Redefining What It Means to Be Free: The Social and Economic Context of Young-Adult Sexual Relationships in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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ABSTRACT


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The well-documented problem of gender-based violence in South Africa has emerged in a context in which human rights are championed, new economic opportunities are available to some, and structural inequalities persist. Scholars have argued that in modern times, high rates of gender-based violence are due to a ‘crisis in masculinity’. This study reframed the crisis in masculinity thesis by critically examining how South Africa’s current transformative moment has reinscribed ideas around gender, sexuality, race, rights, freedom, and equality into the post-apartheid era. The objective was to analyze how normative, material, and discursive dimensions of the South African context shape young adults’ lives and gender ideals for and experiences in sexual relationships.

The study innovates by applying an intersectional lens to explore the context of young-adult lives and sexual relationships in relation to race and class as well as gender. Data collection included 11 single-sex and 5 mixed-sex focus group discussions, and 21 interviews with a diverse – across the axes of race, class, and gender – group of young adults between 20 and 30 years old in Cape Town, South Africa. Focus group and interview data were analyzed in conjunction with field observation that took place during the two and half years that I lived in Cape Town.

The study strengthens research that moves beyond reductionist views of culture, rights, inequality, gender, and power. The findings suggest that discourses on human rights, neoliberalism, gendered sexual morality, post-racialism, and personal responsibility have purchase in South Africa’s post-apartheid context and contribute to a contested landscape of transformation. Sexual relationships are a terrain upon which the contested landscape of transformation plays out.
Tensions between popular discourses, human rights laws, cultural scripts for gender and sexuality, and structural inequalities allow young adults to deploy them flexibly in organizing their lives and relationships. Young adults use rights and gender as languages of social critique in a context where the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice are contested.

I argue that in pluralist “modern” South Africa, cultural scripts that operate within and between a variety of social institutions offer conflicting messages about gender and sexuality that are expressed in young adults’ gender ideals for relationships. Young adults selectively pull from competing scripts and popular discourses to construct masculine and feminine ideals for sexual relationships and decide how power should be negotiated in idealized intimate partnerships. This project also contributes to research on gender and modernity by illustrating how social location shapes who and what is considered desirable in the young-adult relationship market as well as the relationship pathways available for young women and men to pursue. In sum, young adults’ discursive use of rights and their relationship ideals reveal that they are acutely aware of the discrepancies among the values to which they are exposed in South Africa’s contested landscape of transformation. The gendered sexualities they construct suggest that sexual relationships are a key location to articulate these tensions and redefine equality and freedom in their own lives.
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DEDICATION

To my beloved mother, Geralund Patricia Morgan Smith, and late father, Joe Louis Cary Anderson, who instilled the value of education in me at an early age and made great investments and sacrifices that allowed me to pursue and successfully achieve my wildest dreams.

To Asya Yvonne Marie Morgan and Christopher James Morgan, who left us too soon, may you be at peace in the hereafter. Your spirits are with us always as we continue this life journey.

To my ancestors, who dreamed me into existence whenever they got a little space to climb into their heads and be free, they closed their eyes and saw… me.
CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

‘We emerge from a conflict ridden-society; a society in which colour, class and ethnicity were manipulated to sow hatred and division. We emerge from a society which was structured on violence and which raised the spectre of a nation in danger of never being able to live at peace with itself. Our agreements have put that era behind us. This shameful past dictates the crucial need for a Government of National Unity. We are firmly on the road to a non-racial and non-sexist democracy.’

Nelson Mandela’s address to the plenary session of the Multi-Party Negotiations Process, 1993

South Africa’s transformation to a democratic state and enshrining of human rights have created high expectations among citizens about the rights and opportunities afforded to people, and the impact of these changes in pursuit of an equal and just society. Gender is central to social change in South Africa, as an element of actual changes to social institutions that create new opportunities for women’s and girls’ social and economic advancement. Moreover, gender equality, as a cultural script, has become a language through which people talk about the broader social and economic reorganization that the country is experiencing in terms of gender as well as race, class, age, and sexuality. Legally-constituted rights’ protections and freedoms have prompted popular discourse on how gender and sexual relations should be constructed in public and private life. This study set out to explore this transformative moment in South Africa and understand how young adults as a strategic research population are living these changes professionally, socially, and intimately.

This chapter introduces the research context in which the study takes place, and emphasizes how the deep chasm between new legally-constituted rights and people’s opportunity to exercise these rights is one of the most pressing problems in the post-apartheid era. Next, I present a justification for the study grounded in identified gaps in previous theoretical and empirical research on gender and sexuality. This is followed by an overview of the study aims for this dissertation project and methodological procedures undertaken. The chapter concludes with an outline of how
the subsequent chapters are organized.

**Research Context**

**Transition to Democracy**

South Africa’s constitutional enactment of a comprehensive human rights-based framework is often cited as a model for modern nation states due to an unparalleled commitment to equal protection and non-discrimination\(^1\). In 1994, the African National Congress’ (ANC) campaign slogan leading up to the first democratic elections was ‘a better life for all’. The transition to a representative democracy ushered in new political and civil rights and abolished de jure racial segregation in education, employment, and housing for those socially- and economically-disenfranchised under colonial and apartheid rule\(^2\). Further, the Constitution included rights to education, food, health, land, water, housing, social security, and environmental rights, and the rights to equality and freedom from all forms of violence from either public or private sources. However, the state conditioned social and economic rights included in the Constitution on its ability to finance these guarantees. Also despite a plan for land restitution, the Constitution contained provisions to protect the property rights of White land owners, which Hendricks and Ntsebeza (2000) argue preserved colonial and apartheid land dispossession by constitutional sanction.

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\(^1\) The Equality Clause in the Constitution establishes that the state nor any person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.

\(^2\) Under apartheid rule in South Africa, the White-led state assigned people to one of four racial groups – African/Bantu, Coloured, Asian, or White. Formal state policy racially segregated people and forced them to live in separate neighborhoods and use separate public facilities. Social contact between racial groups was limited and controlled. People labeled as non-White (Black Africans, Coloureds, and Asians) had restricted access to White areas. Further, interracial sexual relationships were prohibited. An ideology of white supremacy guided state policy, the social and economic restrictions placed on non-White groups, and the quality of public services offered to different racial groups. At one end, Whites were able to access the highest quality of services and received greater freedoms than non-Whites, and at the other end, Blacks received the most inferior accommodations.
To enact social and economic rights, the state established the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), an ambitious social development policy to improve water, sanitation, health, education and housing in disenfranchised communities. Further, funds were allocated to extend social welfare benefits for children and the elderly. The implementation of RDP has created new opportunities for Black, Indian and Coloured South Africans resulting in moderate decreases in interracial inequalities in access to quality education, housing, and healthcare. Seekings and Nattrass (2015) state, “the poor have benefitted far more from redistribution [than capital growth-focused economic policies], including through social grants, subsidized health care, housing, and, to a more limited extent, public education and municipal service delivery.”

Only a few years after the transition to democracy, the state departed from the aspirational vision of equality for all by implementing a neoliberal macro-economic strategy known as the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) plan. The government promoted GEAR as a ‘pro-poor’ policy aimed to strengthen economic development, broaden employment, and redistribute income and socioeconomic opportunities for the disenfranchised. In practice, it focused on trade liberalization, labor market deregulation, and privatization of state-owned enterprises. Under this economic policy, unionized skilled workers with robust political power and an emerging Black middle-class have fared well, while the unskilled and undereducated working-class has experienced high unemployment or unstable temporary employment (Desai, 2003). Many South Africans are frustrated with the ANC’s economic development approach, which appears to compromise the core socialist principles that were central to the anti-apartheid liberation struggle. Seekings (2013) argues that together the social development RDP policy and the
neoliberal economic GEAR strategy have resulted in an “often incoherent mix of policies and interventions that both exacerbate and mitigate poverty.”

Social and Economic Indicators

Some of South Africa’s socioeconomic indicators over the past 20 years point to significant progress to redress the injustices the disenfranchised experienced under colonial and apartheid rule. GEAR has led to steady growth in the national economy until recently, as well as substantial improvements in access to quality education and employment, and income levels among non-Whites and women across racial groups. Moreover, these new opportunities have created more integrated social and professional spaces that allow for interaction among groups historically divided by race, class, and gender. Still, many features of the colonial and apartheid eras persist including interracial inequities in material deprivation, massive unemployment, income inequality, and economic mobility. There is also evidence of persistent gender disparities in the public and private employment sectors as well as rising intra-racial inequalities in access to quality education, employment, and housing. Consequently, democracy has failed to deliver many of the benefits the state promised, and class, gender, and race-based disenfranchisement continue to be reproduced in the post-apartheid era (Leibbrandt et al., 2009, Seekings and Nattrass, 2015). The deep chasm between legally-constituted rights and the ability of people to exercise these rights, evidenced by entrenched structural inequality, exemplifies contemporary South Africa.

Landscape of Gender and Sexuality

The gap between the vision of equality and the unfulfilled promises of transformation is also apparent in the structure of the gender order. The ANC established a commitment to advance women’s rights as part of the liberation struggle, and gender equality has featured prominently in its social development platforms since the first democratic elections (Beresford et al., 2010,
Mvimbi, 2009, Spitz and Chaskalson, 2000). Key initiatives include instituting a Commission on Gender Equality in 1996, which regularly monitors, investigates, and reports on gender issues in civil society, and the Office on the Status of Women, which is responsible for gender mainstreaming throughout the government. The Constitution specifically addresses the rights of women and girls to equality and nondiscrimination. Policies to advance gender equality have led to significant gains in women’s representation in political office, participation in the labor market, and girls’ educational attainment. In addition to other legal guarantees, the state established special courts to hear cases of gender-based violence, safeguards for the rights of survivors of abuse, and legal provisions for victims of violence (Beresford et al., 2010). Given these institutional changes and moderate increases in women’s and girls’ empowerment, South Africa was the top ranked country in the latest Africa Gender Equality Index (AfDB, 2016) and 15th among 144 countries in the 2015 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index (WEF, 2015). Moffett (2006) affirms that the ANC launched an “admirable programme of female representation, that amounts to one of the most radical affirmative action programmes in favour of women in the world.”

Despite efforts by the state to champion women’s rights through progressive institutional changes, South Africa remains a deeply inequitable society in terms of gender norms and the material conditions under which women and girls live. Scholars have noted that the feminization of poverty (caused by labor migration and changes in gender relations under apartheid) has been exacerbated by the post-apartheid state’s neoliberal economic policies (Benjamin, 2007, Olufemi, 2000, Shisana et al., 2010). According to recent labor statistics, men are over twice as likely to be

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3 The Africa Gender Equality Index measures differences between women and men across three dimensions: economic opportunities, human development, and law and institutions.
4 The Global Gender Gap Index examines the magnitude of gender disparity in a country in four categories: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment. The top ranked countries are considered to be more gender-equitable in these four areas.
employed as managers than women, while women are over 25 times as likely to serve as domestic workers. Women are also twice as likely as men to be underemployed and the unemployment rate is higher for women than men (SSA, 2016). An abundance of research has documented the pervasiveness of social norms in South Africa that reinforce restrictive gender roles for women and men, and men’s dominance in family and intimate relationships (Campbell, 1992, Harrison et al., 2006, Hoffman et al., 2006, Jewkes and Abrahams, 2002, Strebel et al., 2006). In their 2011 Concluding Observations on South Africa’s country report, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) expressed concerns about the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and gender norms that perpetuate women’s subordination. The Committee also noted that media portrayals of prescribed gender roles and responsibilities further undermined gender equality (CEDAW, 2011). In South Africa, civil society advocates argue that despite a commitment to women’s rights on paper, the attitudes and practices of elected officials often make the state complicit in fostering gender-inequitable norms. In sum, these indicators suggest that in South Africa firmly entrenched class, gender, and race-based inequalities persists despite progress towards ‘a better life for all’ (Leibbrandt et al., 2009, Seekings and Nattrass, 2008, Seekings and Nattrass, 2015).

Research Justification

The well-documented problem of gender-based violence in South Africa has emerged in a context in which human rights are championed, new economic opportunities are available to some, and structural inequalities across the axes of race, class, and gender persist. The last 20 years have seen a proliferation of research on how material deprivation, experienced by women and men, interacts with rigid masculine and feminine norms to give rise to men’s violence against women and girls. Scholars, researchers, and activists have argued that the high rate of gender-based violence in
South Africa, particularly intimate partner violence, is due to a ‘crisis in masculinity’ (Andrews, 1998, Jewkes et al., 2006, MacPhail and Campbell, 2001, Moffett, 2006, Varga, 1997, Wells and Polders, 2006, Xaba, 2001, Jewkes et al., 2009). Many attribute high rates of intimate partner violence to men’s backlash in response to women’s legal-constituted rights that men perceive as a threat to their dominance in intimate relationships. This study renews the crisis in masculinity thesis and asks, how are social, cultural, economic and political factors shaping young women’s and men’s lives and sexual relationships in post-apartheid South Africa?

