGD, 15-16 years)

It seems young adolescent men place significance on seeing and spending time with a girlfriend, therefore, it can be hard to maintain a relationship where there is no physical intimacy. The inability to spend quality time with a girlfriend might have impacted on young adolescent men's relationship experiences.

As much as young adolescent men said that they wanted to spend quality time with their girlfriends, they also said that they wanted love, and aspired to love and be loved. They described the intense feelings of love they experienced (feelings that come with being in love and loving someone) and their motivations for being in love. In the quote below, Anda speaks about why he is in a romantic relationship, saying.

Anda: To be happy and love someone and also to be loved. If she loves me, then I will also love her (IDI, 17 years)

For Anda, as was the case with other young adolescent men in the study, love was fundamental in their romantic relationships. Young adolescent men wanted love, to be loved and their narration of love suggests that they were moved by altruistic motives to love. They described their motivations for love and being in romantic relationships as selfless, saying that they wanted to make someone happy, smile, and make a difference in someone's life by spoiling the person and doing anything for the person they love.

Young adolescent men's ideology of love and the meanings they ascribed to love were shaped by notions of comfort, care, and happiness and point to softer, alternative masculinities characterised by qualities such as thoughtfulness and emotionally responsive. Young adolescent men's narration of their experiences, ideas of love, and desires painted a face of love that is rarely seen or talked

about. For example, Theleni said that being loved made him feel precious while young adolescent men in the quote below spoke about how being loved made them blush.

Odi: I blush for instance when I receive her message I just smile. Even if you argued but once you receive that message from her everything becomes okay...

Litha: it's very nice to be loved. Love is very nice...I want her to show me how much she loves me and not hear it from her friends...There's nothing nicer than being loved. As Odi mentioned that even when you receive a text from her you smile immediately and want to attend to it. Her presence when you're together a different feeling than when you're with your friend...You don't have time for other people but her, she's so important to you.

Odi: Even at night you end up not sleeping cos you're constantly talking to her (FGD, 16 - 17 years).

A focus on young adolescent men's experiences of love and ability to love introduces the idea that young adolescent men can simultaneously hold masculine ideals and at the same time be capable of showing love, care, warmth, and thoughtfulness.

Using metaphors and gestures to express and talk about love.

Attempts to describe what love resulted in young adolescent men using metaphors to describe the intense feeling of love and using gestures to express love. Young adolescent men largely spoke about love as a verb and expressed it through certain gestures. The use of metaphors to describe love is common in many African cultures. As such, young adolescent men might have used these metaphors because it is something that they are familiar with when talking about love and associated feelings, or perhaps young adolescent men continued to rely on metaphors because they struggled to define love. Metaphors used by young adolescent men to describe love were

associated with heat, warmth, or oil. For example, Nkosana used the metaphor “*umasemathandweni kugijima igazi*”, which means when one is in love, blood rushes.

For Lwando and Lethu, love was a feeling that is associated with the heart. For example, Lwando used the metaphor “*inhliziyi ibhaka amagwinya*”, which loosely translates to the heart is baking fat cakes/vetkoeks. Vetkoek is an Afrikaans word for fat cake. It is similar in shape to a doughnut but without a hole and is made with yeast dough. Lethu used the metaphor “*inhliziyi idada emafutheni*”, which can be directly translated to the heart is swimming in oil. Both these metaphors may be loosely interpreted to have a similar meaning as the one that goes “your heart skips a bit”. To make love concrete, Lwando associated love with the heat that transforms dough into vetkoeks. In the case of vetkoeks, the hot oil, which is the love, transforms the heart, as dough transforms into vetkoeks.

In addition to the use of metaphors, some young adolescent men said love was about actions, about what you do for another person, and attempts to describe love resulted in young adolescent men’s use of gestures to show how love can be expressed or how one can tell, through a girl’s gestures, that they are loved. Posting, which is uploading a picture or the act of writing something on one’s social media site to be seen by one’s followers, was one gesture to show love. Posting a romantic partner on social media sites and showing the “world” that one is in love was Mabox’s expression of love towards his girlfriend.

In the quotes below, Zolani and Zwelo speak about some of the gestures by their girlfriends that showed him that indeed, he is loved.

Zolani: Yes, there was this one time when she came to my place unannounced. I was in my room with my friend, and we were watching movies and smoking. She knocked on the door, I could not recognise her voice, so she started shouting, telling me that I must open the door, or she will kill both me and the slut that I am with. I only realised later that it was her, and when I opened the door, she was already angry. When I opened the door, she realised that I was with my friend, she said, “oh I thought you were with some slut. Hey, I was going to beat her up”. But she calmed down. She had bought KFC for me, she looked around the room and said “hai no man this room is too dirty”, she asked us to leave so she can clean it, and it was really dirty. I thought to myself, why is she like this today? Anyway, we did that, and I came back after some minutes, we ate the KFC. She told me that she never wants to find any girls here (IDI, 18 years)

Zwelo: When I was writing two papers at school for the exams, the first one was in the morning and the other one was in the afternoon, so I was hungry. She bought KFC and she brought it to school for me, that is when I felt loved... (Diary, 18 years)

The idea of girls buying gifts for young adolescent men is an interesting exception to the usual pattern wherein males are expected to gift females in romantic relationships. Zwelo and Zolani appreciated the gestures by their girlfriends and while these gestures do show some appreciation and attempts to take care of him, there are also undertones of gendered norms which prescribe that the role of girls should be tending to house chores and ensuring that the man is fed.

Another gesture used to show love was offering gifts in the form of money or other material things. For some young adolescent men, being able to “spoil” their girlfriends were an important gesture of affection and to show that they loved and appreciated their girlfriends. Bee, Wole, and Lethu shared that for them loving someone and showing love involved the pleasure and ability to be

romantic with a girlfriend by spoiling her, like buying chocolates and going for picnics. The way they describe their expression of love and romance might be influenced by popular romantic discourses, which construct young adolescent men as providers. However, considering that these young adolescent men were not financially able to offer gifts to their girlfriends, the aim of offering gifts was not to offer luxurious gifts but simply to express commitment and appreciation. In the excerpt below, Lakhe dismissed the view that young adolescent men buy gifts for girls because they want to be deemed as real men who can provide, arguing that he doesn't "spoil" his girlfriend because it is expected of him to do so.

Lakhe: I do all this because I want to make my partner happy, not because it is a trend for boys to buy gifts for their girlfriends (Diary, 18 years)

Although gifting was seen as a gesture of affection and love, other young adolescent men also felt conflicted about the true meaning of gifting. While for some young adolescent men, this was a way to show love and appreciation for one's partner, others felt that the whole concept of being romantic and spoiling a girlfriend was extortion, as illustrated in the quote below.

Themba: Others also, like expenses. They want you to always spend money on them, that time they don't even love you. When you are in a relationship you are supposed to love each other, when it's time for you to spend money spend it equally, but others just think of money first.

Interviewer: And what happens when you don't give them money?

Fikile: The relationship ends because you don't have money. They want your money; they don't love you. If you won't be able to buy them anything they want. The relationship ends.

Themba: And they love doing nails. They like comparing themselves to their friends. They'd for instance say "my friend has nails; I also want nails" or want expensive weaves. They want to be like their friends and don't want to understand your situation. They don't think before they act (FGD, 16-17 years)

Sihle held similar views as Themba and Fikile above, he said that he did not use money to show love. Sihle's distaste for giving money to a girlfriend might be his way of shutting down expectations of money and gifts because he doesn't have the resources to do this. Certainly, the concept of gifting was tricky for young adolescent men in the study considering their economic status. For poor young adolescent men, the idea of gifting might also elicit feelings of resentment and unworthiness as they try to navigate a world where love and money or gifting are intertwined. For example, in a diary entry, Lakhe spoke about how he felt unworthy and less of a man when he could not buy a birthday present for his girlfriend.

The link between love and sex

Young adolescent men had different views about the meaning of sex. For some, sex was an indication of love and strengthened love in a relationship. Other young adolescent men rejected the notion that they were in romantic relationships for sex arguing that having sex was not an indication of love. Some young adolescent men felt that having sex strengthened their love and bond with their girlfriends. For Odi, in addition to sex being nice and something they enjoy, sex was also a prerequisite in a romantic relationship because it served to strengthen love and make the connection between the couple stronger. Manga added saying that sex meant spending quality time with your girlfriend away from friends. Manga was appreciative of the emotional intimacy that he shared with his girlfriend, on top of sex, he wanted to connect more deeply with his girlfriend, suggesting an investment and commitment in the relationship. Manga's narrative also reveals that he perceived his girlfriend to be his confidante and found the romantic relationship to be a safe space to talk about "anything". Like Manga, Lihle shared that the meaning of sex for him

was to strengthen the connection between him and his girlfriend. Lihle and Manga's assertions challenge the idea that sex for young adolescent men is a meaningless activity. For these young adolescent men, having sex meant strengthening the connection with their girlfriends. The section below further complicates the meanings young adolescent men ascribe to love, with boys arguing that sex is a part of nature and has no real meaning.

Not only did sex strengthen love for young adolescent men who were in romantic relationships, but for some young adolescent men, having sex resulted in them falling in love with girls they were not in a romantic relationship with, suggesting that sex was not an emotionless activity for young adolescent men, but could lead to romantic feelings. Zolani and Lethu held the view that love grows with sex, they argued that it was possible to start a romantic relationship solely based on sex and as time goes on, develop feelings of love, as illustrated in the quotes below.

Zolani: It depends, sometimes, you love someone, but the sex is not nice. Then, with this one you don't love, the sex is nice. So, you end up being with the one who gives it to you nicely, so you feel great during sex.

Zolani: It can end up being love. Because this person is giving you everything you want in bed, then you end up loving her (IDI, 18 years)

Lethu: It depends on your first experience with that person. If it is good, you can have sex with her again and again.

Interviewer: But still, you don't love her?

Lethu: Yes, if you get that certain pleasure that you do not get from anyone else then you can continue sleeping with her. Sometimes this pleasure may lead you to end up loving her even if at first you did not love her. When she pleasures you well (IDI, 19 years)

Anda had similar sentiments about developing feelings for a girl who he was sleeping with but not in a romantic relationship with. These young adolescent men's narratives suggest that sex for young adolescent men is not devoid of feelings.

Although some young adolescent men tended to associate sex with romantic feelings – the development of these feelings or the strengthening of them – some young adolescent men like Fana and Lwando, as shown in the quotes below, were of the view that sex had no real meaning but was part of nature, and a fun and enjoyable activity.

Fana: Sex means something but not everything to me, I could live without having sex, but it's a joyful feeling and I like it (Diary entry, 18 years)

Lwando: [...] For me, loving someone is not about having sex. I can't say that for her to prove that she loves me she must have sex with me, no. Love is love and sex is sex [...] (IDI, 19 years)

Luzuko also said that sex had no special meaning, except that it is nice. Similarly, Abonile also acknowledged that sex is nice, but for him, sex was also part of life and something humans cannot escape.

While love was central in young adolescent men's romantic lives, pursuing a girl to be in a romantic relationship and being in love made young adolescent men anxious and exposed them to some vulnerabilities as discussed in the section below.