A common theme in empirical research on gender and sexuality in South Africa is overly dualistic representations of gender and culture. African masculinities are often perceived as problematic and pathological, while a singular African femininity is depicted as victimized and vulnerable. This study set out to trouble a dualistic approach in research on young adults’ gendered sexualities and the contextual factors that organize their lives and sexual relationships. I interrogate how tensions among a variety of structural and cultural factors are expressed in young adults’ masculine and feminine ideals and in their perspectives on how power should be negotiated in relationships. I also describe the processes through which institutionally-organized disadvantage and privilege shape young adults’ ability to align their gender ideals and life aspirations with the relationship pathways available for them to pursue.

Research Focus
This study critically examines how South Africa’s current transformative moment has reinscribed ideas around gender, sexuality, race, rights, freedom, and equality into the social and economic context. The objective was to analyze how dimensions of South Africa’s post-apartheid context – human rights laws and discourse, other popular discourses, cultural scripts for gender and sexuality, and structural inequalities – shape young adults’ lives and gender ideals for and experiences in
sexual relationships. The study innovates by exploring the context of young-adult lives and sexual relationships in relation to race and class as well as gender. I apply an intersectional lens to investigate young men’s and women’s experiences of gender-, class-, and race-based privilege and disadvantage and how these factors influence their discursive use and experience of rights. Further, the study accounts for young adults’ multi-situated identities, and considers how intersectional social location organizes their life and relationship ideals and experiences. Much of the existing scholarship on young adults’ gendered sexualities is insufficiently intersectional.

At the broadest level, the study describes and analyzes young-adult lives and sexual relationships in Cape Town, South Africa and the material, normative, and discursive dimensions of the context in which they occur. More specifically, the study aims are to:

- describe young women’s and men’s perspectives on social, economic, political, and cultural transformation in post-apartheid South Africa,
- explore their perspectives on young-adult lives and sexual relationships,
- examine how they discuss their experiences in navigating adult lives and relationships, and
- investigate young adults’ perceptions of the contextual factors that influence their lives and relationships.

**Methodology**

Following is a brief overview of the research methods. In Chapter Three, I provide a detailed explanation of the methodological approach and data collection and analysis strategies. A study of young adults’ lives and sexual relationships requires a research methodology that is flexible enough to capture normative, material, and discursive dimensions of South Africa’s post-apartheid context, and young women’s and men’s lived experience. Consequently, I use three complementary methods of data collection. The first stage of data collection included 11 single-
sex and 5 mixed-sex focus group discussions with a diverse – across the axes of race, class, and gender – group of young adults between 20 and 30 years old in Cape Town, South Africa. The age range was selected to include young women and men who are actively engaged in pursuing pathways to adult lives and relationships. Focus group discussion participants were selected through purposive sampling. Fifty-one young women and men participated in single-sex focus groups stratified by gender, race, and level of educational attainment; a table of the final sample for focus group discussions is presented on page 47. A subsample of 25 participants from single-sex groups participated in five mixed-sex focus groups stratified by race and level of educational attainment. Focus groups captured young adults’ views on South Africa’s social and economic context, their gender ideals, and how they believe gendered power should be negotiated in sexual relationships.

During the second stage of data collection, I conducted 21 interviews with young women and men that built on a broad range of opinions and perspectives expressed in focus group discussions. These interviews explored in greater depth the normative and material conditions under which young adults navigate transitions to adult lives and relationships in post-apartheid South Africa. Young adults who participated in in-depth interviews were selected through theoretical sampling. A table of the final sample for interviews is presented on page 54. Field observation was the third method of data collection. Focus group and interview data were analyzed in conjunction with numerous informal conversations and moments of observation that took place during the two and half years that I lived and worked in South Africa between 2011 and 2016. The study employed grounded theory and intersectionality as analytic approaches and brought the two in conversation with one another as they both employ constant comparative analysis as a point of departure to examine processes that link context, power relations, and lived experience. The
University of South Africa (UNISA) College of Graduate Studies’ Research Ethics Committee and Columbia University’s Institutional Review Board approved the study.

**Dissertation Structure**

The dissertation chapters are organized as follows. Chapter Two contextualizes the study with a review of theoretical frameworks that inform empirical research on contemporary gendered sexualities among young people in sub-Saharan Africa. In this chapter, I identify gaps in the existing literature, articulate what is obscured by these silences, and outline how this study contributes conceptually and empirically to the study of gender and sexuality. Chapter Three is an account of the methodological approaches undertaken and a description of the study design, data collection, and analysis procedures. In Chapter Four, I explore young adults’ perspectives on social and economic transformation in the post-apartheid era and on the factors they feel inhibit their realization of rights. I also examine participants discursive use of rights and gender as languages of social critique in the post-apartheid era. Next, Chapter Five describes two overarching cultural scripts for gender and sexuality to which young adults are exposed, those that promote gender equality and others that establish restrictive sets of roles and values for men and women. In this chapter, I argue that in pluralist “modern” South Africa, cultural scripts that operate within and between a variety of social institutions offer conflicting messages about gender and sexuality that are expressed in young adults’ gender ideals for relationships. Chapter Six examines how young adults’ draw on competing cultural scripts for gender and sexuality to decide how power should be negotiated in their conceptions of an idealized intimate partnership-type relationship. I also explain how social location shapes desirability in the relationship market and the relationship pathways available for young women and men to pursue. Finally, Chapter Seven summarizes the
research findings, discusses the study’s empirical and conceptual contributions to gender and sexuality scholarship, and offers recommendations for applied research.
CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews theoretical frameworks that inform empirical research on gendered sexualities among young people in sub-Saharan Africa. To begin, I ground research on young people’s gendered sexualities in some of the earliest sociological thinking on gender and sexuality and trace the evolution of these frameworks into contemporary theoretical formulations. I specifically examine work theorizing the multiple and contextual meanings of gender and sexuality in African societies⁵, which use social constructionist and intersectional approaches, apply sexual script theory, and seek to understand how capitalist-modernity re-organizes gender relations. Within each of these areas of scholarship, I critically evaluate empirical research that applies these theoretical frameworks to examine gendered sexualities among young women and men in African societies. To conclude each section, I identify gaps in the existing literature, consider the analytic costs of these gaps, and outline how this study contributes conceptually and empirically to this important area of research.

Social Constructionist Approaches to the Study of Gender and Sexuality

The origins of gender theory within the social sciences began with the study of biological and social differences between the sexes. Bio-determinism and social evolutionary thought, the dominant perspectives of the time, put forth a reductive view of sexual difference as primarily biological, as something fixed and essential, located in the body (genes, genitals, hormones) or the

⁵ In line with a postcolonial research approach, this project challenges essentialist portrayals of a singular and culturally degenerate African sexuality. I use the phrase ‘African societies’ and highlight empirical work on gendered sexualities among young people throughout the continent to show both similar themes and contextual variation in this area of research. In this brief review of the literature, I aim to acknowledge the rich diversity across contexts which have commonalities and shared political and historical legacies that are inscribed in culturally-specific understandings of gender and sexuality throughout the region.
soul (Fausto-Sterling, 1997, Martin, 1991). The influence of historical, contextual, and institutional factors was absent from these paradigms. Over time, social scientists began to distinguish between the sexed body and the social construct of gender, as well as between gender and sexuality as concepts. Social constructionism is an analytic orientation employed to describe complex meanings associated with social phenomena and how these meanings are produced interactively and discursively in the social world (Holstein and Gubrium, 2013). In early theorizing, the concept of gender was used to differentiate between men’s and women’s social roles. The study of sex roles in the fields of sociology, cultural anthropology and social psychology conceived of gender as a social category imposed on a sexed body (Money and Ehrhardt, 1972, Lorber, 1994). This functionalist approach to gender and sexuality lost currency as second wave feminists moved beyond the study of gender differences and began to offer ideological and materialist explanations of gender inequality produced through social institutions and structures. The social movements of the 1960s and 1970s coincided with a shift to postmodern theoretical paradigms in academic scholarship. Scholars began to analyze gender and sexuality as socially constructed with an understanding “that masculinity and femininity are loosely defined, historically variable, and interrelated social ascriptions to persons with certain kinds of bodies, not the natural necessary or ideal characteristics of people with similar genitals” (Kegan Gardiner, 2005). The paradigmatic shift to social constructionism was in part to refute biological determinism and sex role literature as overly reductionist, deterministic, and one that lacked an analysis of power in gender relations. Seminal studies that incorporated a social-constructionist approach to understand gender inequality include Rubin’s analysis of kinship and the political economy of sex and Hartmann’s research on patriarchy, capitalism, and sex-segregation in the labor market (Hartmann, 1976, Rubin, 1975).
Theory of Gender and Power

Applying a social-constructionist approach, Connell (1987) critically analyzed this early work on the determinants of gender inequality and put forth a systematic sociological theory of gender relations. Building on Bourdieu’s (1977) and Giddens’ (1984) dualist models of structure and practice, Connell contends that a theory of practice is useful to illustrate how patterns of gender inequalities – bestowing greater privilege, status, and power to men over women – are organized within a structure of gendered social relations and maintained through daily practice. Her approach emphasizes the interplay between structure and practice – what people do to constitute social relations and the structure of social relations which conditions practice – as well as the function of contestation that challenges the reproduction of an unequal gender order. She also notes that social structures are historically-situated. Thus, gender relations are continuously transformed and are organized by the dominance of specific social interests at a given period.

Connell identifies three domains of gender relations: 1) the sexual division of labor (norms of practice), 2) the structure of power (ideological norms and the deployment of power), and 3) the structure of cathexis (patterning of emotion and desire). She argues that gender is an intrinsic element of society’s class structure, and is evident in gender-inequitable patterns of production, consumption, distribution and accumulation of resources. The sexual division of labor, and gendered practices and relations more broadly, are reinforced by a gendered structure of power relations guided by a hegemonic ideology of patriarchal authority over women and subordinate men. The structure of cathexis is a theoretical construct Connell uses to discuss the social reproduction of gendered emotional attachment and sexual desire. It has three organizing principles – hegemonic heterosexuality (sexual practice organized in married heterosexual
relationships); presupposition of sexual difference between feminine and masculine patterns of desire; and support for sexual promiscuity among men but not women. Contemporary gender scholarship grounded in this reflexive theoretical approach seeks to understand how men’s dominance is maintained and gender inequality is reproduced within all three domains.

**Sexual Script Theory**

Drawing on social constructionist, symbolic interactionist and feminist approaches, Gagnon and Simon’s (1973) *Sexual Conduct* is foundational to the study of the meaning of sexuality in social life and non-sexual motivations that organize and sustain sexual relations. According to Gagnon and Simon, cultural scripts for gender and sexuality serve as overarching instructional guidelines for people to organize sexual behavior and relationships and provide a shared set of reference points for people to negotiate interpersonal sexual scripts and fashion intrapsychic sexual identities. Sexual script theory is particularly useful for understanding the significance of sexuality as a terrain to demonstrate social and moral competence through the practice of normative gender roles and relations (Simon and Gagnon, 1986). In later theorizing, they stress that the display of competence is not about merely adopting cultural messages\(^6\) wholesale, but calling upon them selectively and in the process of subjective construction of gendered sexual identities and relational negotiation in sexual encounters (Simon and Gagnon, 2003). Further, they argue that in post-paradigmatic societies where shared meanings about social life are less cohesive, people are less likely to adopt prescribed sexual identities. Consequently, in times of transition, cultural messages about sexuality may lose their hegemonic power and are selectively employed as a legitimating device for claims and counterclaims of sexual morality.

\(^6\) I use the terms “cultural scripts” and “cultural messages” interchangeably
Theorizing Gender and Sexuality in African Societies

The study on gender and sexuality in contemporary African societies has its foundations in social constructionism and feminist thought as well as political scholarship that has critiqued Western imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, and capitalism (Morrell and Clowes, 2016). Morrell’s (1998) engagement with Connell’s theory of gender and power in research on masculinities and violence is foundational in contemporary gender theory in Africa broadly and critical studies of masculinities in South Africa specifically. His seminal work illustrates how the intersections of race, class, and gender have historically transformed existing masculinities and established new masculine ideals in the process. Morrell’s analysis of South African masculinities centers on what he asserts as the dominant discourse of the region's history – the language of white men and black 'boys'. He recounts the ways in which racial subordination in the colonial and apartheid periods projected an inferior status onto African men in relation to hegemonic white masculinities. He observes that across time, Black and White men in South Africa have used violence to resist domination, legitimize masculine identity against competing claims, and re-establish power over women and subordinate men. Morrell’s early theorizing coincided with a new era of critical studies of masculinities research across Africa, which include several anthologies written in the early 2000s (Morrell, 2001, Ouzgane and Morrell, 2005, Reid and Walker, 2005, Shefer et al., 2007). Conceptual and empirical contributions from a broad array of scholars explore how historical trajectories, geographical location, class, and ethnicity affect the representation, construction, contestation, and interpretation of various masculinities throughout the continent.

In research on masculinity and violence in South Africa, the concept of a ‘crisis in masculinity’ was first introduced by Campbell (1992) in a study of political violence during the

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7 In this work, Morrell also outlines the origins and historical formation of white masculinities in South Africa – both Afrikaans and English masculine identity.
waning years of the apartheid era. It subsequently gained traction in theorizing on the 
pervasiveness of gender-based violence in South Africa. Andrew’s (1998) posited that a “culture 
of violence” produced by a history of state-sponsored racist militarism, defiance through armed 
sexual violence as a ‘gendered civil war’ initiated by men in reaction to perceived threats to their 
gender dominance by women’s new legal rights. In line with this perspective, Posel (2005) argued 
that new freedoms that grant women the right to sexual expression, and to seek redress for 
gendered violence, had punctured the silence on sexuality in South Africa and “destabilized the 
very bedrock of masculinity.” The vast majority of gender-based violence and HIV policies and 
public health interventions are designed based on the conception of a crisis in masculinity in South 

Parallel to and in conjunction with these contributions to gender theory, scholars 
throughout Africa have incorporated social constructionist approaches to critical studies on 
sexuality. In a seminal volume on African sexualities, Tamale (2011) retraced the historical 
trajectory of theorizing and research on sexuality in Africa and the ideological, political and social 
agendas that informed this area of study. She recounts that early work on sexuality, conducted by 
white missionaries and colonial explorers, and later by anthropologists, was central to imperialist 
expansion throughout the continent in the 19th and 20th centuries. This work was used to justify the 
colonial project of civilizing ‘primitive’ and ‘exotic’ African sexualities which were considered 
the antithesis of idealized European Judeo-Christian Victorian sexual values (Magubane, 2001, 
Mama, 1996). These racist ideologies and discourses seeped into public health and development 
sector initiatives to medicalize African sexualities first through curbing women’s fertility in the 
name of population control and later to address the onslaught of HIV/AIDS. Processes of othering
are also evident in early work by women’s rights activists to ‘save’ African women from ‘barbaric’
cultural practices like female genital circumcision and polygamy (Tamale and Oloka-Onyango,
1995). Throughout these phases, African feminists critically questioned colonial and biomedical
research that narrowly interpreted African culture and sexuality, and aimed to ‘rewrite’ and ‘reright’
conceptualizations of African gendered sexualities (Arnfred, 2004, Imam, 2000, Moyer and

Empirical Research on Gendered Sexualities among Youth in Africa

As an empirical approach, social constructionism has proven remarkably useful in understanding
the processes and practices by which social phenomena come into existence (Holstein and
Gubrium, 2013). Researchers have taken up the tools of social constructionism to explore
gendered sexualities among young women and men in Africa with a focus on the reproduction of
gender inequalities in young adults’ sexual practices identities, and ideals. While the vast majority
of empirical work has been conducted in South Africa, this section will highlight insightful studies
from several countries throughout the region. One of the advantages of a social-constructionist
framework is that it reveals the structure of power relations, and how these arrangements constrain
and enable social action. A key area of investigation is how young women and men reproduce
social inequality in their gendered attitudes and behaviors (Austrian and Anderson, 2015, Bhana,
2016a, Gevers et al., 2012, Hallman, 2005, Hoffman et al., 2006). For example, Bhana, a prominent
scholar of adolescent sexuality in South Africa, highlights the cultural processes that organize and
reproduce men’s dominance in sexual relationships and constrain teenage girls’ ability to exercise
agency with their sexual partners (Bhana, 2016a). This area of work sheds light on how gender-
inequitable norms and economic conditions are reflected in young people’s practices in sexual
relationships.
Scholars often deploy a social-constructionist framework to describe how cultural norms shape masculine and feminine sexual identities (Ampofo, 2001, Malinga and Ratele, 2016, Pattman, 2005, Sennott and A. Mojola, 2016, Tibesigwa and Visser, 2015). In work that informed sexual education in East and Southern Africa, Pattman (2005) explored how gendered sexual morality discourse imposed constraints on girls’ full expression of their sexuality in interactions with boys in school. Moreover, feminine scripts about appropriate types of dress and girls’ free movement in public spaces impacted their sexual reputations and social freedoms more broadly. Together these studies demonstrate that cultural beliefs about feminine respectability encourage women and girls to achieve sexual identities that reinforce gender-inequitable norms. Social constructionism is also informative in understanding how discursive practices are deployed both to maintain and transform gender and sexual ideals (Bhana, 2016b, Gevers et al., 2013, Harrison, 2008, Lesch and Furphy, 2013, Macia et al., 2011). In Mozambique, Macia and colleagues (2011) proposed that young women’s desire for socially-respectable educated and employed boyfriends intersects with masculine ideals of financial provision to shape how young men exert power in sexual relationships. Ideologies that prescribe obligatory gendered sexualities through notions of respectability further elucidate the significance of sexuality as a fundamental domain to socialize youth about gendered relationships of power.

While the studies mentioned earlier focus on how context shapes inequitable relations of power between young women and men, other work indicates a departure from the reproduction of the existing gender order. This literature emphasizes that as countries legally enshrine rights protections for women and girls, men engage with these social transformations in a variety of ways (Bhana, 2015, MacPhail and Campbell, 2001, Moolman, 2017, Pettifor et al., 2012, Rule-Groenewald, 2013, Stern and Buikema, 2013, Strebel et al., 2006). In research with Black and
Coloured working-class young adults in South Africa, Strebel and colleagues (2006) reported that although traditional gender roles were still prevalent, power dynamics in relationships were shifting and young adults were unclear about appropriate gender roles. They also noted that this ambiguity in gendered sexualities had not improved young women’s power in sexual decision-making. Similarly, other studies have shown that changing discourses on gender and sexuality have not increased women’s agency in sexual relationships. As Bhana and Anderson (2013) found, young women’s expressions of sexual desire and pleasure were often constrained by norms about feminine respectability and intimate partner violence.

Other work has elucidated tensions in young men’s constructions of contemporary masculinities that appear to resist some aspects of new gender equality discourse and support other changes in gender relations (Dworkin et al., 2012, Nzioka, 2001, Swartz et al., 2016). Nzioka (2001) found adolescent boys in Kenya to be ambivalent about social prescriptions that allow for men’s sexual promiscuity. They conformed to ideals of masculine sexual prowess despite being well-informed of the possible sexual risks of their behavior. Moreover, they expressed that they were often embarrassed to discuss their sexual behavior with adults or purchase condoms in public stores because they felt their sexually-promiscuous behavior was not socially acceptable. Dworkin and colleagues (2012) found that men in rural South Africa used rights as a frame to interpret changes in gender norms and relations. The men in this study embraced women’s increased participation in community leadership and the opportunity for women and men to learn from one another in communal spaces. Still, they believed that rights had disrupted gender dynamics in familial and intimate relationships. In their view, men have the responsibility to provide for women and children. Yet, in the era of rights, women have greater access to money than men through both paid work and social grants provided to parents (mostly single women) to care for children in low-
income families. This body of work underscores the multi-faceted construction of gendered sexualities. In the face of changes in gendered regimes, young women’s and men’s relationship ideals show compliance with and resistance to dominant gender ideologies.

Several studies draw upon sexual script theory to demonstrate the importance of culture in shaping youth sexualities in a variety of African contexts (Harrison et al., 2006, Maticka-Tyndale et al., 2005, Izugbara et al., 2011, Izugbara and Undie, 2008, LeClerc-Madlala, 2009, O'Sullivan et al., 2006). This scholarship has largely focused on how normative expectations for “traditional” masculine and feminine roles contribute to gender-inequitable sexual practices. In research with adolescents in Kenya, Maticka-Tyndale and colleagues (2005) explored the role of the family in perpetuating binary gender roles in sexual relations. In this study, they describe the family as complicit in expecting boys to engage in aggressive sexual practices that may become coercive and girls to comply with boys’ sexual advances. Similarly, Harrison and colleagues (2006) in South Africa examined how cultural scripts influence inequitable relationship norms among young men and women and increased young women’s HIV and gender-based violence vulnerability. In examining cultural scripts for masculinity in Malawi, Izugbara and Undie (2008) found that they often encourage adolescent boys to engage in sexually predatory practices in relationships in defense of their masculine identities. This body of work draws attention to the fact that cultural massages provide a shared set of reference points for young women and men to negotiate sexual interactions and fashion sexual identities. When cultural scripts establish gender binaries - men’s power and women’s submissiveness – these power inequities are reproduced in young women’s and men’s gendered sexualities.
Limitations of the Social Constructionist Literature

The social constructionist approaches to theorizing gender and sexuality draw attention to the strategies young women and men employ to produce gendered ideals, identities, and behaviors for sexual relationships. They also highlight how gendered relationships of power are reproduced and contested through the practice of social actors. Despite these noteworthy contributions, there are some inherent limitations in the existing work. A common assumption in empirical research on gendered sexualities among young people in Africa is that there is a strict division between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ gender models for relationships. This study challenges this dualistic approach and argues that gender models are influenced by a variety of competing cultural, discursive and economic factors that taken together do not offer clear and cohesive messages about gender and power. These tensions at the contextual-level show up in young adults’ gender ideals, in how they perceive what constitutes gender equality in sexual relationships, and how they seek to negotiate gender power in practice and the realm of ideals. Additionally, a substantive gap in existing work is a disproportionate focus on the gendered sexualities of adolescent girls and boys to the exclusion of understanding young adults’ sexualities as they transition to adult lives and relationships. In this study, I explore this critical life stage and how normative and material conditions of South Africa’s post-apartheid context shape young adults’ gender ideals for and experiences in relationships now as well as their aspirations for the future.

Intersectional Approaches to the Study of Gender and Sexuality

Intersectionality as an analytical orientation builds on social constructionism and takes into account multiple grounds of social identity when considering how the world is organized (Crenshaw, 1989). Critical studies of race, class, and gender emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s in large part as a response to the social movements for racial justice, women’s rights, queer rights,
the rights of the poor, and anti-colonial and indigenous liberation struggles globally. Academic and activist scholarship sought to challenge single-axis approaches that apply gender-, race-, class- and sexual orientation-only theories to understand social inequality (Davis, 1981, hooks, 1981, Lorde, 1984, Matsuda, 1991, Smith et al., 1982). Collins’ (2002) theorizing on Black feminism and the matrix of domination proposed that these axes operate as mutually-reinforcing and interlocking systems of oppression that structure relations of power and resistance. Conceptually, the matrix of domination suggests that all groups experience variable amounts of oppression and privilege. Her work emphasizes the multiple levels and relations of power that vary by context and change over time (Collins, 1989).

As a prominent scholar of critical race feminism in legal studies, Crenshaw introduced the term intersectionality into the academic lexicon. In her work, intersectionality is employed as a theoretical approach to describe marginalized social identities and to understand power relationships and exclusionary social practices within feminist and anti-racist discourse. Building on these early works, intersectionality has developed across different academic disciplines over the past 30 years as an interpretive framework to investigate the “structure of hierarchal power relations that have patterned organizational outcomes on the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of analysis as well as discourses that frame these relations” (Collins, 2007).

In conversation with critical race feminism in the West, feminists emerging from postcolonial liberation struggles further refined intersectional analyses of gender and sexuality. They argued that second wave feminism often reinforced neocolonial approaches to address gender inequality and theorize sexualities in the Global South and drew upon discourses on cultural and racial inferiority that lingered from the imperialist project. A specific concern was an emphasis by Western feminists in judging the conditions of women in the Global South using
dominant Western standards on gender equality and conceptions of how gender and sexual freedom should be conceived (Abu-Lughod, 2002, Amadiume, 1987, Mohanty, 1988, Ogunyemi, 1985). In particular, Oyèwùmí (1997) sought to distinguish African feminist epistemologies by emphasizing that they should not rely on Western-derived conceptualizations of gender and sexuality that put forth a monolithic image of African women as poverty-stricken vulnerable victims of patriarchal cultural values deprived of agency. In South Africa, feminists have deeply engaged in these debates, regionally and nationally, and incorporated their perspectives in advocacy for gender equality as part of anti-apartheid and post-apartheid struggles. Notable is the internal struggles within the women’s movement in South Africa during the transition to democracy. At the time, Black women activists and researchers criticized how White women scholars in elite academic institutions produced the majority of scholarship on Black women’s oppression in the country. Through debates over the racial privilege within the women’s movement and the production of knowledge on gender inequality in South Africa, Black women challenged localized Western feminist epistemologies and contributed to multivocality in the feminist discourse.

Early work that applied an intersectional lens included Cock’s (1980) analysis of the political economy of gender and race under apartheid. In this research, she sought to disrupt a universal conception of women’s oppression by elucidating the ways in which White women intentionally exploited Black women’s domestic labor under apartheid. In more recent sexuality literature, Ratele (2009) mapped the racial coding and control of sexualities throughout South Africa’s history from colonial laws that prohibited interracial sexual relations to racist sexualization apparent in both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. He argues that power regimes (governmental, religious, scientific, cultural and economic authorities) of the past have resurfaced
in modern times as people’s private lives and intimate relationships have turned into “an obsessive national interest.” Underlying concerns about people’s sexual desires and practices are moral anxieties about raced identity, belongingness, and integration.

**Employing an Intersectional Approach to Studying Young-Adult Sexuality in Africa**

Few studies offer an explicit intersectional lens in theorizing young-adult sexuality in African contexts (Groes-Green, 2009, Moolman, 2013, Bhana and Pattman, 2010, Shefer et al., 2007, Spronk, 2005). In this study, I problematize existing work that tends to privilege gender over other axes of power and privilege and fails to recognize how othering processes at the intersection of gender, race, and class shape young people’s lives and relationships. To extend understanding beyond reductionist views of gender and power, I apply an intersectional lens to examine young men’s and women’s experiences of gender-, class-, and race-based dominance and marginalization and how these factors influence their perceptions of social and economic transformation. Further, this study accounts for young adults’ multi-situated identities and explores how intersectional social location shapes their relationship ideals and experiences in South Africa’s post-apartheid context.