Young adolescent men's fears and anxieties in romantic relationships

This sub-section discusses young adolescent men's vulnerabilities as a counterargument to the "tough guys" masculinities narrative. The section explores young adolescent men's vulnerabilities and fears in their romantic relationships, which can be classified into three categories, (a) young adolescent men's fears about pursuing a potential girlfriend (b) fear of using social media to *shela* because doing so may signal that a young adolescent man is a coward (c) uncertainties and anxieties about the future of the romantic relationship and fears of the relationship ending.

Fear- of being potentially rejected during ukushela

Even though many of the young adolescent men in the current study had dated in the past, the fear of potential humiliation during *ukushela* (asking a girl out) love to a girl was real. Due to fear of rejection, young adolescent men were hesitant and had low confidence during *ukushela*. For some young adolescent men, prospective girlfriends were total strangers who they met at the mall or on the streets. Such encounters often meant that, during the process of *ukushela*, young adolescent men approached girls they had never seen before. The idea of approaching a stranger might have exacerbated these young adolescent men's fears. Interestingly, even the idea of *shelaring* (the act of pursuing/proposing love) a familiar girl was anxiety-provoking. For example, Odi mentioned that he had seen the girl he liked around and was to a certain extent familiar with her, but still felt anxious about the prospect of *shelaring* her.

Some young adolescent men's fears, and hesitation were a result of hearing stories about how girls can be mean to young adolescent men during *ukushela*. Simamkele and Manga recount first-hand experiences of how girls embarrassed them and how that made them feel about the whole process of *ukushela*. Both young adolescent men said such experiences can diminish one's confidence and can result in young adolescent men feeling like they do not ever want to *shela*. Although some young adolescent men may feel crippled by the fear of *ukushela*, Lukhaya shared how he had

developed coping strategies to deal with the uncertainty and disappointment that comes with *ukushela*. He said that when he approaches a girl to *shela*, he goes there with room for disappointment so that he may not feel as bad should he be rejected. While this coping strategy allows Likhaya a little bit of confidence, it does not erase the anxiety that comes with the process of *ukushela*. Likhaya, further said that it is better to target the girl you like when she is alone, so that should she be rude, friends are not there to laugh at you. As a mechanism to avoid disappointment and potential humiliation, Manga said that he had to “quickly learn” to research the girl he is interested in to know the type of person she is before *shelaring* her.

Despite the fear that comes with *ukushela*, young adolescent men still felt that they had to be the ones to *shela*. The expectation that young adolescent men should be the ones to *shela* as opposed to being *shela'd* by girls may be reinforced by the prevailing stereotypical gender norms that construct young adolescent men as brave chasers. Young adolescent men like Wole were against being *shela'd* by a girl, as shown in the extract below.

Wole: ...I don't date girls who approach me. I think it is not right for a girl to be the one telling a boy that they want to date. Because when they do that, then it's like the girl is the man now. I want to be the one to approach a girl, if I don't, then we might as well forget because nothing will happen (IDI, 14 years)

Wole's thinking that being *shela'd* by a girl diminishes one's manhood status reinforces societal expectations that young adolescent men must be the “chaser or hunter” and must have the courage to *shela*. In his attempt to explain why some young adolescent men were against girls *shelaring* boys, Zwelo said

Zwelo: Because here in Gugs [Gugulethu] we believe that a guy is supposed to take action in terms of shelaring [proposing love] if a girl does, we believe the girl is desperate (Diary, 18 years)

Other young adolescent men were fine with being *shela'd* by a girl, for example Bee said that it is uncommon for a girl to *shela* a young adolescent man, showing that the idea of a girl *shelaring* a young adolescent man is still foreign in the participants' context. Despite Bee finding it uncommon for girls to *shela* young adolescent men, he said that he did not have a problem with it. While young adolescent men continue to be framed as the main "chasers", dominant and possessive, they might welcome advances from a girl and may be open to being *shela'd* by girls.

Young adolescent men's fears of Shelaring via social media

Not only did young adolescent men experience anxiety and fears about *ukushela* and potentially being rejected. They also feared *shelaring* via social media because doing so might mean that they were not brave enough to face a girl face-to-face and did not want girls going around telling people about their lack of courage to face them in person. In the quotes below, Wole and Manga recount how they used social media, particularly Facebook, to attract a girl's attention and get to a talking stage. Once this was achieved, they would ask to see the girl face-to-face to tell her how they felt.

Wole: After talking a bit on Facebook and meeting her multiple times on the streets, I finally told her that I would like to date her. If you tell her on Facebook, she might think you are a coward, and she might tell people that. So, for me, I thought it best I tell her face to face (IDI, 14 years)

Manga: [...] I asked for her Facebook account, we started talking via Facebook. We spoke for a while on Facebook until I asked her if we could meet up, she agreed and

that's when I told her that I love her. She said she was aware that I liked her. Then she responded that it's fine, we can date and see where it leads us (IDI, 17 years)

Manga and Wole might feel that they had to face a girl face-to-face because society expects and has conditioned young adolescent men to be confident, and brave and hide any signs of fear or weakness. Thus, young adolescent men might view expressing interest in a girl via social media as a sign of low self-esteem, cowardly, and unmanly.

Some young adolescent men used social media as an alternative way to mediate the fear of talking to a girl face-to-face. Social media, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp, were reported to be effective means of meeting new romantic partners, particularly for young adolescent men who were shy or scared to *shela* a girl face-to-face. Lwazi told a girl via Facebook that he liked her and would like to be in a romantic relationship with her.

Lwazi: Joh, the first time I saw her was in school during break time. Like, it was my first time to love a girl like that. I would look at her and see that she is also looking at me. One day, I decided to search for her on Facebook, I sent her an invite and that is how we started talking.

Lwazi: At that time, I was scared, I was too shy to tell her face to face. I was scared of telling her how I felt, so I told her via Facebook that I liked her.

Lwazi: eh because, eh I don't have the courage to talk to girls, I'm shy.

Lwazi: I told her that I have feelings for her. She also told me that she likes me too and has been thinking about us dating. That is how we started dating (IDI, 18 years)

Lwazi did not subscribe to the notion that a young adolescent men must propose love to a girl in person. Amid his fears and anxieties, he took advantage of social media to communicate that which he felt he could not do in person.

Though some young adolescent men did not want to *shela* via social media, social media played a significant role in their established romantic relationships. The role of social media included (a) direct and indirect communication (b) maintaining romantic relationships when in-person interactions were not possible and (c) demonstrating relationship status and loyalty. First, social media was used as a means of communication. Young adolescent men said that checking up on a girlfriend and communicating about when and how to meet was done via WhatsApp. Sometimes, social media serves as a “screen” by facilitating indirect communication e.g. during a breakup. Upon learning that his girlfriend was cheating on him, Zolani used social media to communicate that he had moved on by posting his new girlfriend. Sabelo recounted how his girlfriend used social media to display her misery and hurt by posting broken hearts on Facebook and WhatsApp. After seeing how sad and miserable his girlfriend was, he forgave her. Although no words were explicitly said between Zolani, Sabelo, and their partners, these young adolescent men were able to understand what was communicated by their girlfriends, and in the case of Zolani, he was able to indirectly communicate that he has a new partner.

In addition to using social media to communicate with a partner, social media facilitated difficult conversations. Luzuko preferred solving arguments via WhatsApp as opposed to having heated arguments with his girlfriend in person. It is possible that he did this because he did not want arguments to turn physical. For young adolescent men like Litha and Manga social media allowed them to maintain continuity in relationships when in-person interactions were not possible. These young adolescent men relied on social media to maintain their relationships because they could

not see their girlfriends regularly. While both young adolescent men struggled with the idea of not being able to see their partners, they improvised by using social media to keep in contact.

A third way in which young adolescent men used social media was to show loyalty, affection and commitment. Mabox and Zolani spoke about how they posted their girlfriends on Facebook and WhatsApp statuses to show love. Zolani further stated that to prove his loyalty, he would exchange phones with his girlfriend overnight. During the exchange, the girlfriend would post her pictures on his WhatsApp status, and he could not delete the posts for fear that the girl would think he was cheating. Another strategy used by young adolescent men to prove that they were loyal and not entertaining other girls was to give their social media login details to their girlfriends, as narrated by Lwando in the excerpt below.

Lwando: [...] Also at first, she did not trust me, so I gave her my Facebook login details so that she could go through my Facebook and see that I am not talking to other girls besides her (IDI, 19 years)

Having to share one's social media credentials with a romantic partner might be deemed as control, however, for these young adolescent men, they did so to show their partners that they can be trusted. Perhaps young adolescent men wanted to be trusted by their partners – so much so that they shared social media credentials – because they did not want their girlfriends to end the relationship due to lack of trust.

Young adolescent men's fears and uncertainties in established romantic relationships

Young adolescent men shela'd girls and in many instances succeeded in convincing a girl to be in a romantic relationship with them, yet after all this, they were not at ease in their relationships. They had anxieties and uncertainties around whether they were loved and if the romantic

relationship would last. In the quotes below Zolani and Manga talk about some of the insecurities that they had to deal with in their relationships.

Zolani: ... I want someone I can spend my time with, someone I can trust. But to be honest, I don't trust this new girlfriend.

Zolani: ...for me I want my girlfriend to not have guy friends. But this one she has guy friends. I told her that I don't like it when she has guy friends, she said she would stop it, and she did stop, for a while, but I know now that she still has guy friends. I wish my girlfriend would not even talk to other boys; I am scared that she would have feelings for these other guys that she talks to. You know how boys are, they are too smart, they can take your girlfriend (IDI, 18 years)

Manga: I don't like the cheating. I also don't like a girl who entertains other boys. So, I once saw her with another boy, but I never asked her about it, I just wanted to see/find out for myself what was really going on. As time went on, I realised that she really loves me, it's just that many boys want her (IDI, 17 years)

Although both young adolescent men did not explicitly state that they believe that their partners do not love them, their narratives expose some of the anxieties and uncertainties they experience in romantic relationships. Zolani and Manga's insecurities highlight their commitment and investment to their girlfriends. If these young adolescent men were in romantic relationships solely for sex, surely, they would not be preoccupied about whether their girlfriends love them or not but would be happy that they were getting sex. Further discussions with young adolescent men made it clear that while young adolescent men did have concerns about sex in their romantic lives, they also had concerns, doubts, and insecurities about whether one is loved or not. For example, Manga, Fana and Sane doubted their girlfriends' love for them. Fana was concerned about the future

prospects of his relationship, saying that although his girlfriend acts like she loves him now, he can never be 100% sure and has no way of ever knowing what might happen in the future. While it would make sense for young adolescent men to have such doubts because something was done or said by their girlfriends, Sane shared, that he can never trust that she truly loves him, even though his girlfriend has never done anything to make him doubt her love for him.

Concerns about being loved were exacerbated by concerns about whether the relationship would last. Young adolescent men expressed fear and hurt at the thought of the relationship ending. They wanted to build long-lasting relationships and wished to marry their current girlfriends and have children.