**Gender and Modernity**

**Postcolonial approaches to theorizing modernity**

Comaroff and Comaroff (2012) assert that modernity as an object of analysis refers to “an orientation to being-in-the-world”, “an ideal of humanity”, and “a vision of history as a progressive, man-made construction” whose meaning is contextually-variable, yet has universal appeal. They explain that modernity serves to relatively position people “on the near-or-far side of the great divide between self and other, the present and prehistory, the general and particular—oppositions that are mobilized in a range of registers.” This is the central purpose of modernity guided Western
imperialism and colonialism across the world. Critical theorists have extensively studied political and socioeconomic philosophies from the past four centuries – liberalism, human rights, capitalism, and industrialization – and have drawn attention to how they circulated narratives of modernity and progress globally that were enmeshed with cultural discourses on race, gender, and sexuality. As Arendt (1990) points out, Western modernity coupled with race ideology functioned as key rationales for imperialism, colonialism, and the enslavement and ethnic cleansing of dehumanized others. It created a façade of compatibility between European capitalist expansion of power for the accumulation of wealth and Western moral standards concerning natural rights.

For several decades, postcolonial scholars have offered a sharp critique to theories of modernity that conflate modernization and Westernization, and exclude the contributions of the Global South in theorizing development and progress (Appadurai, 1996, Chakrabarty, 2000, Lomnitz, 2006). Connell (2007) notes that Western scholars emphasize how modernity has spread from the northern producers of knowledge, industry, and culture to their ‘eager’ southern neighbors. Yet the Comaroffs argue that modernity has always been a “universal project and a host of specific, parochial emplacements, a force for equality and simultaneously, a producer of difference.” Throughout Africa, post-colonial scholars have a long history of writing about the contextual and historical trajectories of African modernities that have been constructed alongside and in relation to Western manifestations (Amin, 1989, Makdisi, 1992, Masilela, 2003, Táiwò, 2010). They have also elucidated how what is perceived as traditional is always a modern construct that shifts over time as each generation attempts to distinguish itself from the past. In analyzing the costs and benefits of the proliferation of Western modernity, a constructed African past and traditions assigned to it are either romanticized or denounced in comparison to the current period.
Critical theorizing on modernity and shifting gender and sexual relations

In the field of gender and sexuality, scholars have examined the cultural and economic effects of modernity on changes in social relations and processes. Waring and Steinem (1988) argued that the global political economy codes a particular set of gendered values and thus a particular set of gendered power relations. Connell (1987) argued that industrial capitalism and industrialization cultivated cultural models about heterosexual marriage, and a gendered division of labor that consist of men’s breadwinning and women’s domestic labor. Colonial powers and Christian missionaries diffused these new Western gender models throughout the Global South and promoted a modern nuclear family ideal to transform indigenous societies’ kinship practices (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1986, Hunt, 1990, Wallerstein, 1960). In more recent empirical research, Hirsch and colleagues (2006) explore how dimensions of modernity – individualism, commoditized social relations, and narratives of progress – are linked to contextually-specific companionate marriage ideals in various regions. A key finding from this work is the “discursive intertwining of gender, marriage, and progress,” whereby people use gender relationships to cultivate modern identities. Other scholars have shown how sexuality has been an actively contested political and symbolic terrain in modernization projects that sought to alter sexual desires, relations, and ideals (Arnfred, 2004, Gunkel, 2010, Tamale, 2011).

Scholars argue that narratives of modernity have been rearranged and hybridized, and interact with new processes (i.e. neoliberal economic policies, urbanization, the proliferation of global media) that has resulted in social and economic dislocation in post-industrial societies globally (Appadurai, 1990, Castells, 2000, Connell, 2007, Kumar, 2009). Broad transformations in political, economic and cultural structures have subsequently disrupted conceptions of gender and sexuality as they relate to modernity. Some suggest that these structural shifts have ruptured
men’s dominance in public and private spheres resulting in a major loss of the patriarchal dividend for some men and creating new avenues for gender equality. While postcolonial feminists champion the proliferation of gender equality policies and discourse, they challenge Western standards of women’s empowerment and put forth contextually-specific frameworks to reorganize gender power in social institutions and advance women’s agency in social and intimate relations. Others propose that the ascendancy of neoliberal economic policies and global capitalism has further entrenched patriarchal power and contributed to an escalation of inequalities across social axes of privilege and disadvantage. In both areas of work, researchers called into question the benefits and costs of modernity on gender and sexual relations, and investigate how women and men negotiate these changes in their professional and intimate relationships.

**Empirical Research on Gender, Sexuality, and Modernity with Youth in Africa**

Over the past 15 years, an emerging literature on gender and modernity has explored how broad social and economic transformations have reconfigured young adults’ heterosexual relationships throughout Africa (Bhana and Pattman, 2011, Hunter, 2010, Leclerc-Madlala, 2003, Michielsen et al., 2014, Smith, 2000). In a recent systematic review of transactional sex in Africa, Stoebenau and colleagues (2016), found that scholars conceptualize this practice among young women using three overarching paradigms – sex for basic needs, sex to improve social status, and sex and material expressions of love. Most critical studies on modernity and young adult sexual relationships have moved beyond the first paradigm, and examine how women’s and men’s relationship motivations express desires for both romantic love and modern identities. The second paradigm posits that neoliberal economic policies coupled with the rise of consumption culture drive young women to engage in sexual relationships to obtain commodities of modernity (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003). These structural determinants of shifts in intimate relationships are
prominent in Hunter’s (2010) study on the social reproduction of intimacy in South Africa’s KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province. Using the dynamic and dialectical relationship between the “economic” and the “intimate” as a frame, he demonstrated how structural inequality has altered the materiality of sexual relationships. Hunter illustrated how the history of both men’s and women’s labor migration in KZN has modified masculine and feminine cultural models within various historical moments. Moreover, he showed how the interplay among colonial-era scripts for gender and sexuality, new political freedoms, chronic unemployment, and reduced marriage rates shape the processes through which young adults produce and navigate intimate relationships.

In another qualitative study in an urban area of KZN, Bhana and Pattman (2011) uncovered how adolescents’ perceptions of class status and urban/rural distinctions intersect with gender norms to shape their goals for intimate relationships. They found that teenage girls’ relationship ideals were inextricably linked to their aspirations for middle-class lifestyles and boyfriends who could provide financially. In contrast, men who lacked the material resources to attract these young women desired love-based relationships with young rural women they imagined to be less invested in commodity-driven lifestyles.

Scholarship on transactional sex as material expressions of love is in many ways in response to an absence of the affective dimensions of these relationships in other research. One of the most prominent recent studies is Mojola’s (2014) work which examines the processes through which young women navigate their quest for loving relationships and career aspirations in a context of entrenched gender inequalities in Nyanza, Kenya. She contends that gender inequality in education and the labor market challenge young women’s pursuit of consumption-driven lifestyles, and so they engage in love/money relationships as a means to attain goods and products that are essential for the ‘modern’ subject. Mojola’s research is discussed at length in Chapters
Six and Seven in relation to the conceptual and empirical contributions of this study to the literature. Groes-Green (2009) also examined the entanglements of love and money in work on the class-specific strategies young men in Mozambique’s capital Maputo employ to maintain dominance and desirability in the relationship market. He argued that the state’s neoliberal economic policies have caused massive unemployment in disadvantaged communities at a time when material expressions of love have gained currency. Young women in the study, who faced gendered barriers to pursuing economic opportunities, were dissatisfied that their family and boyfriends were unable to support them economically. In this environment, middle-class young men achieved desirability through providing material gifts to young women, and working-class men relied on tactics including sexual prowess as a substitute for economic power. By conforming to a context-specific form of complicit masculinity, working-class young men rework masculine ideals in an attempt to balance the gendered power dynamics in their intimate relationships. As a whole, this work illustrates the complex ways in which shifting meanings of intimacy intersect with increasing economic inequality to produce new modern subjects and alter the structure of young people’s gender ideals, identities, and practices in sexual relationships.

**Positioning Young Adults’ Gendered Sexualities in the Context of Social, Economic and Political Changes in South Africa**

This study engages with, problematizes, and extends existing work in several key ways. The study challenges the prevailing narrative in much of the public health scholarship on African masculinities that are conceptualized mostly as problematic and pathological. Indeed, researchers have paid little attention to the diverse ways in which young men have responded to delegitimized forms of patriarchal power and gender relations produced during the colonial and apartheid eras (Hunter, 2010, Bhana and Pattman, 2011, Shefer et al., 2007). I also add to work that disrupts a singular depiction of African femininities as victimized and vulnerable (Higgins et al., 2010,
Tamale, 2011). A broad range of political, economic and cultural factors continue to alter young men’s and women’s motivations for and experiences in sexual relationships despite the entrenchment of social norms and the persistence of economic inequality. My research explores how normative, material, and discursive dimensions of the post-apartheid context can serve as a lens to understand changes in these relationships. Also, the study recognizes that young men’s conceptions of power in sexual relationships consists of ideals that are on a spectrum from men’s dominance to gender equality and in practice the vast majority of people’s expressions and experiences of gender fall somewhere in the middle. Thus, it is important to understand the meanings young men and women assign to their ideals and aspirations for sexual relationships.

In the cited scholarship on gender and modernity, the influence of political economy and social norms on young adults’ construction of gendered sexualities is well documented, yet the processes that mediate associations between context and lived experience require further investigation. In the existing literature, there is some evidence of how economic restructuring in post-colonial societies has both sustained a hegemonic masculine provider ideal and limited men’s ability to enact it in practice. Similarly, critical studies have carefully demonstrated how these same contextual forces produce consumption-driven lifestyles that lead women to choose relationships that reproduce gender inequality. These types of studies are scarce. More attention is needed to establish how contextual conditions are embodied in lived experience, specifically linking interpersonal relationships, social institutions (family, schools, and media), and societal structures (law, religion, the economy, and the state). In this study, I interrogate the tensions within and between cultural scripts for gender and sexuality and ideologies of modernity – human rights, gender equality, post-racialism, and personal responsibility – are expressed in young adults’ gender ideals for relationships. I also describe the processes through which disadvantage and
privilege that are institutionally organized shape young adults’ ability to align their gender ideals and life aspirations with the relationship pathways available for them to pursue.
CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

At the broadest level, the study described and analyzed young-adult lives and sexual relationships in Cape Town, South Africa and the material and normative dimensions of the context in which they occur. More specifically, the study aims were to:

- describe young women’s and men’s perspectives on social, economic, political, and cultural transformation in post-apartheid South Africa,
- explore their perspectives on young-adult lives and sexual relationships,
- examine how they discuss their experiences in navigating adult lives and relationships, and
- investigate young adults’ perceptions of the contextual factors that influence their lives and relationships.

A key element of this investigation was to analyze how both cultural and structural factors shape young women’s and men’s life aspirations and experiences of rights, and their gender ideals for and experiences in sexual relationships. The research was conducted in Cape Town, South Africa with a diverse – across the axes of race, class, and gender – group of young men and women. Contextually, South Africa is a particularly apt setting to explore how young women and men experience rights-based social, economic, political and cultural transformation in their everyday lives and relationships. To begin the chapter, I explain the methodological approaches undertaken and describe the study design and data collection procedures. From there, I outline the organization and analysis of data, including strategies taken to assess rigor and justify the findings and conclusions presented throughout the dissertation. Next, is a statement on how I position myself in relation to the research, and I conclude the chapter with a description of the research ethics approval process and how ethical challenges were addressed.
Methodology

Grounded Theory Approach

Grounded theory as an iterative and inductive methodological approach offers stepwise procedures to theory formulation through systematic collection and analysis of qualitative data. Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) foundational text outlines the critical decisions one should take into account during each stage of qualitative inquiry as well as specific techniques and tools used to facilitate a grounded theory approach. A key feature of grounded theory is the creation of a theoretical sample based on constant analysis of collected data that aims to identify novel participant groups that must be included in the sample to produce data that will contribute to a comprehensive theoretical framework. Another core element of grounded theory is the iterative phases of coding data to develop and interrelate themes and dimensions of these themes to build a conceptually-dense framework that represents the processes under study (Charmaz, 2014). Constant comparative analysis integrates perspectives from multiple standpoints and contributes to the development of the theoretical framework (Creswell and Clark, 2007). As an interpretive framework, grounded theory aids in constructing an integrated theory that emerges from the data by stimulated thinking on how and why patterns and processes change across contextual conditions and the consequences of variation (Glaser et al., 1968).

Intersectional Approach

Building on early theorizing on intersectionality, McCall (2005) critically assessed methodological approaches to studying multiple, intersecting, and complex social relations. She described three methodological approaches “defined principally in terms of their stance toward categories, that is, how they understand and use analytical categories to explore the complexity of intersectionality in social life” (McCall, 2005). Extending McCall's research, Choo and Ferree offer a useful analytic
framework to consider what it means for sociologists to practice intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological approach to the study of social inequality (Choo and Ferree, 2010). They distinguish three styles of understanding intersectionality in practice: group-centered, process-centered, and system-centered. Group-centered analysis emphasizes centering multiply-marginalized groups and their perspectives as the primary focus of research. Process-centered models emphasize the material and cultural relations of power that structure societies; a comparative and contextual analysis of dynamic social interactions; and the importance of challenging the primacy of any one axis of inequality by investigating multiple and intersecting social hierarchies. A systems-centered approach rejects associating specific forms of inequality with specific types of institutions and instead examines how axes of inequality span and transform structures and practices at all levels and in multiple mutually-dependent institutional contexts. This study applies a process-centered intersectional approach to examine the ways in which young adults’ gender ideals for sexual relationships express their exposure to competing cultural scripts for gender and sexuality, structural inequalities, and contradictory discourses. I also describe the processes through which disadvantage and privilege that are institutionally organized shape their ability to align their gender ideals and life aspirations with the relationship pathways available for them to pursue.

**Linking Approaches**

This study brings these two methodological approaches into conversation with one another as they both employ constant comparative analysis as a point of departure to examine processes that link contextual conditions, power relations, and lived experience. Moreover, grounded theory and process-centered intersectionality foreground multiple perspectives that reflect situated knowledge, to understand the continuum of conditions and strategies undertaken in addressing the phenomena.
under study. These approaches also incorporate both inductive and deductive techniques in rigorously theorizing context, specifically this study investigates the social and economic organization of power, and how social location shapes young adults’ lives and relationships. Throughout this chapter, I carefully detail the application of grounded theory and process-centered intersectionality to study design, and data collection and analysis procedures.

Study Design and Data Collection

Research Context

South Africa’s transition to democracy raised citizens’ expectations about social, economic, political and cultural transformation along several axes of privilege and power, including gender equality. New legally-constituted rights have prompted discourses on how gender and sexual relations should be constructed, and these discourses become a language through which people talk about the broader social reorganization that their country has experienced in terms of gender as well as race, class, and sexuality. This study explores how South Africa’s social, economic and political context shapes young adults' gender ideals for and experiences in sexual relationships and how they believe power should be negotiated in these relationships.

Preliminary Research

In 2011, I conducted nine weeks of fieldwork in Durban and Cape Town, South Africa. The primary aim of this initial work was to test the feasibility of conducting qualitative research with young men on masculine ideals, social inequality, and sexual violence and assess the effect of the interviewer’s gender on respondents’ willingness to discuss these research topics. A methodological concern was that young men’s gender display would be more pronounced with a woman focus group moderator or interviewer. Another concern was that my positionality, as a
woman and foreign researcher, would produce gender performance by men that was different from what they would display for a South African man or woman investigator.

To explore these methodological concerns, four focus group discussions were conducted with approximately five young men in each group, and three young men were interviewed individually. All focus groups and interviews were carried out in a language chosen by research participants with researchers who were fluent in the particular language. Three focus groups were conducted by men moderators and the fourth by a mixed-sex moderation team. Two of the individual interviews were conducted by an interviewer who was a woman and the third by an interviewer who was a man. I co-moderated a focus group discussion and interviewed two participants. As discussed below, an analysis of this preliminary work indicated that men-only versus mixed-sex group facilitation did not affect men’s willingness to discuss masculinity, social inequality, and sexual violence in a group setting. In the individual interviews, men were more willing to discuss their sexual behavior and challenges to live up to masculine ideals with an interviewer who was a woman. Evidence from other research suggests that, on average, men are more comfortable discussing sensitive topics with a woman interviewer (Catania et al., 1996, Darrow et al., 1986).

A comparative analysis of men’s gender performance in focus groups and interviews conducted by my South African research assistants and those in which I took part revealed no detectable difference in how respondents expressed their perspectives on the research topics. Whether or not I was present during the discussions, men offered very candid opinions on gender norms, social inequality, and coercion in sexual relationships. Based on these findings, in subsequent fieldwork, I continued to play an active role in focus group moderation and conducted all individual interviews. I also hired both men and women research assistants to moderate focus
group discussions and included both single- and mixed-sex moderation teams. In addition to fieldwork with young men, I met with several scholars, researchers, and program implementers to discuss my research and emerging directions in work on masculinities and sexual violence in South Africa. Field experts felt that the most intriguing aspects of my research were an exploration of multiple, competing conceptions of masculinity, the expression of racialized and classed masculinities, and under what social and material conditions gender-equitable ideals emerge.

The data gathered during this preliminary study reconfigured my dissertation project. This shift was driven by themes that emerged from the data: 1) young men expressed gender ideals in racialized and classed terms; 2) young adults are frustrated by contradictions among new legal freedoms, widely-held social norms, and entrenched inequalities; 3) social and professional experiences of gender, race, and class integration support, challenge and transform their gender ideals for sexual relationships; and 4) young women’s expectations of men profoundly influence their self-perception and attitudes and practices in relationships. Additionally, several young men suggested that for research on how young men and women negotiate sex and power in relationships, it would be useful for both men and women to participate in focus group discussions together. These themes opened my project up in several ways. I shifted from a singular focus on sexual violence to a broader exploration of gender ideals and relations, and normative practices. Specifically, I moved towards an examination of how popular, yet contradictory, discourses have been produced during the post-apartheid era, and how young adults use them to make meaning of their lives and relationships. In addition, I reframed the project to examine how masculinity and femininity are constructed in relation to one another and how they inform sexual behavior and relationships. Subsequently, men and women participated in focus group discussions and interviews to share their gender ideals for relationships. Also, I refocused my work to explore the
normative, material, and discursive manifestations of rights and social inequality as specific aspects of South Africa's post-apartheid context that shape young adults' sexual relationships.

**Qualitative Research Approach**

Qualitative research involves data collection that provides deep and detailed observation of social phenomena and is based on engagement with the participants under study. It enables researchers to understand the dimensions of social life through the standpoint of participants and explain how they make meaning of their beliefs, motivations, and experiences. An advantage of qualitative research is that it allows the processes and systems of relationships underlying social phenomena to emerge and helps researchers to unpack the complexity of participants’ construction of their reality. These features of a qualitative approach to scientific inquiry guided this research given the stated study aims. I employed three complementary methods of data collection, and Table 1 summarizes the connection between the research methods and the study’s specific aims.

**Table 1. Study Aims and Research Methods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Aims</th>
<th>Research Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To describe young women’s and men’s perspectives on social, economic, political and cultural transformation in post-apartheid South Africa</td>
<td>Investigated primarily through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews; and also, field observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To explore their perspectives on young-adult lives and sexual relationships</td>
<td>Investigated primarily through focus group discussions and also in-depth interviews and field observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To examine how they discuss their experiences in navigating adult lives and sexual relationships</td>
<td>Investigated primarily through in-depth interviews and also focus group discussions and field observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To investigate young adults’ perceptions of the contextual factors that influence their lives and sexual relationships</td>
<td>Investigated through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus Group Discussions

Theory and Link to Study Aims

Focus group methodology is particularly suited to investigate the processes through which individuals jointly construct group norms, social ideals, and collective identities (Bryman, 2015, Munday, 2006). Cyr (2016) posits that “[focus groups] are inherently ‘social events’ that yield data through the interaction of individuals” involved in conversation and debate. In a recent meta-analysis of the use of focus groups as a methodological technique in the social sciences, she suggests that focus groups generate data at three units of analysis: the individual, the group, and the interaction. She argues that although most researchers limit their interpretation to individual-level data, “focus groups’ comparative advantage lies in the group and interactive units.”

At the group level, focus groups allow researchers to observe how people understand and speak about a topic of interest and the processes through which consensus is built or conflict ensues. Through group interaction, participants engage in comparisons between themselves and others in the group as they ask for clarification from other participants, and express agreement or disagreement with opinions of other group members. Observing patterns of consensus and disagreement enables focus group moderators to determine whether opinions are widely shared among a group or specific to certain participants. At the interactive unit of analysis, the deliberative process of focus groups allows researchers to uncover tensions about a topic and different perspectives among a group under study that would not be revealed in individual interviews. Moreover, Stewart and Shamdasani (2014) note that the synergistic effect of the focus group setting produce new ideas among the group as participants react to one another and build on one another’s’ responses. To gain insight into these complex social arrangements, I conducted 11 single- and five mixed-sex focus group discussions with young adults about their perceptions of
transformation in South African society and the contextual factors that influence their lives and sexual relationships. Groups discussed similar themes, which allowed for inter-group comparative analysis, an essential aspect of a process-centered intersectional approach.

Research Assistants

In addition to data collection, fieldwork was structured to facilitate professional development for young adults who served as research assistants, which is in line with the study’s post-colonial methodological approach. I hired 11 local university students and community outreach workers to assist in recruitment, data collection, and transcription. Research assistants were selected based on their experience working with young adults and conducting research, and their ability to be self-reflexive and culturally sensitive (See Appendix 1 – Research Assistant Job Advertisement).

Each research assistant was formally interviewed and completed online human subjects training. To prepare them for fieldwork, I provided a 2- to 4-hour mandatory training in research ethics and qualitative research methodology. I developed standard operating procedures and flowchart of research activities for the focus group moderation and transcription trainings, with the goal to standardize data collection to minimize variation across research assistants, ensure fidelity to study goals, and to prepare study staff for subsequent independent research. During the focus group moderation training, assistants thoroughly reviewed and revised the single-sex focus group guide, role-played moderating a group discussion and received constructive feedback from their colleagues. I paid research assistants for the time they devoted to the trainings and their work on the project.

Based on our interactions post-fieldwork, this skills training and work experience proved valuable for research assistants who worked on this project as they have gone on to pursue graduate studies and transition into the workforce. Periodically, I receive requests for career advice and
letters of recommendation, and I continue to mentor them as they pursue their professional and personal goals. I had an opportunity to provide references for one research assistant who applied to graduate programs in clinical psychology and another who submitted applications for doctoral fellowships in public health. They expressed that the research experience they gained through working on my dissertation project was a key component in increasing their competitiveness for graduate studies.

Recruitment and Screening
To ensure diversity across axes of privilege and disadvantage, my research assistants and I recruited participants from a wide variety of social spaces frequented by young adults that included malls, retail and fast food establishments, public universities and trade schools, and churches and faith-based institutions. Some research assistants recruited people they knew on campus or who lived in their neighborhoods. Others randomly approached young adults in public spaces and tried to recruit them (see Appendix 2 – Recruitment Script). We also publicized the study through a classified advertisements website called Gumtree, similar to Craigslist. The posted ads for the study included questions about the prospective participants’ age (between 20 -30) and location (living in Cape Town) to direct attention to the target population. The ad encouraged them to respond to the post if they were interested in sharing their opinions about the lives and relationships of young adults in South Africa during a 90-minute interview. Information about compensation and confidentiality were included.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: 1) were 20 – 30 years old; 2) spoke English, isiXhosa or Afrikaans; 3) were a South African citizen; 4) identified as Black/African, Coloured, or White (three of South Africa’s four recognized Population Groups); and 5) had some secondary education. Potential study participants were excluded if they did not meet all of the inclusion
criteria. Prospective participants were also excluded if they appeared to be under the influence of a controlled substance at the time of the scheduled interview or focus group discussion. Certainly, young adults had to be willing to participate in the study, able to provide oral consent to enter or continue the study, and for the study to use their data.

One hundred and twenty participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. Research assistants typically approached young adults in the social spaces identified above to recruit them for the study. They would explain in English, isiXhosa or Afrikaans the purpose of the study and what participation entailed. If young adults were interested in participating, research assistants would complete a contact information form (Appendix 3) and indicate the young adult’s chosen pseudonym for the study, their mobile phone number and a schedule of availability for focus groups.

After prospective participants had been recruited, I contacted them via text messaging or WhatsApp, a popular instant messaging application widely used in South Africa, to schedule a screening interview. During this initial contact, I made clear to young adults that the screening interview was a part of the research and ensured that they assented to participate in this initial stage of the process. All prospective research participants had some fluency in English and, therefore I conducted all screening interviews. The purpose of the screening interviews originally was to assess young adults’ ability to substantively contribute to focus group discussions and recruit the desired demographic composition of the target population. However, these informal conversations turned out to be a rich form of data collection.

I described these initial meetings with prospective participants as a short, casual conversation to share information with them about the study and for me to get to know them. Most meetings took place in neutral spaces - public libraries and malls – in the neighborhoods where
they lived, but for those unable to travel to public spaces, we met in their homes. Traveling to a variety of areas throughout Cape Town for these meetings allowed me to witness firsthand that despite 20 years of state policies to achieve social integration, apartheid-era practices of race-based spatial and economic segregation are still firmly in place in Cape Town. Except for university students who lived on campus, nearly all young adults resided in racially and economically segregated communities. Moreover, university students often shared during group discussions that they and their classmates often self-segregate along race and class lines in peer groups and social interactions. Traveling from downtown, the center of commerce and cosmopolitan life, to disenfranchised communities often took over an hour using multiple forms of transportation; and this helped me to understand better the distinct and unequal worlds that young adults inhabit.