Zwelo: I want to marry my girlfriend, so I can't do dirty [cheat] on her (Diary, 18 years)

Lihle: I wish for us to make this relationship work. Like I said, I really love this girl, so I want us to work hard, buy a house, and have two children...we always encourage each other that we need to work hard so that our two kids will have better lives than us (IDI, 15 years)

Lihle and Zwelo's wishes to marry their girlfriends demonstrate that young adolescent men do not enter relationships just to pass the time, instead, they are invested and committed in their romantic relationships. Young adolescent men's wishes for their romantic relationships to last longer were threatened by issues of trust, and the fear of cheating or being cheated on. Lihle did not even want to entertain the thought of his relationship ending, he said "I don't know what I would do, joh that...but hai man, we will never break up"

A major threat to some of the young adolescent men's relationships was infidelity. Zolani recounts how his girlfriend's infidelity hurt him, even though he had also cheated on his girlfriend. Other boys also experienced being cheated on, for example, Simamkele said,

Simamkele: Yes. There was one who cheated, but we talked and moved on. Then I cheated too, and she dumped me [laughs] (IDI, 17 years)

Ironically, both Simamkele and Zolani were victims of infidelity, yet they also later cheated on their girlfriends. Could it be that victims of cheaters become cheaters? Young adolescent men's reactions to cheating varied, while victims of infidelity became cheaters themselves, other young adolescent men's reactions to cheating were hurt but they still forgave their girlfriends. Zwelo recounted that after he found out about his partner's infidelity, he felt "rejected, sad and drained" but still forgave his girlfriend. Bee recounted a scenario where he had travelled and bought a present for his girlfriend, only to come back and find that she had cheated on him. Despite the hurt and anger, he forgave his girlfriend. Decisions by Bee and Zwelo suggest that some young adolescent men are willing to forgive their partners' cheating and were not concerned about being labelled weak or bewitched, the insults that come with being cheated on as a young adolescent man.

Despite these vulnerabilities, some young adolescent men tried hard to present themselves as invulnerable to their girlfriends. But, even when young adolescent men tried to be strong when they were alone or with a trusted friend, "tears will drop", said Fana. Still, for some young adolescent men could not drop anywhere, they had to be strategic about when to cry and who could see them during this state of vulnerability. Some felt that it was a sign of weakness or a threat to their manhood to cry in front of a girlfriend.

Sane: ... It's rare that guys cry in front of their girlfriends because if you do it, you are showing being a coward. You can't stand for something by crying. It says something else to the girl. Yes. And they have the mentality the moment you cry to them, that you are weak. Because there are a lot of girls out here, why are you crying? (IDI, 18 years)

Fana described similar views, saying that crying makes a young adolescent man look weak, particularly when done in front of a girlfriend. Similarly, other young adolescent men in FGDs, such as Lali, Ishipho, and Meka said that when a young adolescent man cries, they are labelled “moffies, cowards, fools and cry-babies”. Not crying in front of a girlfriend is a tactic that serves to protect their manhood and convey the idea that they are strong. For these young adolescent men, being a real man is about emotional detachment, and sense-making of their manhood was through withholding showing their emotions.

For some young adolescent men, crying in front of their girlfriends was not an issue but certain conditions had to be met for this to happen. For example, Sabelo said he would cry in front of his girlfriend if he trusted and felt comfortable with her. When young adolescent men cannot be vulnerable even with their romantic partners, they are left with the burden of bravery and pseudo-invulnerability while battling with their fears of being hurt and their need for assurance and love. Other young adolescent men utterly rejected this stoic view that “real men” ought to be strong and not show their weakness in front of a girl. For example, in the quote below, Nkosi is defying the rules around young adolescent men and expectations on how to express their emotions.

Nkosi: Yes, I feel like I'm one of them. I don't know about the rest, but I can show my emotions and even cry. That's why I said, I'm more of an action guy.

Interviewer: Are you able to show emotions of being hurt, or even crying? In a romantic relationship, in front of your girlfriend?

Nkosi: I do that actually. Even though I rarely do it, but I do it (IDI, 18 years)

Conclusion

This chapter examined young adolescent men's experiences of love and desire, their expression of love, and the uncertainties that come with love. Overall, the chapter paints a picture of young adolescent men that is rarely acknowledged or appreciated. Findings highlight young adolescent men's desires to love and be loved, disrupting the prevailing discourse that constructs young adolescent men as emotional cripples who are incapable of freely expressing love. The findings in this chapter also underscore the vulnerability that young adolescent men navigate in their romantic relationships, complicating and challenging perceptions that masculinities ought to be characterised by invulnerability. Young adolescent men may be interested in proving their manhood, by conforming to masculine expectations, while also embracing alternative practices of being a man and experiencing a variety of vulnerabilities in their romantic relationships. The findings point to the significance of moving away from homogenising versions of masculinities to promoting alternative masculinities among young adolescent men.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This qualitative study explored young adolescent men's heterosexual romantic relationships and how these shape their SRH, HIV, and IPV-related attitudes and practices. The aim was to gain insights into how young adolescent men aged 14 – 19 years old residing in Gugulethu, South Africa make meaning of their romantic relationships and how such meaning shapes sexual negotiation and decision-making. The study also sought to understand gender power dynamics in young adolescent men's romantic relationships as well as the factors that shape the manifestation and expression of such power in young adolescent men's romantic relationships. In doing so, the study further endeavoured to contribute to an understanding of how young adolescent men experience and perceive IPV.

Findings highlight the romantic relationship as an important context that may provide an important platform for young adolescent men to enact behaviours and play out gender roles learned from their broader context and shows that young adolescent men's sexual practices, their perceptions of risk to HIV, STIs, and their attitudes towards IPV are located in and influenced by the romantic relationship context. These findings add to the emerging literature that complicates the construction of young adolescent men in public health research, showing that in romantic relationships young adolescent men shifted, challenged, or reinforced gender norms and seemed to navigate their romantic relationships with mixed feelings of uncertainty, fear, and self-doubt, while at the same time negotiating their masculinities and grappling with their desire for intimacy and emotional connection with their partners.

This discussion chapter presents three cross-cutting themes, which highlight how context, culture, and romantic relationships intersect to shape how young adolescent men make meaning of their

romantic relationships. Theme one addresses young adolescent men's desires for love and how these reflect multiple webs of meaning and logic about their affective worlds. Theme two interrogates masculine positions taken up by young adolescent men in the context of their romantic relationships, focusing on the multiple ways young adolescent men perform masculinities and how these are neither straightforward nor static. Theme three shows that despite young adolescent men exhibiting some progressive shifts in masculine norms, some masculine characteristics were hard to change.

Love and other emotional dimensions in young adolescent men's romantic relationships

Love emerged as a key feature in young adolescent men's romantic relationships. In this section, I focus on young adolescent men's desires and affective experiences and discuss how love and other emotional dimensions influence their construction and performance of masculinities. In doing so, I draw on contextual and cultural norms as key conditions that shape the expression of love and expectations in romantic relationships. In this study young adolescent men were prepared to forgo some traditional masculine traits in the name of love, challenging the prevailing view that they are emotionally inexpressive. Their talk about love and being in love highlights that love is essential and valued by young adolescent men. Further, their experiences, ideas, and desires of love paint a face of love that is rarely seen or acknowledged and challenge the view that masculinities should be characterised by emotional detachment (Bhana, 2017a).

Findings on love and other emotional dimensions in young adolescent men's romantic relationships add to a small but emerging body of research in South Africa that challenges long-held stereotypes about young adolescent men's emotional capabilities (Dlamini, 2023; Hamlall, 2018; Bhana, 2018; Gibbs et al., 2014). Love may thus be instrumental in shifting gender norms (Bhana, 2013; Deutsch, 2007). Despite love's potentiality in bridging gender dynamics in romantic relationships, contextual norms may subject young adolescent men to social scrutiny regarding their emotional expression. For example, young adolescent men who express love may be

perceived as wimps (McQueen, 2017), even though research suggests that romance is no longer the preserve of wimps (Allen, 2007). The mockery of young adolescent men who express love and show sensitivity in a context that favours emotional detachment may threaten young adolescent men's performance of ideal masculinities valued in their contexts.

In addition to labelling young adolescent men who show love and sensitivity as wimps, suggesting that those who express love to their partners have been given *isidliso*, a love potion, is another way to discourage young adolescent men from expressing love. It is said that *isidliso* can be used to restrain a partner from cheating or entertaining other women (Kunene, 2010). In South Africa, statements like *udlisiwe* are commonly passed in instances where male partners appear to be taking care of their female partner (Kunene, 2010; Parle & Scorgie, 2012). If young adolescent men perceive their soft, caring, and warm sides to be a source of mockery from others, they might want to maintain their emotional distance in romantic relationships.

Young adolescent men desire to maintain some masculine norms valued in their context was seen through their desire to sustain in-person interactions during *ukushela*. Although young adolescent men shared fears induced by pursuing a girl, they seemed to be against the idea of pursuing a girl via social media, even though social media could potentially lessen the anxiety of approaching a girl face-to-face. Perhaps young adolescent men resisted the use of social media to *shela* because they wanted to portray a sense of bravery and confidence. The concept of *ukushela*, a Nguni term for pursuing a prospective romantic partner is laden by masculine ideologies that dictate that young adolescent men should be brave and confident to pursue a girl. Hence, despite changing norms around who should *shela*, the idea that young adolescent men should be chasers persists and part of the gatekeepers of such views are females, who feel that young adolescent men should be confident and brave to ask a girl out (De Meyer et al., 2017; Duckworth & Trautner, 2019; Zibane, 2021).

The view that young adolescent men who express love are wimps or that they have been given love portions and that pursuing a girl in person is a sign of bravery and confidence are important contextual and cultural norms that shape young adolescent men's ideologies of love, including its expression. All young adolescent men in the current study identified as Xhosa, a Nguni tribe predominantly found in the Eastern Cape and a largely rural province. They all resided in Gugulethu, a diverse social and cultural urban context. Socialisation may have been a by-product of the rural and urban ways of being, wherein young adolescent men learned about manhood through observing adults who inhabit both EC and Gugulethu. Men in Gugulethu - whom young adolescent men looked up to and thus informed their ideas about manhood - may temporarily abandon elements of masculinities that do not make sense in the urban space and resume performance of these only when in the rural areas (Çaro et al., 2018; Kunene, 2010).

This means that as young adolescent men made meaning of their masculinities, they may have borrowed from their rural and urban interactions. Urban performances of masculinities may allow or be tolerant of emotionally expressive young adolescent men. This is because "urban areas typically have a greater range of masculinities than rural areas due to populations more diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, migration status, class, religion, subculture, or ideology" (Silva, 2021, p. 204). However, because rural masculinities are rigid, it may be socially unacceptable for males to be emotionally expressive (Abelson, 2019; Silva, 2021). The result of this is that young adolescent men may be discouraged by their rural roots from being emotionally expressive, yet the urban context may be tolerant of emotionally expressive young adolescent men. Such conditions, that is the rural/urban dynamics may result in young adolescent men assuming conflicting masculine identities or straddling between masculinities, as was found in this study.

In addition to the socio-cultural context, the romantic context is another key consideration in young adolescent men's performance of their masculinities and their ideas of love. For example, young adolescent men may enter romantic relationships with preconceived ideas about love and its

expression – shaped by culture and context – however, as the couple negotiate their understanding and expectations of love, ideas about love and how it is expressed may be re-imagined. In this case, the romantic relationship provides a further layer in shaping young adolescent men performance of masculinities and ideas about love. Perhaps the dynamics of each romantic relationship explain the complexity and heterogeneity of young adolescent men masculine ideas performances and ideologies of love. Hence some young adolescent men may be more amenable to new constructions of love while some may stubbornly hold on to former ideas of love.

Young adolescent men challenging and straddling between masculinities

As young adolescent men battled with managing their affective worlds, they did so while challenging and straddling between masculinities. In my discussion of how young adolescent men challenged and straddled between masculinities, I draw on decision-making around condom use and on issues of *ulwaluko* and IPV. First, I use findings around condom decision-making to discuss how challenging masculinities looked like in young adolescent men’s romantic relationships. Second, I use findings on *ulwaluko* and IPV to highlight how young adolescent men straddled between masculinities. In my discussion of these, I also discuss the conditions – context, culture, and romantic relationships – that shape young adolescent men’s multiple, fluid, dynamic, and sometimes conflicting masculine positions.

Challenging gendered masculine norms around condom use

The findings show that in young adolescent men’s heterosexual romantic relationships, gender norms were shifting. For example, young adolescent men challenged ideas around IPV, family planning and condom use. This section uses condom decision-making to highlight some of the shifting gender norms among young adolescent men in the study. Findings in this study show that young adolescent men did not have all the power to decide on condom use, instead, their female partners seemed to have more say in condom use. This finding adds to the body of research in South Africa that reports on shifting norms and the complexity of sexual decision-making among

adolescents (Duby et al., 2021; Hartmann et al., 2018). Such a finding also redefines young adolescent men as sexual partners who take into consideration the sexual preferences of their romantic partners. Further, it challenges the one-dimensional view that condom use in heterosexual romantic relationships is driven by harmful masculine norms.

Although female partners mainly made decisions around condom use, in cases where girls suggested not using a condom, van der Riet et al. (2018) propose that young adolescent men might have been happy to forgo condom use because (a) not using a condom has been constructed as what “real” men do (b) pressure from friends to try sex without a condom (c) they perceived condoms as interfering with sexual pleasure (d) not using a condom may be perceived as a demonstration of love, trust, and commitment. The study does not have data on girls, but it is possible that girls might have suggested not using a condom for the same aforementioned reasons. Nonetheless, young adolescent men’s agreement to non-condom use, notwithstanding the risks, may indicate that their priority lies with meeting and respecting their girlfriends’ sexual needs over their sexual health.

The findings of the current study show shifts in sexual gender norms, in particular gender norms around condom decision-making. Key in shaping sexual norms and ultimately sexual decision-making are the contextual and romantic relationship norms. First, romantic partners in the romantic relationship context are influenced by the broader Gugulethu context and the culture within that broader context. In this study, Gugulethu an urban setting might have approved of girls who are vocal about their sexual needs, hence for some young adolescent men, it was acceptable for their partners to make decisions regarding condom use. This finding is consistent with findings from previous studies that report on the significant role that context plays in how males enact their masculinities. These studies show that in urban settings, it may become more difficult for young adolescent men to harbour rigid gender norms, as such, they may embrace sexually empowered girls (Connor et al., 2021; Ratele, 2013). Perhaps the growing power in sexual decision-making

among girls in urban settings is a contributing factor to young adolescent men's attitudes towards condom use. For example, Hartmann et al. (2018), in a study in Cape Town reported that young women exercised their agency in condom decision-making. Similarly, a study by Pettifor et al. (2012), conducted in Johannesburg, South Africa found that the young women in their study wanted decision-making to be shared equally with their partners.

In addition to the context shaping romantic partner's attitudes in romantic relationships, the interactions between partners in these relationships may also shape sexual attitudes. This is to say that while girls' agency and autonomy to decide on condom use may be frowned upon by contextual and cultural norms, young adolescent men's encounters with their girlfriends supported girls' agency and undermined the view of sexually disempowered girls. For example, although, often, sexual decision-making is said to be the preserve of males in heterosexual romantic relationships, through the interactions with their partners and the norms in their romantic relationships, young adolescent men in this study seemed to challenge this view. Instead, it seemed that meaning-making around their manhood was informed by their interaction with their romantic partners, resulting in the shifting of power dynamics, taking the relationship towards egalitarianism. The fact that young adolescent men make meaning of their manhood through their encounters with their romantic partners shows that despite societal gender norms, gender, and its related performances manhood is concretised through everyday interactions, which may challenge or support social gender structures (Khumalo et al., 2021). This means that the masculine positions young adolescent men assume might differ depending on who they interact with, resulting in them straddling among masculinities.

Straddling among masculinities

As young adolescent men disrupted gender norms around condom use, it seemed they held conflicting positions regarding *ulwaluko* and IPV. Among the Xhosa people, the tradition of *ulwaluko* becomes the most acknowledged pathway into manhood. While these young adolescent

men may have been brought up in Gugulethu, most of their identities are forged in connection with or drawing from the Xhosa culture and the Gugulethu context. As such, the intersection of their culture and the urban setting worked hand in hand to produce particular ideas about what it means to be a man.

Gugulethu is a diverse, urban, and multicultural setting in which young adolescent men live and interact with males from a variety of African cultures. The infusion of the different cultures may have expanded young adolescent men's views of what a man is. Such a context may have allowed young adolescent men to learn that manhood is not solely based on the tradition of *ulwaluko*. It is perhaps for this reason that although young adolescent men borrowed from their culture to make sense of their manhood, they also questioned the fact that they could only be "men" if they had undergone *ulwaluko*. In this sense, young adolescent men's manhood ideas are constructed between two geographies and are a by-product of cultural fusion, resulting in the evolution and re-evaluation of masculine norms (Connor et al., 2021).

The cultural fusion in multi-cultural contexts such as Gugulethu afforded young adolescent men the opportunity to express themselves in ways in which they might not have expressed themselves in a rural village in EC. For example, according to the Xhosa culture young adolescent men are not yet men, yet in the Gugulethu context, young adolescent men in this study already considered themselves men. The Gugulethu context allowed young adolescent men to forge their manhood outside of and in addition to the tradition of *ulwaluko*. In the urban space of Gugulethu, a different kind of being a man is born. It may be that some Xhosa boys in rural EC, where notions of manhood remain grounded in the tradition of *ulwaluko* might continue to hold rigid views about manhood and what it takes to be a man. Young adolescent men in rural EC, of the same age as young adolescent men in this study, who have not undergone the culture of *ulwaluko* might not entertain the idea of themselves as men. This is because, these young adolescent men might have not

experienced cultural fusion, as such, their views might not be affected by other cultures and world views (Connor et al., 2021; Ratele, 2013).

Even in their questioning of the validity of *ulwaluko* in making one a man, it seemed young adolescent men did not want to outrightly reject the tradition of *ulwaluko*. They still felt undermining the tradition might result in harsh consequences from ancestors and alienation from family and friends. According to Mdedetyana (2019) despite urbanisation and migration to townships, the practice of *ulwaluko* has not declined. Perhaps the fear of the brunt of ancestors and ostracisation by friends and family might have, in moments of doubt, motivated and re-energised young adolescent men that *ulwaluko* remains a significant marker of manhood. The sacredness of *ulwaluko* is also noted by Ntozini and Ngqangweni (2016), who contend that one of the significances of the tradition is to formally introduce young adolescent men to their ancestors and ask for guidance as they enter this new phase of their lives.

Work by Mdedetyana (2019) and Ntozini and Ngqangweni (2016) highlights how culture and unseen forces, such as ancestors and other spirits intersect to shape manhood identity. The role of culture and unseen forces is the reason why Mfecane (2016) argues for a need to acknowledge the diversity, multiplicity, and fluidity of masculinities to develop theories of masculinities based on African conceptions of reality. The argument is that African theories of masculinities should seek to understand how culture and unseen forces of personhood shape beliefs around manhood within the African cultural context (Mfecane, 2016, 2020). The intersection of culture, ancestors, and the setting makes it difficult to talk about hegemonic masculinities, particularly in the South African context where there are eleven cultures all ascribing to different ideas of what it means to be a man. In a case where eleven males from these different cultures move to one setting, although there might be some broad similarities, the hegemony of what a man is ceases to exist. As such, it becomes difficult to talk about hegemonic masculinities in Africa (Ratele, 2013).

In addition to holding conflicting perceptions around *ulwaluko*, its significance, and relevance, young adolescent men's attitudes towards IPV were another example of how they straddled between masculinities. The findings showed that young adolescent men aspired to remain non-violent, yet they felt doing so shouldn't threaten their manhood or threaten it too much. Otherwise, even in their desire to remain non-violent in instances where their manhood was threatened, they would be violent to thwart any doubts about the authenticity of their manhood. Perhaps young adolescent men experienced conflicting desires, as reported by participants in Abelson's (2019) study.

Contextual norms around what a man does or does not may push young adolescent men to be violent as a mechanism of protecting their image. It seemed that, for some young adolescent men protecting and maintaining the image of someone strong was important in maintaining their manhood status. The need to protect one's manhood, particularly in public is because manhood, at its core, is a social spectacle with both males and females policing whether young adolescent men are performing their manhood right (Mishra et al., 2023). As such, even though they might have been against violence, defending their manhood justified acts of violence. While remaining non-violent even in instances where one's manhood might be questioned is possible, doing so in a context that characterises violence as a masculine trait might lead to mockery and possible ostracisation. This means that shifting contextual norms around manhood may be key in tackling IPV.

Not only did young adolescent men hold conflicting views around IPV, but it seemed they also assumed both the victim and perpetrator status. The narrative in research around IPV constructs young adolescent men as perpetrators of IPV. While young adolescent men are largely perpetrators, such a narrative lacks nuance and does not present the conflicting and complex positions that young adolescent men may assume about IPV. For example, despite emerging literature in some African countries showing that young adolescent men are also experiencing

concerning rates of IPV, often, young adolescent men are automatically seen as perpetrators (Hogan et al., 2022; Scott-Storey et al., 2022; Walker et al., 2020; Wallace et al., 2019). To see young adolescent men as only perpetrators silence young adolescent men who are victims and those who are both victims and perpetrators of IPV. Also, turning a blind eye to young adolescent men who are victims of IPV and therefore in need of interventions can be classified as structural violence.

Structural violence refers to the harm that young adolescent men may experience from social structures such as the police or violence programmes that prevent them from opening cases or receiving help as victims of IPV (Galtung, 1969). There is a widespread understanding that structural violence has serious implications for individual behaviour. For example, there seems to be a consensus that how certain social structures operate may be violent towards women and girls (Montesanti & Thurston, 2015; Sinha et al., 2017). However, there seems to be a reluctance to describe young adolescent men as victims of structural violence (Rawlings, 2015). Some young adolescent men in this study spoke about men's general reluctance to open up about their experiences of violence. The impact of this is that young adolescent men are often left out of health programmes and interventions.