When we met, I would offer to order them a drink and break the ice by sharing with them my professional background working in youth development and sexual and reproductive health, and providing an overview of the study. Eventually, after we had established some rapport, I would ask young adults to tell me about themselves. These conversations were at times short, and young adults shared a little about their background and current academic or career pursuits. Other times, we would sit for over an hour if they chose to divulge their often painful and difficult life story. Regardless of their approach, I listened attentively and allowed them to share. Almost all young adults screened were invited to participate in focus groups discussions. Only a handful was screened out due to the exclusion criteria or because their personality traits did not seem well suited for a group discussion that required participants to respect viewpoints different from their own. For example, a prospective participant shared that he worked in youth development and spent much of his time mentoring young people to improve their quality of life. He was eager to join the focus group so he could share his knowledge with and guide fellow participants. Several times I
explained the purpose of the group discussion was for everyone to speak about their perspectives on the research topics, yet it was clear that the young man was mostly interested in serving in a leadership capacity in the group. At the conclusion of screening interviews, I explained the next steps for scheduling the focus group and logistical information. Immediately after the meetings or while in transit, I completed a Screening Questionnaire (Appendix 4) for each potential participant and captured the key themes from the meeting in fieldnotes. Often young adults would refer to what they had shared with me during these initial conversations during the focus group discussions, however, to protect their privacy I would not personally initiate these subsequent conversations in a group space.

Table 2 presents the sample for screening interviews. Seventy-seven young men and women participated in informal screening interviews, and I collected demographic information and fieldnotes for them. Participants represented a variety of social positions including university students, small business owners, social service workers, the unemployed, manual laborers, workers in informal economies, atheists, religious devotees, single parents, married, divorced, and those not in a relationship. Of the young adults screened, 51 took part in single- and mixed-sex focus group discussions. Loss to follow-up was primarily a result of scheduling conflicts, loss of interest, and communication and transportation issues. Two participants who were screened were deemed unsuitable for focus group discussions, and three were ineligible because they were born and raised in other African countries.
Table 2. Focus Groups - Screening Interviews Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B/High (7)</td>
<td>B/Low (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C/High (8)</td>
<td>C/Low (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W/High (10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key
Racial Group – B: Black, C: Coloured, W: White
Class Status – High: Completed Matric; some Tertiary Education; Low: Did Not Matric; some Job Training

Sampling

The target population for this project was young-adult men and women (20 – 30 years) who live, study, work and socialize in Cape Town, South Africa. For focus groups, I used purposive sampling to capture diversity within this population across the axes of gender, race, and class, which are salient and socially-relevant axes of privilege and disadvantage in the country. Focus groups were stratified by gender (men/women), race (Black/Coloured/White – three of four official racial categories in South Africa) and level of educational attainment (did not complete secondary education, some job training / completed secondary and some tertiary education). The sampling strategy reflected the study’s intersectional approach.

Focus groups took place in sequential stages with some participants involved in multiple stages. Table 3 presents the final sample for focus group discussions. The 1st stage (single-sex groups) included a total of 51 participants in 11 focus groups stratified by gender, race, and level of educational attainment. In the 2nd stage, a subsample of 25 participants from the 1st stage participated in five mixed-sex focus groups stratified by race and level of educational attainment.

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8 In South Africa, there are a variety of job training options which, include everything from free one-day job readiness training, certificate courses in office skills and manual trades, and semi-skilled degree programs.
9 I conducted one single-sex focus group discussion with each cell (sub-population across gender, race and class groups) represented in Table 3 with the exception of White women with high class status. Due to scheduling conflicts, I conducted two single-sex group discussions with this sub-population.
The sample size of 17 focus group discussions attempts to balance data quality with economic and resource limitations in the capacity to collect and analyze data. Study participants were selected to capture a broad range of perspectives on the research topics.

### Table 3. Focus Group Discussion Final Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Stage Single-sex Groups</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Sample Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B/High (5)</td>
<td>B/Low (4)</td>
<td>B/High (4)</td>
<td>B/Low (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C/High (7)</td>
<td>C/Low (4)</td>
<td>C/High (3)</td>
<td>C/Low (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W/High (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>W/High (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2nd Stage Mixed-Sex Groups</th>
<th>Mixed-sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B/High (4)</td>
<td>B/Low (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key**
- Racial Group – B: Black, C: Coloured, W: White
- Class Status – High: Completed Matric; some Tertiary Education; Low: Did Not Matric; some Job Training

**Single-sex Focus Group Discussions**

Venue: Focus groups took place in private meeting rooms in public libraries and community centers, and on college campuses. I ensured that the meeting locations were convenient for study participants and allowed for easy interaction and discussion of the research topics. I offered and provided transportation for participants to and from the meeting locations.

Group Facilitation: Focus groups were moderated by a team of trained facilitators with strong communication skills and some research experience. Each team consisted of a primary moderator responsible for facilitating focus group discussions and an assistant moderator responsible for taking notes of the order in which participants spoke and observations of group dynamics. I was present at all focus group discussions to coordinate logistics, obtain consent, at times moderate discussions, and observe and take notes on group interactions. Even when not
moderating a discussion, I often asked participants probing questions to clarify responses or delve deeper into the most relevant research topics. Most participants selected to have the focus groups conducted in English, and the remaining discussions were conducted in isiXhosa and Afrikaans, two languages commonly spoken in Cape Town. Given that I am not fluent in either isiXhosa or Afrikaans, research assistants moderated group discussions in these languages. During these focus groups, I observed and took notes on group interactions among study participants.

Obtaining Consent and Protecting Confidentiality: Upon arriving at the meeting venue, each study participant was assigned an individual group number, which they were asked to display throughout the group discussion. Participants were offered refreshments and were given a written copy of the consent form to read in the language of their choice. Nearly all participants requested an English language consent form (Appendix 5). To maintain confidentiality, I decided to use an oral consent process with a waiver of documentation of informed consent. I reviewed the consent form with each participant individually, and all focus group participants provided voluntary informed consent to participate in the study. I signed and dated each consent form indicating that consent was obtained. At the beginning of the discussion, participants were asked again to provide oral consent to participate so that it could be captured on the audio recording. To maintain confidentiality, research assistants who served as focus group moderators were not involved in participant recruitment. Thus, they were only able to identify study participants by the number assigned to young women and men during the group discussion.

Discussion Logistics: Semi-structured focus group discussions began with a brief overview of the study purpose and a reminder of voluntary consent and efforts to maintain confidentiality. Focus group moderators started the conversation with broad questions and asked young adults to describe their views on South African society today. This topic typically led to a boisterous
discussion of the most pressing social and economic problems facing the country. This particular subject was not overly contentious within each group and allowed participants to build rapport with one another. From here, moderators typically moved the conversation to hear participants’ perceptions of young adults’ lives in South Africa and probing about perceived lifestyle differences across the axes of gender, race and class. The third main area of discussion was young-adult sexual relationships. Participants were allowed to discuss the research topics in any order they preferred. On average, participants spent at least half of the conversation discussing relationships.

Moderators were equipped with a detailed focus group guide (Appendix 6) but were encouraged to allow participants to take the conversation in a direction they saw fit as long as the discussion was somewhat relevant to the research topics. Some discussions would continue uninterrupted for over 10 minutes which allowed for consensus or divergence in participants’ views and experiences to emerge. Other times the moderators and I would probe to clarify viewpoints or explore if there were alternative beliefs on an issue. During their first few focus groups, moderators typically asked questions that were outlined in the guide, while I would delve deeper to understand how something that was interesting to participants but seemingly unrelated to the research was linked to how they perceived their lives and relationships. For example, during a focus group discussion among Black men who were university students, a few participants referred to young adults living in modern times as a “lost generation”. During a break in the conversation, I asked why a group of relatively successful young men would describe their age-cohort and the people around them as lost and disaffected. Their responses contributed to understanding the gap between young adults’ expectations of transformation in the post-apartheid era and their lived experience of rights.

Often, relationships were a sensitive topic and quite difficult to discuss. There was never a
time when a participant asked to leave the discussion, but there were some emotional moments in some groups. Assuming a discussion on sexual relationships might be emotional and challenging, all moderators concluded discussions on a positive note by asking participants about the benefits of relationships and what opinion leaders could do to improve these relationships. Young adults were very responsive to discussing problem-solving strategies and nearly all group discussions ended on an upbeat note.

Debriefing: The focus groups were scheduled for two hours, but most went over because of participants’ desire to continue a conversation. After the discussion, had ended, each young adult received monetary compensation of 200 Rand (approximately $16 at the time the fieldwork was conducted) for their participation. After participants left the meeting space, the moderators and I met for 10 -15 minutes for a debriefing session where I asked them their views on the discussion and major themes that had surfaced. These conversations were useful across the board but especially for discussions that took place in Afrikaans and isiXhosa since I am not fluent in these languages. During those meetings, I would also provide feedback to moderators on their facilitation style and note areas for improvement. All debriefing sessions were audio recorded, summarized in fieldnotes, and used in analysis.

*Mixed-sex Focus Group Discussions*

Kitzinger (1995) notes that homogenous group composition is a way to capitalize on the shared experiences of participants in focus group discussions. Yet, Rupenthal and colleagues (2005) stress that diversity within focus groups allows for a wider range topics and perspectives to surface. To further explore the research topics among a diverse sample of research participants, I conducted mixed-sex focus group discussions across race and class categories. This approach allowed for a more nuanced examination of the relational and intersectional construction of young adults’
masculine and feminine ideals. I paid particular attention to how gender, race and class surfaced in conversations in relation to discussions of negotiation of gendered power in relationships.

The process of conducting mixed-sex group discussions was in many ways quite similar to the single-sex groups. The primary difference was the gendered composition of the groups and types of questions posed during the discussions. A few of the participants from each single-sex group were invited to participate in the mixed sex discussions. I sampled participants who were expressive in the single-sex groups and who reflected both convergent and divergent views. I obtained consent again from all young women and men who participated in mixed-sex focus groups.

Mixed-sex focus group guides were revised based on preliminary analysis of single-sex focus group transcripts. Some of the new topics that surfaced across all groups were: South African politics, social integration, modern masculinities and femininities, and what constitutes abuse in sexual relationships. I customized guides for each mixed-sex group that included specific themes that surfaced from single-sex groups in a particular demographic category (i.e., Black, college-educated women and men). The mixed-sex group guides also incorporated de-identified participant quotes from the single-sex groups across all demographic categories. This strategy allowed participants a glimpse into other single-sex groups and an opportunity to compare and reflect on their responses. Participants were notified in advance that quotes from these conversations would be shared and provided permission. Sharing quotes led to lively conversations and debates about intra- and inter-group similarities and differences in lifestyles that were at times attributed to the distinct experiences of young adults in specific social locations at the intersection of gender, race and class.

My comparative analysis of single- and mixed-sex focus group data exposed a few
interesting methodological developments. On average, conversations in mixed-sex groups were more contentious than in single-sex discussions, but this pattern was not consistent across the board. Also, disagreement in mixed-sex groups was not always based on gendered perspectives. Some of the most heated conversations were about religion and gender. Additionally, some strong opinions about gender discrimination that surfaced in single-sex groups were absent in mixed-sex groups. At times, in mixed-sex groups, it appeared that women were hesitant to discuss the pervasiveness of gender discrimination that they and other young women experience. In other occasions, it seemed that different forms of privilege and disadvantage surfaced. An example is when gender differences took a back seat in mixed-sex groups, and discussions about race and class distinctions became more prominent.

**In-depth Interviews**

*Theory and Link to Study Aims*

Building on a broad range of opinions and perspectives expressed in focus group discussions, I conducted 21 interviews to explore in greater depth the normative and material conditions under which young adults navigate transitions to adult lives and relationships in South Africa’s post-apartheid context. Theoretical sampling was employed to select young adults for interviews building on the conceptually-relevant categories emerging from constant comparative analysis of focus group data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This sampling technique allowed me to move outside the initial sampling frame to gather information to corroborate focus group findings, elaborate unanticipated categories, and establish new categories, linkages, and interpretations (Coyne, 1997, Webb and Kevern, 2001). The inclusion of theoretical sampling supported the grounded theory methodological approach and contributed to refining the conceptual frameworks developed.
**Sampling**

To begin the theoretical sampling process, I outlined the main themes and tensions that emerged from an initial analysis of single- and mixed-sex focus group data. One of the most prominent themes was how young adults thought about gender equality in relationships and the extent to which differences in their perspectives were associated with their social location. Some of the tensions related to this theme were as follows:

- Why are some social norms and cultural scripts on gender and sexuality valued and adopted and others challenged?
- To what extent are young adults’ gender ideals for relationships aligned with social norms, and what are the social penalties for embracing ideals that contradict norms?
- How is social location associated with young adults’ gender ideals for relationships?
- How is social location associated with the distinct domains of gender equality discussed?

Another important theme was coherence between young adults’ gender ideals for relationships and their experiences negotiating power in these relationships. Key tensions related to this theme were:

- How do young women and men put the gender ideals they construct for relationships into practice? What are the challenges they face? What is the role of social location in practicing one’s ideals?
- Do young adults challenge social norms on gender in their relationships?
- How they negotiate gender power in sexual relationships?

These two themes guided the sampling strategy for and content focus of individual interviews. The purpose of interviews was to extend an exploration of the context of young adult sexual relationships from the level of ideals to actual lived experiences. Specifically, the study sought to

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10 Three domains of gender equality and power in relationships were discussed across groups: a balanced division of household labor, joint decision making, and equal financial contribution to relationship expenses between partners.
understand how young women and men resolve the aforementioned tensions in their everyday lives and relationships.