Although males and females can be victims of IPV, their experiences and how they perceive their victimhood status may differ (Hogan et al., 2022; Morgan & Wells, 2016). For example, coming out as a victim of IPV as a young adolescent man may threaten their manhood identity. Some young adolescent men in the study were concerned that societal norms in their context make a mockery of males who report IPV. Such mockery silences these young adolescent men, making them feel like they have failed in their manhood and in meeting dominant expectations of them as strong (Hogan et al., 2022). As such, young adolescent men may be left with no option but to bottle their experiences.

Progressive gains yet some harmful behaviour related to masculine norms remain entrenched

Young adolescent men's love and other emotional dimensions as well as their struggles with challenging and straddling between masculinities emerged as progressive gains that challenge and complicate how they are often constructed in research. Gender norms may have evolved, and in some instances, they might present in conflicting ways, making young adolescent men more complicated than often constructed. However, sometimes young adolescent men's masculine performances reflected unyielding compliance to harmful societal ideals about what it means to be a man, highlighting some characteristics related to masculine norms that were hard to change (Fleming et al., 2016). In this section, I discuss how young adolescent men's views that (a) sex makes a man (b) low perception of the risk of HIV and STIs (c) poor HIV testing behaviours emerged as some of the harmful behaviours related to masculine norms that remained entrenched.

The idea that sex makes a man remained ingrained in young adolescent men, they placed great emphasis on sex being a key marker for manhood and spoke of sex as a vehicle into manhood. Such a finding confirms results from previous literature (Fleming et al., 2016; Manyapelo et al., 2019). However, simply being sexually active was not enough to make one a real man, in addition, young adolescent men had to perform well sexually. I provide two reasons – one selfish and the other selfless - that might help explain why young adolescent men were concerned about their sexual performance.

The selfish reason was that they did not want to be a source of mockery due to poor performance, which might lead to the questioning of one's manhood status, as the idea is that "real men" perform well sexually. Males take poor sexual performance seriously so much that to deal with poor sexual performance, some may resort to herbs and other substances to boost their sexual performance (Fiaveh, 2019). The selfless reason why young adolescent men might have been concerned with

their sexual performance is perhaps because they might have truly desired to pleasure their partners. For example, some young adolescent men in this study said that they make it a point to satisfy their girlfriends, they said they don't only do so to avoid being talked about in their community, instead, they believed that both partners should enjoy sex. In this regard, young adolescent men's conformity to masculine norms around sexual performance did not only "benefit" them. As such, young adolescent men's concerns with pleasuring their girlfriends challenge the widespread stereotype that males are self-centred and only care about their pleasure (Hyde et al., 2009).

The second harmful behaviour related to masculine norms that seemed hard to change was young adolescent men's perceptions of their risk of HIV and STIs. Condom use in young adolescent men's relationships was inconsistent, exposing them and their partners to the risk of HIV and STIs. Despite inconsistent condom use, young adolescent men's perceptions of their risk of HIV and STIs in this study were low. Three possible reasons why young adolescent men might have not considered themselves to be at risk of HIV and STIs. These are (a) the perception of girls as sexually innocent, (b) gender norms that expect young adolescent men to be strong and self-reliant, and (c) HIV overload. First, young adolescent men might have not considered themselves to be at risk because of the view that their partners would not sleep around and contract infections. The societal view that girls should uphold high moral ground when it comes to sex or risk being labelled sluts or shamed through *inkciyo* (virginity testing) might inform young adolescent men's beliefs about girls not sleeping around (Endendijk et al., 2019). Due to cultural practices such as *inkciyo* unmarried girls may hide the fact that they are having sex (Crosby et al., 2020; Endendijk et al., 2019). This means that it may be easy for girls to be perceived as sexually innocent and to conclude that they are disease - STIs and HIV - free. Second, young adolescent men might have perceived themselves to be at low risk of contracting HIV and STIs because of gendered norms that teach them that they are brave, strong, and self-reliant, which ultimately leads to the undermining of safer sexual practices (Byaruhanga, 2020; Fleming et al., 2016; Ganle & Dery, 2015). Living in

fear of contracting HIV or STIs or believing that one is at risk might diminish young adolescent men's supposed strength, bravery, and self-reliance. Third, young adolescent men's low perception of their risk of HIV and STIs might be due to HIV and STIs information overload, which may have caused indifference around HIV and STIs. Despite nationwide efforts – sexuality education - to educate adolescents about HIV and STIs, for the most part, these efforts have not necessarily translated into consciousness around HIV and STIs and changed behaviour (Mthembu et al., 2019; Shefer et al., 2012; Sommer et al., 2015).

The third harmful behaviour related to masculine norms that emerged as deeply ingrained in young adolescent men was poor HIV testing behaviours. Testing for HIV might be key in reducing HIV transmission and acquisition (Tenkorang & Maticka-Tyndale, 2014), yet the findings of this study showed that young adolescent men did not see the need to go for HIV testing because they relied on their partner's statuses to draw conclusions about their HIV statuses. Trust in young adolescent men's romantic relationships might have influenced these young adolescent men's HIV testing behaviours. Trust, as a factor likely to discourage HIV testing in romantic relationships, is also reported by Hartmann et al. (2018) in a South African study. Distrust, on the other hand, may encourage HIV testing, for example, a study in Uganda with older men found that their distrust for their partners encouraged HIV testing (Gottert et al., 2018). Other factors that might have influenced young adolescent men's poor HIV testing behaviours are harmful masculine norms that discourage health-seeking behaviours and structural set-up of health facilities that discourage access to health, including HIV testing (Beia et al., 2021; Conserve et al., 2019; Sileo et al., 2018).

Lack of social support in young adolescent men's lives might explain why they continued to harbour some harmful masculine norms. Young adolescent men in this study seemed to grapple with sexual decision-making and navigating romantic relationships with little support. In South Africa, at the national level, fewer efforts and approaches are directed towards supporting young adolescent men as they transition into adulthood. Currently, nationwide efforts catering to only

young adolescent men include CSE and voluntary medical circumcision (Makusha et al., 2020). At home, parents may be crucial in addressing SRH gaps among adolescents, and doing so may allow them to impart sexual values and beliefs that they align with, also parents' proximity to their children may allow them to individualise sex education. (Chiweshe & Chiweshe, 2017; Evans et al., 2020). Yet, findings in this study showed that parents were also not supporting young adolescent men in romantic relationships and sexual decision-making. Also, while it might be appropriate for parents to instil sexual values in their children through open communication, there is a lack of evidence that shows the effectiveness of this approach.

Implications for the study

Challenge the current discourse around young adolescent men

The current discourse around young adolescent men overlooks other forms of masculinities that may exist. This study has shown that young adolescent men do not always aspire to dominant masculine norms in the contexts, they may conform or reject these norms. Some research in South Africa shows that conformity to hegemonic norms in a given context is not the only thing driving males' behaviour (Langa, 2020; Shefer et al., 2015). For example, Langa (2020) in a study with young adolescent men from Alexander (a South African township) reported that young adolescent men can occupy other masculinities. Shefer et al. (2015) report on young adolescent men's vulnerabilities and uncertainties as they perform masculinities. Despite these studies showing that young adolescent men straddle between performing dominant masculine norms in their contexts and a rejection of these norms, research continues to predominantly focus on the masculine norms characterised by power, dominance, bravery, and risky behaviours. This has resulted in the overshadowing of other masculinities that young adolescent men may perform.

Researchers should be conscious of how the current framing and emphasis on young adolescent men's problematic and destructive behaviour obscures the presence of other forms of masculinities

that young adolescent men may subscribe to. Masculinity has and continues to be viewed as flexible, culturally, and context-dependent and this should be reflected in the discourse around young adolescent men. While some young adolescent men's behaviour may be problematic, particularly in instances where they aspire and conform to toxic gender norms, the heavy focus on young adolescent men's enactment of these toxic masculinities may reinforce the assumption that young adolescent men's behaviour is problematic. There is a need to de-homogenise perceptions and the discourse around young adolescent men's masculinities. The findings of this study attempt to do this by highlighting the vulnerabilities and complexities of black young adolescent men living in Gugulethu.

Consider young adolescent men's vulnerabilities

During adolescence, young adolescent men are still in the process of forging their identities both as individuals and as romantic partners. This may be a vulnerable and uncertain phase for them but in a world that mostly views them as predators and problematic (Shefer et al., 2015), they may not receive proper support to navigate this phase and successfully enter adulthood as responsible and healthy adults.

When young adolescent men are not offered supportive and safe spaces to talk about their vulnerabilities, they may use unhealthy ways to deal with these vulnerabilities, resulting in poor health and well-being. The findings of this study highlight young adolescent men's uncertainties, anxieties, and vulnerabilities. This finding may inform the development of specific health programmes directed at young adolescent men, which might have some latent benefits for girls i.e., improved well-being and health outcomes. Such a finding may also present an important entry point for gender work that seeks to shift problematic masculine norms.

Open conversations to demystify adolescent romantic relationships

Young adolescent men need dating and SRH support to successfully navigate romantic relationships. Currently, the only formal avenue where adolescents learn about topics related to romantic relationships is through CSE. Although promising, teachers are uncomfortable delivering the CSE content, resulting in gaps in the information that adolescents receive (Shibuya et al., 2023). Parents may be better placed to complement CSE and offer support because they know their children's developmental capacity and the kind of information, sexual norms, and values they would like their children to possess during their different developmental milestones (Ashcraft & Murray, 2017; Evans et al., 2020). However, as shown in this study and other previous studies, there continues to be concerning silence between adolescents and their parents about sex, dating, and related topics (Chiweshe & Chiweshe, 2017; Evans et al., 2020). SRH programme developers and interventionists may need to capacitate parents to talk to their children about dating and related topics.

Researchers, programme developers, and interventionists need to recognise the romantic relationship as a context that shapes young adolescent men's sexual behaviour, and a context in which adolescents may potentially assess their sexual risk or lack thereof, which may subsequently inform their decision-making. For most young adolescent men in the study, sex happened in the context of a romantic relationship. Sexual behaviour may thus be shaped by negotiations that happen in these relationships. Researchers need to study these relationships, what they look like, what happens in them and how long they last, what adolescents look for in these relationships, and how what they look for shapes sexual decision-making. The romantic relationship may also be an important context in which intimate ideas linked to manhood are played out, refined, and refuted. It is a key social context that sets the stage for how adolescents express their gender identities, and sexual desires and negotiate their sexual needs.

The romantic relationship and an understanding of the complexity and dynamics of this context may thus be important in informing efforts to improve the SRH of young adolescent men and by extension, that of girls. Ignoring the romantic relationship as a context that shapes adolescents' sexual behaviours and as a space wherein sexual norms may be constructed and co-constructed between romantic partners makes it seem like sexual activity is something that happens randomly among adolescents. Also, overlooking the romantic relationship may miss certain aspects of the relationship that shape sexual behaviour and gender norms and how in turn these are challenged or reinforced between partners.

Find creative and culturally relevant ways to engage and energise black young adolescent men

Young adolescent men are aware of some of the negative SRH outcomes, yet for some reason, this information and knowledge about HIV and STIs do not result in practising safer sex for them (Mthembu et al., 2019; Tenkorang & Maticka-Tyndale, 2014). Perhaps young adolescent men have become unreceptive to current HIV and STI messaging because such does not capture their ideas about what it means to be a black young adolescent man. For example, in the Xhosa culture, *ulwaluko* plays a great deal in shaping males' ideas about manhood and a man's sexual conduct (Mfecane, 2018, 2020), yet SRH programmes and interventions may be overlooking this important cultural aspect and how it may shape sexual behaviour and subsequent SRH outcomes. The manner in which programmes and interventions work is not in line with African-centred ideas about what it means to be a young adolescent man and the relevance of sex in shaping young adolescent men's masculine identities (Mfecane, 2018). As such, programming and interventions are missing important aspects of black young adolescent men's sexual behaviour, their general personhood, and the operation of culture in shaping these.

Also, SRH programmes and interventions should allow young adolescent men to lead conversations and discuss what they deem significant in their sexual lives as opposed to facilitators or teachers driving the delivery of such information. As adolescents try to forge their sexual

identities, they may not consider themselves to be at risk, or reducing sexual risk may not be a priority for them in this phase. Perhaps, at this time, sexual exploration takes priority over risk. Therefore, when information seems to want to discourage sexual exploration, such an approach may result in young adolescent men blocking out and blanking out as it does not excite them. Such an approach may also make young adolescent men feel policed and regulated. Engagements with young adolescent men should be driven by what they deem a priority and perhaps doing so might energise young adolescent men, while offering a space to challenge risky sexual behaviours.

Bring on board the missing 50%: Involve young adolescent men in SRH programming

When SRH programmes and interventions overlook young adolescent men, they miss an important half of the population that has an influence on sexual decision-making (Varga, 2002). Young adolescent men may be key players in the improvement of adolescent SRH outcomes. While efforts directed towards improving girls' SRH outcomes are welcomed, girls may be reluctant to put into practice what they learn through these SRH programmes and interventions because such learnings may not be in line with their desires and motivations in their relationships. Also, girls and young adolescent men construct and co-construct ideas and dating and sex (Bhana, 2017b), focusing on just girls may have a limited impact on the success of SRH programmes and interventions, or progress may be slow unless partners of adolescent girls are part of these programmes.

Gender transformative programmes should target communities and not individuals

Targeting individual young adolescent men to shift problematic masculine norms in a given society may not yield positive results. To shift these norms, there may be a need for gender-transformative interventions to target communities. In many African contexts, individualism is discouraged, for example, the Xhosa society is communitarian by nature Mfecane (2020), and being *indoda*, (circumcised man) is a social display, which is conferred and performed socially. According to Mfecane (2020), "manhood status is conferred by the community collectively rather than being

dependent only on the desires and actions of the individual” (p. 4). Targeting individuals to shift gender norms may not be successful in communities where people's sense of being is tied to others in the community. Challenging individuals' behaviour may result in feelings of isolation and such feelings may make it easy for them to disregard attempts at shifting gender norms in favour of belonging (Bhana & Mayeza, 2019). As such, it may not make sense to try and shift individuals' behaviour and expect such attempts to be successful. When norms are shifted at the community level, this may allow individuals to embrace such shifts without fearing that doing so removes them from their interconnectedness with their communities and may alienate them.

Study limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, much of the data collection was collected by a female researcher. young adolescent men might have responded in certain ways to come across as appealing to the female researcher. I do not know if young adolescent men would have responded differently to a male researcher. While this might be a limitation, research shows that using a male researcher may result in young adolescent men exaggerating certain behaviours, norms, and values in the hope that doing so will make them seem like “real men” (Bell et al., 2015), resulting in inaccurate data. Also, considering that some of the study findings corroborate findings from other studies that were conducted by male researchers (Hamlall, 2018; Langa, 2020), this challenges assertions that findings might have been shaped by the gender of the researcher.

Second, individual interviews were conducted telephonically (WhatsApp calls and traditional phone calls). During interviews, there were several disconnections due to poor networks. This might have disrupted the flow of the interviews and might have some implications for the depth of information shared by young adolescent men. Also, because interviews were conducted telephonically, some young adolescent men could not take part in the study because they did not own cell phones and using someone else's phone may have been a potential breach of privacy and confidentiality. Further, nonverbal communication is lost over the phone. Nonetheless, telephonic

interviews may be used to collect sensitive information and the use of telephonic interviews may have allowed young adolescent men to relax and be free to share sensitive information (Novick, 2008). In addition, the use of telephonic interviews gives power to participants as they can conduct the interview in their own comfort space and may be considered participant-centred research (Trier-Bieniek, 2012). Telephonic interviews may give power to participants because they may be more comfortable speaking about sensitive subjects over the phone rather than in person. Further, the use of telephonic interviews might have allowed the researcher to build rapport (multiple interactions with boys before the actual interview) with young adolescent men and get them thinking about their romantic relationship experiences before conducting in-person FGDs and the handwritten diaries.

Third, the study was cross-sectional and did not allow for the exploration of young adolescent men's romantic relationships over time. Although the diary entry lasted for a month, no changes in young adolescent men's romantic relationships were observed. Learning and interactions with romantic partners may be a continuous process, wherein meanings and the nature of relationships might change over time. As such, it remains uncertain how young adolescent men's romantic relationships might have evolved and progressed to shape their sexual behaviour, their SRH, HIV, and IPV attitudes, and practices.

Fourth, the number of young adolescent men who took part in the study is small and this may have implications for generalisability. Another factor that may have implications for generalisability is the fact that although Gugulethu is a diverse multi-cultural setting, only Xhosa young adolescent men took part in the study. As such, the data presented does not capture the diversity of all young adolescent men in Gugulethu and thus cannot be generalizable to young adolescent men from other ethnic/cultural groups. Similarly, the study was done in one Township in Cape Town, as such, the findings may not be generalised to other contexts. Even so, the study findings are important in

understanding young adolescent men's experiences of romantic relationships and how these relationships shape SRH, HIV and IPV attitudes and practices.

Conclusion

Romantic relationships are common in adolescence and may be a key context in which sexual norms, including sexual decision-making and masculine norms, unfold. This study explored how heterosexual romantic relationships shape SRH, HIV, and IPV-related attitudes and practices of young adolescent men in Gugulethu, Cape Town. The findings of this study complicate the manner in which young adolescent men are constructed in public health research, highlighting young adolescent men's complexities, and uncertainties and how they grappled with challenging and in some instances conforming to masculine norms in their romantic relationships. The study also contributes to current scholarship by increasing knowledge and understanding of the significance of the romantic relationship in shaping SRH, including HIV and IPV outcomes. The romantic relationship is important because it is a context in which, notwithstanding the influence of culture and the broader context, young adolescent men and their partners may choose to adhere to cultural and contextual norms, or they may choose to challenge these. In doing so, partners in romantic relationships co-construct relationship norms that work for them. As a response to SRH, including HIV and IPV outcomes taking into consideration the romantic relationship context and its dynamics can inform efforts to improve the SRH of young adolescent men.

The exploration of power and masculine norms in this study has provided insights into masculine norms that drive young adolescent men's behaviour, highlighting that the romantic relationship is an important context that may inform young adolescent men's performance of power and how such power is negotiated with romantic partners. As highlighted in this study, masculinities are not fixed, the manner in which young adolescent men perform masculinities at home or among friends may be different from how they do so with their romantic partners. This means efforts to fully understand gender norms and young adolescent men's performance of their masculinities

may necessitate giving particular attention to the romantic relationship context. Also evident from the study findings was that persistent issues around harmful masculine norms remain, increasing young adolescent men's risk of poor sexual health outcomes and highlighting the need to include them in SRH work. The inclusion of young adolescent men in SRH work should consider contextual and cultural factors and how these factors fuse, to create particular kinds of young adolescent men.

A focus on young adolescent men's romantic relationships, emotional investment, and affective experiences offers a complex picture of young adolescent men as affective beings who aspire to and are motivated by more than just proving their masculinities. This study has highlighted that in heterosexual romantic relationships, young adolescent men occupy multiple positions, they are not inherently emotionally inept, invulnerable, and uncaring, instead, there are other versions of masculinities characterised by care, warmth, and love. By focusing on love, the study highlights the many ways in which young adolescent men challenge heteronormative stereotypes. It adds to the emerging literature that has begun to show insights into the intersection between love and masculinities, revealing that there is more to young adolescent men beyond the pathologisation and simple construction of this group as problematic.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Study recruitment pamphlet



Participants needed for a study investigating young adolescent men's experiences of romantic relationships

Who is eligible to take part in the study?

- 1. Young adolescent men*
- 2. Aged 14 – 19 years old*
- 3. Residing in Gugulethu township*
- 4. Have been in a romantic relationship with a female person*

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED, CONTACT:

WhatsApp number: 0728950438



School of Public Health
Departement Openbare Gesondheid
Isikolo Sempilo Yoluntu

Appendix B: Semi-structured individual interview guide

To be translated

Time required: 45 minutes – 90 minutes

Introduction

- Explain the aim of the research project, the information included in the informed consent form, and the kind of questions to be discussed. Remind the participant about their right to withdraw and how anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured. Remind them that they do not have to answer a question if they do not feel comfortable doing so – you will simply go on to the next question if they wish.
- Ask the participant to choose a pseudonym by which they can be referred to in the study documents (make this fun for the participant – if they get stuck, ask them the names of their favourite singer or actor, or the name of their favourite colour).
- Answer any questions the participant might have.

Being in a relationship

1. Are you currently in a relationship?
 - How long have you been in the current relationship?
 - How did the relationship start? How did you approach your partner, what words were used to express your feeling?
2. What qualities are you looking for in a romantic partner? The way they look, behave etc.
 - What informs your choice?
 - What do you expect from your romantic partner in terms of behaviour?
 - Do you feel like your expectations are met, do you think you meet your partner's expectations? why and why not?
 - What are your partner's expectations, how do you know? Was this discussed?

3. How are decisions made in the relationship, why?
4. Where do you get information and support about romantic relationships?
5. According to your own personal experience when and why do relationships end?

Love and sex

1. What is love and where did you learn about it?
2. Do you love your partner, does your partner loves you, how do you know?
3. Do you have to love you partner to be in a romantic relationship?

- Probe: How do you express your love to your partner?

4. Where did you learn about sex?

Probe: Who taught you how to have sex?

5. Is love necessary in order for sex to happen?

- Probe: Can you have sex with someone you do not love?
- Can you be with love and in a relationship with someone and not have sex?

6. What does sex mean to you?

- How often do you have sex and who initiates sex and why?
- Do you enjoy having sex, does your partner enjoy having sex, how do you know?

7. Do you think a woman has a right to refuse sex?

- How do you feel when your romantic partner is not interested in sex or does not feel like having sex?

HIV, STIs and Pregnancy prevention

1. Would you say that you are practicing safe sex?

- What method(s) are you currently using to protect yourself from STIs, HIV and pregnancy?
- Whose responsibility is it to make sure that the sex is safe?