**Table 4. Interview Final Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In-depth Interviews</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th></th>
<th>Sample Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black / Middle (2)</td>
<td>Black / Striver (1)</td>
<td>Black / Working (1)</td>
<td>Black / Middle (3)</td>
<td>Black / Striver (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured / Middle</td>
<td>Coloured / Striver (2)</td>
<td>Coloured / Working (3)</td>
<td>Coloured / Middle (0)</td>
<td>Coloured / Striver (2)</td>
<td>Coloured / Working (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White / Middle</td>
<td>White / Striver (2)</td>
<td>White / Working (0)</td>
<td>White / Middle (1)</td>
<td>White / Striver (0)</td>
<td>White / Working (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key**
- Racial Group – Black: Coloured, White
- Class Status – Middle: Completed Matric; University Education; Middle-class Background
- Striver: Working on Matric or Completed Matric; University or Technical College Education; Stable Employment; Working-class Background
- Working: Did Not Matric, Working on Matric, Matric; some Vocational Training Certificate Programs; Periodically Employed or Unemployed; Working-class Background

Based on these themes, I sampled young adults based on two criteria – their social location and views on gender equality in sexual relationships. **Table 4** presents the final sample for in-depth interviews. For social location, I continued to use the axes of gender, race and class as relevant categories of privilege and disadvantage. However, during the collection of focus group data, I found educational attainment as a proxy for class status to be inadequate. For individual interviews, I broadened the determination of class status\(^\text{11}\) to incorporate the type of post-secondary training young adults received (certificate programs, technical colleges, university

\(^{11}\) Reference to class status draws on Bourdieu’s (1984) classification of social groups distinguished by their attainment of inherited and acquired capital. For the post-apartheid South African context, I’ve adapted Bourdieu’s three main social positions – dominant, middle and working class – to the following categories: middle class – ascribed inherited and obtaining acquired capital; striver class – obtaining acquired capital; working class – lacks inherited and acquired capital
education); type of employment (low/high skilled); and socioeconomic background (grew up working or middle class). This approach allowed for a more diverse study population, and I intentionally sought out two groups not well represented in focus group discussions: Whites who grew up working class, and Blacks from middle-class backgrounds.

Young adults were also sampled based on their views about gender equality. This criterion was assessed in informal conversations during screening interviews. I shared some of the themes discussed in focus groups – i.e. gender equality, human rights, sexual relationships – and asked if they would be comfortable to discuss these topics. This typically resulted in prospective interviewees sharing some of their initial thoughts on gender equality and rights. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached across various perspectives about gender equality in relationships along a spectrum from men’s dominance to gender-equitable.

The individual interview guide (Appendix 7) were developed based on analysis of single- and mixed-sex focus group data and early stages of conceptual mapping. The guide incorporated a synopsis of perspectives shared during group discussions as a point of departure for participants to discuss the research topics. The interview guide also placed greater emphasis on 1) the link between young adults' pursuit of life goals and how relationships factored into this journey, and 2) experiences of negotiating gender power in relationships. I used the same guide for all interviews. I also administered an adaptation of the Gender Equitable Men’s (GEM) scale (Pulerwitz et al., 2006) during in-depth interviews (Appendix 8). Although researchers suggest that the GEM scale inadequately captures shared norms and measures social norms change (Alexander-Scott et al., 2016, Paluck et al., 2010), it is useful to understand individual perceptions on gender-equitable beliefs and values.
Interview Logistics

Recruitment and Screening: Similar to focus group participants, interview participants were recruited by publicizing the study through a classified advertisements website called Gumtree. While this was a primary means of recruitment, prospective focus group participants who previously had scheduling conflicts but met the sampling criteria for interviews, were also invited to participate. Interview participation was restricted to young adults who did not take part in focus group discussions. Fifty young adults were recruited, and 23 were screened using the same process described for focus group discussions. The other 27 prospective participants were lost to follow-up. I conducted all recruitment and screening for in-depth interviews without the support of research assistants. I completed a Screening Questionnaire for each potential participant and captured my impressions from the conversation in fieldnotes. Of the young adults screened, 21 took part in in-depth individual interviews. I reviewed the consent form with each participant and each provided voluntary informed consent to participate in the study. I signed and dated each consent form (Appendix 9) and indicated that consent was obtained. All interviews were audio recorded.

Methodological Considerations: Many of the data collection logistics were similar for both interviews and focus group discussions. Interviews took place in the same type of venues as focus group discussions, and the processes of obtaining consent and maintaining confidentiality were similar. A significant difference was that all interviews were conducted in English, which limited the potential sampling population. This limitation to the research approach is discussed later in this chapter. I decided to conduct all interviews myself to allow for an intimate conversation about young adults’ lives and relationships that may not have been possible by including research assistants as interviewers. This approach allowed me to bring up information shared during the
screening sessions into the interviews to delve deeper into stories most relevant to the research topics. During both screening conversations and in-depth interviews, participants divulged very personal and painful accounts of their lives, including their HIV status, gender-based violence victimization and perpetration, and experiences of deprivation. Some participants mentioned that they had not shared these experiences with others in their lives for fear of stigma and judgment.

Interviews were scheduled for 60 – 90 minutes, but the majority continued for nearly two hours. Periodically, during each interview, I asked participants if they were comfortable to continue the conversation and if they needed to conclude by a certain time. Interview participants received monetary compensation of 200 rands for their participation. After interviews had concluded, I took detailed notes that outlined my views on the interview process and captured unanticipated themes that might be useful to explore in future interviews.

**Observation and Fieldnotes**

Focus group and interview data were analyzed in conjunction with numerous informal conversations and moments of observation that took place during the two and half years that I lived and worked in South Africa between 2011 and 2016. The purpose of field observation was to see and record how people live, work and socialize in Cape Town. As previously mentioned, traveling to a variety of neighborhoods throughout Cape Town to conduct fieldwork was one way in which I experienced the social and economic landscape of post-apartheid South Africa. Another was by unexpectedly living in a variety of neighborhoods in Cape Town, eight in total. In each location, I experienced how social integration, or lack thereof, occurs in a particular space, and how people in different social locations relate to one another. Throughout my time, I interacted with young adults in a wide variety of social and professional settings to document aspects of their everyday lives not captured by focus group discussions and interviews. My social encounters with young
adults ran the gamut from political rallies and student protest rallies to partying in township nightclubs and VIP sections of high-end lounges. I attended a full range of regular social events (holiday gatherings, birthday parties, initiation ceremonies, and baby showers) with friends who in many ways were, and still are, like family.

I was in South Africa during Nelson Mandela’s transition, and consequently both witnessed and participated in the country’s collective mourning. The tribute ceremonies that took place for nearly two weeks brought the country together in a manner that rarely otherwise reflected in everyday life and media reports. Mandela in many ways is an immeasurable symbol of the potential greatness of South Africa as a human rights and democratic state. His legacy is often the barometer against which the actions of all other leaders and citizens, in general, are measured. The fieldwork was likely strongly influenced by the events of this period as South Africans’ frustrations with unmet expectations of transformation became more pronounced.

An understanding of context was also achieved through numerous conversations I had with public health professionals, gender scholars and social scientists who conduct research on HIV and gender-based violence. I also shared my work and received feedback from colleagues in the Population Council’s Division of Poverty, Gender and Youth. I received valued input from colleagues at South Africa’s Medical Research Council’s Violence, Injury and Peace Research Unit (VIPRU), which hosted me to conduct research for this project from 2013 – 2014. I presented preliminary findings to my VIPRU colleagues in May 2014 and received valuable feedback.

Throughout all phases of this study and during my time living and working in South Africa, I recorded descriptive fieldnotes regularly. As previously mentioned, I systematically took fieldnotes after participant screening sessions, focus groups and interviews as well as while I traveled throughout Cape Town to meet with young adults. I also captured fieldnotes after informal
conservations with young adults, when engaging in social interactions and events that were especially noteworthy, and after meeting with colleagues. I observed and recorded social interactions among young adults in public life, specifically how they interacted across axes of difference, and how they discussed social issues including tone and use of popular discourse. In addition, I analytically coded and systematically reviewed my fieldnotes, and developed analytic memos in which I compared these informal observations to young adults’ perceptions shared during focus groups and interviews. Comparing fieldnotes with focus group and interview data allowed me to confirm or question participants’ perspectives and accounts of their experiences. This process also produced new questions that I raised during later group discussions and interviews. In addition, observation captured through fieldnotes helped me to revise and extend how I conceptualized the themes generated from this research.

**Methodological Modification**

In addition to the social categories presented, the sampling frame for focus group discussions in the approved dissertation proposal included White women and men with low educational attainment. Several months into focus group discussion recruitment, it became apparent that accessing this population would be a challenge. While small, White working-class communities exist in Cape Town, however, these communities are quite isolated and difficult to access socially. Although I made several attempts, I was unable to hire research assistants from White working-class communities where prospective participants could be recruited. Research assistants from other class and racial backgrounds tried to recruit White working-class young adults at the mall and in other public spaces but had no success. Thus, there were no focus group discussions with this sub-population. Inclusion of White working-class participants would have allowed for a nuanced examination of how they feel about transformation in South Africa, believe perceived
changes impact their lives and relationships, and position themselves relative to other sub-populations. In an attempt to gain some variation in the social and economic realities of White South Africans, I actively recruited and screened lower-middle-class White young adults for in-depth interviews and was able to recruit a few young women.

Organization and Analysis of Data

Analytic Approach

I employed grounded theory and process-centered intersectionality as analytic approaches in data analysis. As is central to grounded theory, data collection and analysis occurred concurrently to identify salient themes, produce data for theoretical sampling, and refine conceptual frameworks (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Process-centered intersectionality was incorporated to draw attention to the connections among multidimensional power relations, social and economic context, and lived experience. The multiple methods of collection and analysis allowed triangulation of findings and theory generation from data produced through diverse perspectives (Choo and Ferree, 2010).

Analytic Framework

Data analysis was structured based on Creswell and Clark’s (2007) data analysis spiral that outlines a stepwise yet iterative process of managing, memoing, classifying, interpreting, and presenting qualitative data.

Managing Data

Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, was used to manage study data, which included written transcripts, analytic memos, field note summaries, screening questionnaires, and GEM scale tabulations (Friese, 2013). I created a study-specific project in Atlas.ti and imported data sources throughout the period of fieldwork. To aid in comparative analysis, documents were
organized into ‘Document Groups’ according to document type (i.e. transcripts, fieldnotes, articles, analytic memos) and categories within each document type (i.e. mixed-sex focus group transcripts, interview transcripts). Also, I assigned documents to sub-groups based on the social location of research participants (i.e. Women participants, Working class participants). The organizing system allowed me to readily locate and isolate specific groups for analysis across the various data sources.

Reading and Memoing

A grounded theory analysis approach was carried out through multiple readings of the data and systematically documenting my reflections on the research process. I began reviewing and summarizing fieldnotes before conducting focus groups and interviews and continued this throughout the project. To prepare for mixed-sex groups and to develop guides for these discussions, I read and began analyzing single-sex focus group transcripts soon after they took place. This initial phase of analysis entailed identifying major organizing categories and searching for evidence in single-sex transcripts and field summaries to support preliminary themes. During this period, I also began capturing my reflections of emerging themes by writing detailed analytic memos to develop codes, identify patterns in the data, and define concepts used in thematic analysis. A similar process of reading, reflection and memoing took place when theoretically sampling participants for individual interviews and revising the guide for this phase of data collection. I continued to write analytic and methodological memos throughout the project, which proved extremely useful in linking and interpreting data across various sources and composing narrative sections used in dissertation writing.

Coding and Classification

The process of coding, categorizing and interpreting data across multiple sources happened
iteratively throughout different phases of data collection. I began with inductive content analysis to review focus group and interview transcripts and fieldnotes and assign codes to text segments that fit with both pre-determined and emerging themes suggested by the data. Through this process, I created an evolving coding scheme that I continuously revised while adding and merging codes through multiple readings of the data. I organized codes into groups and maintained a detailed description of the coding process and code definitions in Atlas.ti. Parallel to systematic coding using Atlas.ti, I prepared brief intra-group summaries of single- and mixed-sex transcripts describing the topics on which there was overall agreement among participants, areas where there were considerable disagreement and the source of divergent opinions. These summaries and the inductive coding of transcripts were used extensively in preparing guides for mixed-sex group discussions and theoretical sampling for individual interviews.

Following content analysis, coded data was examined to identify patterns and then reorganized and consolidated into emerging themes. Table 5 presents the key themes and dimensions of each theme that resulted from initial data categorization. Constant comparative analysis occurred by interview type (single-sex groups, mixed-sex groups, and individual interviews) and by gender, class and race groupings to examine emerging themes across intersectional social locations (the primary unit of analysis), and how themes varied across groups (Webb and Kevern, 2001). I reexamined the data by interview type to understand how participants discussed key themes in relation to gender, race and class, and if there were variations within groups and similarities across groups. I also explored when men and women offered gendered interpretations of their perspectives on the research topics as well as instances when gender receded and race- and class-based explanations surfaced. In line with an intersectional approach, it was useful to compare how single-sex versus mixed-sex group discussions shaped which particular
aspects of identity participants foregrounded in their discussions about the context of young-adult lives and relationships.

Table 5. Key Themes and Dimensions from Initial Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Themes</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>post-apartheid context</td>
<td>democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>freedom</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rights,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>crime</td>
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<td></td>
<td>social integration</td>
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<td></td>
<td>entitlement</td>
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<tr>
<td>opportunity structures</td>
<td>education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social norms about young-adult lives relationships (sources and categories)</td>
<td>family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ethnic culture</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>media</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>religion</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>modern versus tradition</td>
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<tr>
<td>young-adult lives</td>
<td>partying</td>
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<td></td>
<td>independence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>peer pressure</td>
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<td>the good life</td>
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<td></td>
<td>responsibility</td>
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<td></td>
<td>inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>young adults’ gender ideals</td>
<td>women’s feminine ideals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>women’s masculine ideals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>men’s feminine ideals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>men’s masculine ideals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>types of young-adult relationships</td>
<td>hookups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>boundary-crossing (race, class, religion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>multiple partners</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>long-term</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>single -life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>power dynamics in young-adult sexual relationships</td>
<td>dominance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>abuse</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dependence</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV and GBV policy and program interventions</td>
<td>women’s empowerment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>government policies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>gender transformation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>sexual violence prevention</td>
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<td></td>
<td>social media campaigns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Interpretation and Presentation*

The preceding stages of analysis allowed me to describe young adults' perspectives on and experiences in navigating adult lives and relationships, and establish linkages between their social location and experiences of social and economic transformation in South Africa. Yet, classification and constant comparative analysis across multiple combinations of race, class, and gender resulted
in an overwhelming amount of data. The next step was condensing analysis to the most important and relevant themes to establish a schematic map of the normative, material and discursive context in which young adult lives and relationships occur. Another important aspect of conceptual mapping was moving from describing thematic categories to explaining processes and the extent to which they varied across social location. I also attended to contradictions within young adults’ gender ideals, tensions between their ideals and experiences, and how they sought to resolve these contradictions and tensions.

With the inclusion of new information during each stage of analysis and writing, I continuously revised the conceptual framework for the project and produced individual conceptual maps for each findings chapter. Through this evolving process, I attempted to abstract from the evidence an analytic story about the processes through which, young adults experience cultural and economic transformation socially, professionally, and intimately. Figure 1 presents the final conceptual framework for the study. On the left side, contextual factors that shape young adults’ lives and relationships include human rights laws and discourse, popular discourses - gender equality, post-racialism, gendered sexual morality, and personal responsibility, cultural scripts for gender and sexuality, and structural inequalities across the axes of race, class and gender. Tensions within and between these contextual influences allow young adults to flexibly deploy them to organize their lives and sexual relationships.

In the center of Figure 1, tensions are also expressed in young adults’ discursive use and experience of rights in a context where the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice are contested. Young women and men use the language of rights to draw distinctions between their morally-justifiable beliefs and choices and those of less-favorably positioned others. Moving from center to right, young-adult gendered sexualities are a key location for the articulation of tensions at the
contextual level as they construct masculine and feminine ideals for sexual relationships. They also draw upon these factors as they use gender as a language of social critique to reinforce a gendered class hierarchy of desirability in the relationship market and to maintain their relatively favorable position within it (see Chapter Six, Table 6). Also on the right, young adults’ good life aspirations, pursued through idealized and alternative relationship pathways, reflect their experience of rights and the structural and cultural influences to which they are exposed.

At the bottom of the figure, social location is a key organizer of young adults’ life and relationship ideals and experiences. I argue that young women’s and men’s life aspirations and gender ideals for relationships are relatively similar across the axes of gender, race, and class. Further, they employ rights, popular discourses and cultural scripts to make meaning of the world and their lives, and to reinforce their beliefs and practices in relation to others. Yet, young adults’ social and economic realities are different based on their intersectional subject positions. Thus, social location shapes women’s and men’s discursive use and experience of rights broadly, and the aspects of their gendered sexualities presented. Concretely, young adults often confront different issues in relationships based on social location and despite shared life aspirations and relationship ideals. Also, there are different costs and benefits for choosing specific life and relationship pathways toward the same end goal. Intersectional social location also appears to play a role in the strategies young people develop to reconcile the distance between their ideals and aspirations on one side and their realities and experiences on the other. While a gap between ideals and reality is normal for everyone, it is typically wider, and the issues and consequences harsher, for those who are more disadvantaged across the axes of gender, race and class. This conceptual map guides the revision of existing concepts in the literature and the generation of evidence-based theory.
Assessing Rigor and Justifying Findings and Conclusions

I employed standards and criteria used to assess rigor in qualitative research to justify the findings presented and conclusions drawn in this study (Kirk and Miller, 1986). I employed a variety of strategies to enhance trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of my findings (Guba and Lincoln, 1981, Ulin et al., 2005). As I have outlined in this chapter, throughout the period of data collection and analysis I systematically documented the study procedures aligned with the approved research protocol and the methodological modifications undertaken due to issues that occurred in the field. The multiple methods of data collection and
analysis employed, and my extended engagement living and working in South Africa contribute
to ensuring that the findings and my interpretations credibly represent the dynamic context in
which young adults negotiate adult lives and relationships (Fern, 2001). Triangulation of the
multiple data sources, debriefing with research assistants, and allowing participants to reflect on
the opinions shared by their peers contributed to the reliability and dependability of findings. To
achieve confirmability, in the findings chapters, I offer rich descriptions of participants' perceptions and experiences to support my interpretations and conclusions. Additionally, I engaged in reflexive inquiry as described in the following section. Lastly, the transferability of study findings and my conceptual and empirical contributions to HIV and gender-based violence structural intervention research are detailed in the literature review and conclusion chapters.

**Positionality**

Standpoint theory suggests that all groups speak from and share their own partial, situated knowledge based on their social location within a complex web of relations of power and inequality (Collins, 2002). My social identity as a middle-aged, middle-class, heterosexual, African American woman certainly shapes the perspective from which I have designed this research project, enables and inhibits particular kinds of insights, and affects how I constructed my analysis. These aspects of my social identity, along with my status as a doctoral student and gender and health scholar, impacted the process of data collection and analysis in complex ways.

Certain aspects of my self-presentation facilitated access to the target population while others likely served as barriers. As previously mentioned, my first face-to-face meeting with the majority of participants was through informal screening interviews. During these sessions and throughout the period of fieldwork I consciously worked to remain open, non-judgmental and non-reactive as young women and men shared both ordinary and deeply personal accounts of their lives.
and relationships. Naturally, when participants shared painful experiences, I tried to respond with empathy. The majority of the conversations were relaxed and sociable. Another decisive dimension of self-presentation was code-switching, a technique I used frequently given the diversity of the study population. During conversations, I noticed that I consciously played up aspects of my identity that were relatable to the study participants present to create a space for them to share their perspectives and experiences comfortably. However, throughout the period of fieldwork, my self-presentation was authentic, and I did not attempt to manipulate certain types of responses from research participants.

Drawing on feminist, postcolonial and critical race theory, my research orientation is both interpretive and political (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, Ratele et al., 2010, Williams, 1991). This work consciously included the experiences of multiply-marginalized and multiply-privileged groups (Collins, 2002, hooks, 1984). In exploring the normative, material, and discursive dimensions of South Africa’s post-apartheid context, I draw attention to the processes through which young adults construct gender ideals for sexual relationships that are informed by structural and cultural factors, and the interplay among them. I also investigate how gender, along with race and class, influence young adults’ experiences of disadvantage and privilege as they pursue life and relationship aspirations. In line with an intersectional approach, I engaged critically with these positions and assumptions throughout the research process in the interest of reflexive and accountable social inquiry (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Limitations of the Research

Study Design

The comparative and multi-group nature of the project assumed somewhat fixed social categories of race, class, and gender. To capture these "subject positions," young adults were sampled based
on their self-identified gender, racial group and level of educational attainment. As previously stated, measuring class status by whether participants matriculated from secondary school proved to be an inadequate proxy for class standing in the focus group discussions. This was evident by substantial variation in socioeconomic resources and outcomes, within and between groups that was partly attributed to other dimensions of class status. To address this issue, for individual interviews the determination of class status was broadened to incorporate the type of post-secondary training young adults received, type of employment; and their socioeconomic background. Despite this modification, the study adhered to an intersectional analysis approach by examining between and within group differences in perceptions and experiences, as well as similarities across groups.

When conducting preliminary fieldwork in 2011, I discussed my plan to conduct mixed focus groups across the axes of sex, race and class and was discouraged by several local researchers to have mixed-race and mixed-class groups. The perception was that lived experience between racial groups and class categories was too different, and fruitful and open dialogue about the research topics could not be achieved. However, the omission of mixed-race groups, in particular, was quite apparent to participants and several questioned why they were only invited to have discussions about the research topics with people within their self-identified racial group. Quite a few participants indicated that they would have appreciated a frank conversation about South African society and the lives and relationships of young adults with people who they did not regularly come in contact with in their everyday lives. Given the tensions that arose in some groups where marked class variation was apparent despite similar levels of education, it is likely that these

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12 Socioeconomic background was determined by: the type of neighborhood in which young adults group up (suburb, township, town); and the type of secondary schooling they received (local public, model C, bordering, private)
conversations would have required careful facilitation to ensure that participants could share their honest views while reducing the risk of them experiencing emotional distress. I believe the inclusion of mixed-class and mixed-race focus groups would have strengthened the project by allowing direct interactions between variously-situated young adults.

My emphasis on exploring the context in which young adults talk about gendered power in heterosexual relationships was appropriate given perceived conceptual and empirical contributions of this project to HIV and GBV structural intervention research. However, this focus limited a thorough examination of how gendered power is experienced in young adult same-sex relationships. Research participants who identified as homosexual and bi-sexual were included in the study although I did not consider this aspect of their social location in the sampling strategy and I did not analyze it in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts. Further, since heterosexuality is in many ways constituted in relation to same-sex sexuality, excluding the latter obscures some of the otherwise invisible parameters of heterosexuality such as heterosexual privilege.

**Data Collection**

Before commencing fieldwork, I considered my limited language skills as a likely challenge to data collection given South Africa’s linguistic diversity. South Africa has 11 official languages, and English is the most commonly used by urban young adults in their social and professional experiences in post-apartheid institutional contexts. The majority of young adults in Cape Town are fluent in English even if it is not their native language. To address this challenge, I hired multilingual research assistants to conduct focus group discussions, and participants decided during screening interviews the language they preferred to speak. In general, I feel this strategy worked well for focus group discussions. However, there were times when reading translated
transcripts of discussions conducted in isiXhosa and Afrikaans that I felt research assistants did not probe in areas that in my opinion were clearly relevant to the research topics. In preparation for mixed group discussions, we reviewed single-sex group transcripts, and I highlighted areas where they should have asked clarifying questions. As I mentioned, I conducted all individual interviews in English, which limited the potential sampling population but allowed for an intimate conversation that might not have been possible by including research assistants. It is likely that other aspects of participants’ stories were silenced due to my language limitations.

Another perceived challenge was response bias due to interviewer effects. Common in all qualitative research, social identity characteristics of the researcher influence how participants present themselves in face-to-face interactions and the information they share. Since social identity is multiply-constituted, it is impossible to disaggregate the specific aspects of an interviewer or group facilitator’s identity that may bias participants’ social performance. Other research suggests that there are no consistent patterns in how a researcher’s social identity influences research participants’ responses (Schwartz, 2000, Wellings et al., 2000). Based on findings from preliminary fieldwork, I hired a diverse team of research assistants to recruit prospective study participants and facilitate focus group discussions. Data analysis did not reveal any clear patterns of response bias due to interviewer effects.

A related concern was that participants would express attitudes and report practices that complied with community-level social norms, and findings in this study indicate that social desirability bias was likely present. Across groups, both men and women participants stated that some support for restrictive gender scripts for women and men were prevalent amongst their peers, but that they did not hold these views. For example, in a group of college-educated Coloured women, participants shared that transactional sexual relationships were quite prevalent on campus.
However, everyone in the group said that they were in stable, loving relationships or single by choice, and spoke with disdain about women who "sell themselves." Interestingly, in several groups the negative stereotype of Coloured women as sexually promiscuous surfaced. This made me wonder to what extent the intersectional social location of college-educated Coloured women shape the sexual identities and practices they construct to challenge negative sexual stereotypes. In the findings chapters, I examine contradictions between young adults' gender equitable ideals for relationships and some of their negative opinions about young women's sexual freedom.

**Data Analysis**

As this chapter illustrates, the data analysis strategy and procedures were quite extensive and complex. However, one source of data – focus group dynamics and non-verbal behavior and interaction among focus group participants – was captured during data collection but not analyzed. During the initial phases of analysis, it became apparent that my research assistants and I had collected a vast amount of data from various sources and I had to decide which sources would be most useful to answer the research questions for my dissertation project. Understanding the source of divergent opinions shared within groups was important, and I feel much of this was detailed in the written transcripts and during debriefing sessions. The detailed notes on group dynamics captured by the assistant focus group moderators were not referenced for this project, though I hope to incorporate these documents into future analyses.