2. Where do you get information and support about sex?
3. Are you having sex with more than one person? Why and why not?
 - Do you think your partner(s) is having sex with other people besides you? Why and why not?
4. Have you and your partner discussed HIV and other STIs in your relationships?
 - Who started this conversation and how did this discussion go?
5. How often are HIV and other STI tests done?
 - Is this done individually or as partners?
 - Have you ever contracted an STI?
 - How do you manage the risk of contracting STIs?
6. How do you protect against pregnancy?
 - Whose responsibility is it to make sure that pregnancy doesn't happen?
7. Do you have something you would like to add, or ask me, about this research?

A reflection

1. What was it like to talk to me about these issues?
2. Was any of it difficult or uncomfortable?
3. Was any of it easy or enjoyable? Why / why not?
4. What was it like doing research on WhatsApp?

Thank the participant for their time and the information they shared with you!

Appendix C: Focus Group Discussions Guide

To be translated

Time required: 60 minutes – 90 minutes

Introduction

- Explain the aim of the research, the informed consent form, and the questions to be discussed.
- At the beginning, ask participants to feel free to contribute to the discussion; to speak clearly, one at a time.
- Inform participants to be sensitive to the perspectives of others and allow others to speak. Also, ask participants to treat what others say confidentially and to note that participants are not required to divulge personal information about themselves or their relationships. They are being asked to give their views on romantic relationships.
- Ask participants to choose a pseudonym by which they can be referred to in the study documents (make this fun for the participant – if they get stuck, ask them the names of their favourite singer or actor, or the name of their favourite colour).
- Answer any questions the participants might have.

Love and sex

1. What is love?
 - How and when does it start?
 - How do you know when you love someone?
2. Love and gender
 - Do young adolescent men and girls show love in the same way, why and why not?
 - What do young adolescent men expect when they are in love, why?
 - What do girls expect when they are in love, why?

3. Love and sex

- What is the meaning of sex?
- Can you be in love with someone and not have sex? Why and why not?
- Who determines when sex happens and why?
- Is it ok to sleep with many people when you are in a relationship, why and why not?
- Do young adolescent men share their sexual encounters with their peers? Why and why not?

NB: Probe for age, decision-making, space/context, timing of sex

Power and control in a romantic relationship

1. What is the role of a man in a romantic relationship?

- How does a man behave in a romantic relationship?
- What informs such roles and behaviours?
- Do young adolescent men and girls behave differently in a romantic relationship? Why and why not?

2. Power and sex

- Who is usually in control in romantic relationships and how does this power look like?
- When people are in a romantic relationship, do they have to both agree to sex before they can have sex? why and why not?

- Who makes decisions about when, where and how to have sex in a romantic relationship?

NB: probe for instances when men and women do not behave or assume their socially expected roles in romantic relationships. What are the benefits? What are the consequences?

HIV, STIs and Pregnancy prevention

1. What is safe sex?
 - Whose responsibility is it to make sure that the sex is safe?
 - Where do you get information and support about sex?
2. Is having sex with more than one person acceptable? Why and why not?
3. Do partners in a romantic relationship discuss about HIV and other STIs?
 - Who should start such conversations?
4. How often should an HIV and other STI tests done?
 - Is this done individually or as partners?
 - How do you manage the risk of contracting STIs?
5. How do you protect against pregnancy?
 - Whose responsibility is it to make sure that pregnancy doesn't happen?

Perceptions and experiences of IPV in a romantic relationship

1. Violence against a romantic partner
 - What behaviours can be classified as violent?
 - Who commits violence in a romantic relationship?
 - Can young adolescent men be victims of violence in a romantic relationship?

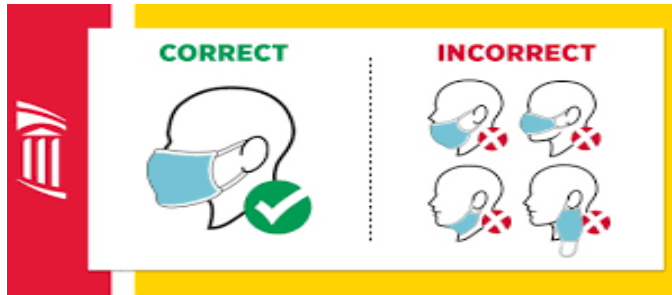
- When does violence happen in romantic relationships?
- Do relationships end because of violence? Why and why not?
- Are there times when it is ok to use violence in a relationship? Explain

NB: Probe for attitudes and beliefs that influence violence. Who are the perpetrators of violence and situations that are likely to result in violence?

Reflection: Participants will be asked to write a brief reflection on how they experienced the FGDs, how it was like talking about such matters in a group setting. Participants will be asked to reflect on the use of WhatsApp as a platform for FGDs.

Covid-19 protocols

Keep yourself and other safe at all times!



Always wear a mask when in public.

Wash your hands with soap



Always maintain social distancing.



NO SYMPTOMS? You may still be infected and infectious. Let's help each other to take care in the time of COVID-19

Appendix E: Diary Entry Guide

To be translated

Time required: 10 Days

First diary entry:

1. Are you currently in a relationship, if **yes**, how long have you been on the relationship?
If **no**, tell us about your previous relationship, how long did your previous relationship last?

2. How did the relationship start?

What do you want in a romantic relationship? What does the relationship offer you?

3. Do you love your partner, why do you say that?

What is love, how do you show your partner that you love them?

How does your partner show you that they love you?

When is love questionable?

NB: Second diary entries will be following up/probing on participant's first diary entries.

Third diary entry:

1. Is there a difference in the way boys and girls behave in a romantic relationship?
What is the role of a young adolescent men and girl and what informs such roles?

2. What does it mean for you to be a man in a relationship?

What are the core features that a man must demonstrate in a relationship?

Does being a man mean that one has power and control?

What happens when a man does not demonstrate power and control?

What happens when a woman shows power and control?

What happens when power is questioned?

3. Who makes decisions in the relationship?

Is permission needed for one to do certain things?

NB: Fourth diary entries will be following up/probing on participant's fourth diary entries.

Fifth diary entry

1. Are you currently sexually active?

How do you protect yourself and your partner from HIV and pregnancy?

2. Is sex important in a relationship? Why?

What does sex mean to you?

3. How often do you have sex?

Where does the sex happen?

Who initiates sex?

4. Have you ever tried to change your partner's mind to have sex with you, when they had initially said they don't want to have sex?

Tell us more about this:

- Why did you feel you needed to convince your partner to have sex?
- What were her reasons for not wanting to have sex?

5. Is there a way of knowing that your partner wants to have sex?

Give an example.

NB: Sixth diary entries will be following up/probing on participant's seventh diary entries.

Seventh diary entry

1. Have you ever hit/pushed, forced your partner into sex?

If **no**, tell us how you have managed to keep violence out of your relationship?

If **yes**, write about a time when you were violent towards a romantic partner?

- What had led to the abuse?
- How did you feel about the abuse?

2. Looking back, do you think it was necessary for the abuse to happen?

If **yes**, why?

If **no**, how do you think you would have prevented the abuse?

3. If you have ever abused your partner, did the relationship end or continue?

Why and why not?

NB: Eighth diary entries will be following up/probing on participant's tenth diary entries.

Nineth diary entry

1. Have you ever been hit/pushed, forced into having sex by your partner?

If **no**, tell us how you have managed to keep violence out of your relationship?

If **yes**, write about a time when your romantic partner perpetrated IPV you?

- What had led to the abuse?
- How did you feel about the abuse?

2. Looking back, do you think it was necessary for the abuse to happen?

If **yes**, why?

If **no**, how do you think your partner would have prevented the abuse?

3. If you have experienced abuse from your romantic partner, did the relationship end or continue?

Why and why not?

4. Who is more likely to be violent in relationships between men/boys and women/girls?

What do you think are the experiences and ideas that shape and steer adolescent boys towards violent behaviour?

5. Are the times when it is ok to use violence in a relationship?

Talk about when and how it is ok to use violence?

NB: Tenth diary entries will be following up/probing on participant's thirteenth diary entries.

A reflection: Participants will be asked about their experiences with - audio or written diaries, including some of the challenges they encountered and how the use of WhatsApp shaped their experiences of the research process.

Appendix F: Ethics clearance letter



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
Faculty of Health Sciences
Human Research Ethics Committee



Room GS0- Old Main Building
Groote Schuur Hospital
Observatory 7925
Telephone [021] 406 6492
Email: hrec-submissions@uct.ac.za
Website: www.health.uct.ac.za/fhs/research/humanethics/forms

06 May 2021

HREC REF:146/2021

A/Prof C Colvin

Division of Social & Behavioural Sciences
Falmouth Building-FHS
Email: cj.colvin@uct.ac.za
Student: tsidisotolla@gmail.com

Dear A/Prof Colvin

PROJECT TITLE: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS ON ADOLESCENT BOYS' SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH-DOCTORAL CANDIDATE-MISS TSIDISO TOLLA

Thank you for your response letter, addressing the issues raised by the Faculty of Health Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

It is a pleasure to inform you that the HREC has **formally approved** the above-mentioned study.

This approval is subject to strict adherence to the HREC recommendations regarding research involving human participants during COVID -19, dated 17 March 2020 & 06 July 2020.

Approval is granted for one year until the 30 May 2022.

Please submit a progress form, using the standardised Annual Report Form if the study continues beyond the approval period. Please submit a Standard Closure form if the study is completed within the approval period.

(Forms can be found on our website: www.health.uct.ac.za/fhs/research/humanethics/forms)

The HREC acknowledge that the student: - Miss Tsidiso Toi/a will also be involved in this study.

Please quote the HREC REF 146/2021 in all your correspondence.

Please note that the ongoing ethical conduct of the study remains the responsibility of the principal investigator.

Please note that for all studies approved by the HREC, the principal investigator **must** obtain appropriate institutional approval, where necessary, before the research may occur.

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Yours sincerely

Signed by candidate

PROFESSOR M.BLOCKMAN
CHAIRPERSON, FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Federal Wide Assurance Number: FWA00001637.
Institutional Review Board (IRB) number: IRB00001938
NHREC-registration number: REC-210208-007

This serves to confirm that the University of Cape Town Human Research Ethics Committee complies to the Ethics Standards for Clinical Research with a new drug in patients, based on the Medical Research Council (MRC-SA), Food and Drug Administration (FDA-USA), International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use: Good Clinical Practice (ICH GCP), South African Good Clinical Practice Guidelines (DoH 2006), based on the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry Guidelines (ABPI), and Declaration of Helsinki (2013) guidelines. The Human Research Ethics Committee granting this approval is in compliance with the ICH Harmonised Tripartite Guidelines E6: Note for Guidance on Good Clinical Practice (CPMP/ICH/135/95) and FDA Code Federal Regulation Part 50, 56 and 312.

1. The study is no more than minimal risk

This was a low-risk study. The risks of the study, which were not greater than those young adolescent men would have ordinarily encountered or expected in daily life are identified below

- 1.1. Face-to-face research might have elevated the risk for COVID-19 infection, so measures to mitigate the risk were put in place (Appendix D).
- 1.2. To mitigate discomfort, participants were informed that they had the option to pause or stop participating in the study if they experienced any discomfort.
- 1.3. Participants were informed of the potential loss to confidentiality and were advised that they did not need to disclose personal matters in the group.
- 1.4. Seeking parental consent might have placed adolescents in harm's way and infringed on adolescents' right to privacy. For example, parents' knowledge about adolescents' participation in a study about romantic relationships might have caused them to want to inquire from their children about what was discussed in the study. This may have caused discomfort and sometimes tension if participants were not willing to discuss their romantic relationship experiences with their parents/guardians.

2. The nature of the research is acceptable to the Committee, parents or legal guardians or the community at large. The Committee's opinion must be based on information from the community concerned and lay Committee members

Romantic relationships are common during adolescence. They play an essential role in setting the foundation for future adult romantic relationships and serve as a training ground for the development and improvement of interpersonal negotiation and communication skills. Yet a better understanding of young adolescent men's experiences of these romantic relationships is lacking. There is largely silence around adolescent romantic relationships, but society has not rejected the fact that adolescents engage in romantic relationships. This means that there is a silent acceptance

of dating in adolescence. Silence acceptance means that adolescents are not given the proper support to navigate this phase by their parents and larger community. This is concerning especially considering the high burden of HIV, poor SRH outcomes and the high prevalence of IPV.

3. Justification for why adolescents are needed in the study

Romantic relationships have a significant effect on adolescents' health and wellbeing, they provide a context within which HIV, SRH and IPV related issues are likely to be experienced. Improving the sexual health and wellbeing of adolescent boys, requires understanding their experiences of romantic relationships, and how these shape their attitudes and practices of SRH, HIV and IPV. Because adolescents are unique beings, knowledge on the topic under investigation gained through adult participants may not be applicable to this population and may lead to ineffective interventions. The findings of the study might help place policy makers, interventionists and program developers develop timely and appropriate services that respond to the specific health and wellbeing needs of young adolescent men.

4. Justification for why adolescents should consent unassisted.

If boys know that their parents are aware that they are participating in a study about romantic relationships, they may be put off from participating in the study. "In certain research situations such as sensitive surveys about high risk behaviours, adolescents may not want their parent or legal guardian to know they are taking part in a study" (Human Research Ethics Committee, 2013, p. 6). Similarly, Reed and Huppert contend that seeking parental consent when researching sexuality related matter may result in fewer adolescents participating in a study as opposed to when parental consent is waived (Reed & Huppert, 2008). Young adolescent men who do take part in the study might have an expectation of privacy regarding what they share. If they feel that this privacy might be threatened, they might feel restricted in terms of the information they share and failure to share such information will lead to poor data and most possibly inaccurate findings. It is important that young adolescent men participate in this study without feeling constrained or feeling like their parents might find out about their private relationships. While dating during adolescence

is regarded as reasonable by societies, in South Africa and Africa as a whole, there is a lack of communication about sexuality, dating and other sex related topics between adults and children. As such, adolescents do not share their sexuality and other related matters with their parents. In fact, a large number of adolescents prefer to maintain their privacy (including their engagement in sexual intercourse) from their parents (Anderson & Branstetter, 2012; Reed & Huppert, 2008).

There are several SRH related instances where adolescents do not need parental consent in South Africa. The South African Children's Act allows children younger than 18 years to access SRH services and other health services without the consent of their parents. The South African Children's Act 38 of 2005 stipulates that children aged 12 years and older do not need parental consent to access SRH services like condoms and family planning services. The act also states that adolescents 12 years and older do not require parental consent for HIV testing or to disclose their HIV status. Further, the Termination of Pregnancy Act 92 of 1996 states that children 12 years and older do not require parental consent to terminate pregnancy. There is a clear link between HIV, SRH and romantic relationships, the study therefore has important implications for adolescent HIV and SRH. Such implications can inform already existing SRH and HIV services.

Also, several acts support the rights of children to take part in research that will benefit them. For example, The Children's Act of South Africa specifies that children have the right to take part in matters that affect them, in an appropriate way. Also, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that children who can form their own views have the right to freely express their views on matters that affect them. Therefore, it may be appropriate to invite 14-17-year-old adolescents to participate in this study without parental consent.

Appendix H: Contact details for counselling services

- 1. Lifeline South Africa** – operated 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Offers counselling services around physical, emotional, sexual and financial violence.

Contact details for violence related counselling: 0800 150 150

Contact details for HIV and AIDS related counselling: 0800 012 322

- 2. Southern African Sexual Health Association (SASHA)** – aims to promote sexual health for all.

Contact details: 082 553 8201/086 132 2322




- 3. South African depression and anxiety group (SADAG)** – Mental health support and advocacy group. Counsellors are available Monday to Sunday between 08:00 am and 20:00 pm.



Contact details for counselling: 011 234 4837

24-hour helpline: 0800 456 789

Suicidal crisis line: 0800 567 567

Appendix I: Protocol for managing distress in the context of a research FGD/interview.

IDENTIFYING DISTRESS	ACTIONS/STEPS TO BE TAKEN
<p>Distress</p> 	<p>A participant indicates they are experiencing a high level of stress or emotional distress</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>exhibit behaviours suggestive that the discussion/interview is too stressful such as uncontrolled crying, shaking etc</p>
<p>Stage 1 response</p> 	<p>Stop the discussion/interview. The researcher will offer immediate support.</p> <p>Assess mental status by asking the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Tell me what thoughts you are having? ➤ Tell me what you are feeling right now? ➤ Do you feel you are able to go on about your day? ➤ Do you feel safe?
<p>Review</p> 	<p>If participant feels able to carry on; resume interview/discussion</p> <p style="text-align: center;">BUT</p> <p>If participant is unable to carry on Go to stage 2</p>

<p>Stage 2 response</p> 	<p>Remove participant from discussion and accompany to quiet area or discontinue interview</p> <p>Encourage the participant to contact the counselling services provided</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>Researcher gets participant consent to contact the counselling services</p>
<p>Follow-up</p> 	<p>Follow participant up with courtesy call (if participant consents)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>Encourage the participant to call either if he/she experiences increased distress in the hours/days following the focus group</p>

Appendix J: Protocol for reporting sexual abuse or neglect

Section 54 of the Sexual Offences Act provides for the mandatory reporting of sexual offences, any person who has knowledge that a sexual offence has been committed against a child must report such knowledge immediately to the police official. Section 110(2) of the Children’s Act states that if any person suspects that a child is being abused or needs care and protection, they must report to a social worker, a designated child protection unit or organisation or to the police. The following information will be compiled for reporting of any sexual abuse or child neglect:

Name of reporter:

.....

Date of report:

.....

Name of child who disclosed sexual abuse or maltreatment:

.....

Summary of what was disclosed:

.....
.....
.....

Person the report was made at the DSD or SAPS and the date that this report was made to them

.....
.....

Actions taken to submit or follow up report:

.....
.....

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY



Study Title: Exploring the influence of romantic relationships on young adolescent men's sexual and reproductive health attitudes and practices

1. WHO IS DOING THIS STUDY AND WHY?

You are being asked to participate in a research project by Tsidiso Tolla. Ms. Tolla is a PhD candidate in the School of Public Health and Family Medicine at the University of Cape Town. Her research focuses on young adolescent men's experiences of romantic relationships in Gugulethu and seeks to understand how young adolescent men in Gugulethu experience romantic relationships and the meanings they ascribe from these relationships. The study further seeks to understand how these relationships shape young adolescent men's attitudes and practices related to SRH, HIV and IPV.

If you agree to participate in this project, you will be asked to speak with the researcher, Ms. Tsidiso Tolla.

2. WHAT WILL YOU DO IN THIS STUDY?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to answer some questions and talk about your experiences of romantic relationships. The researcher will also ask you to share

some of the meanings that you derive from the romantic relationship and some questions will probe generally on SRH practices and how the relationship works and what that means to you.

If you feel uncomfortable talking about any of the questions, feel free not to participate or not to answer a question.

The interviews and FGDs will be in-depth. For diaries, you will be asked questions to answer in writing. Interviews and FGDs could last between 45 minutes to 90 minutes. You will complete a total of 10 diary entries. Please tell the researcher if you have any time limits or if you need to leave at any time. Nothing will happen if you do not wish to participate or if you decide to withdraw from the study before its conclusion.

I may ask you for permission to record some of these interviews and FGDs. You will have the choice to have the interview or FGDs recorded or not. If you do not want to have it recorded, the researcher will simply take notes about your conversation.

3. ARE THERE ANY RISKS IN THIS RESEARCH?

You may feel uncomfortable speaking about some aspects of your relationships, such as sexual intercourse, decisions related to sexual intercourse, and experiences of IPV, either as a victim or perpetrator. If at any time you do not want to answer a question, please tell the researcher and you will not be asked to answer. You are free to not answer any question or speak about any subject that you do not want to. If you feel upset or uncomfortable during or after the interview, please tell the researchers.

4. ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING FOR ME?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. There may be some longer-term, indirect benefits to you if the study is able to influence policy and other programs or interventions targeted at young adolescent men.

5. WILL I BE PAID TO PARTICIPATE?

All Participants who take part in the study will be offered R60.00 to compensate for their time.

6. WILL MY NAME BE SHARED WITH ANYONE?

The researchers will not share your name with anyone and when they write about the research, they will not use your name. All the information from this project will be kept by the principal investigator in a safe place. No one outside the research team will have access to your information. Extracts from your interviews may be published in research reports but any direct information that could identify who you are will be removed.

7. WHO ARE THE RESEARCHERS?

The Principal Investigator for the study is Associate Professor. Christopher J. Colvin from the School of Public Health and Family Medicine at the University of Cape Town. Ms. Tsidiso Tolla is working as a researcher and PhD candidate on this study. **If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact any of the following people:**

1. Ms. Tsidiso Tolla
Tel: 072 890-50438 (Anytime)
Email: tlltsi002@myuct.ac.za
2. Associate Professor. Christopher J. Colvin
E-mail: cj.colvin@uct.ac.za
3. Dr. Jennifer Githaiga

8. WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time and stop participating without any penalty. When you participate in this study, you are not giving up any legal claims, rights or remedies that you may have. **If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Cape Town on Tel: 021 406 6338.**

CONSENT

I understand that I am participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I can stop participating at any point should I not want to continue, and that this decision will not in any way affect me negatively. I understand that this is a research project whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally in the immediate or short term. I understand that my participation will remain confidential. The information about the study was described to me by

I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to *my* satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

.....

.....

Signature of participant

Date:

CONSENT FOR DIGITAL VOICE RECORDING THE INTERVIEWS/FGDs.

I hereby agree to the digital voice recording of my participation during the interviews.

.....

.....

Signature of participant

Date:

I understand that the information that I provide will be stored electronically and will be used for research purposes now or at a later stage.

.....

.....

Signature of participant

Date:

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to [*name of the participant*]. [He/she] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions.

.....

Signature of investigator

.....

Date: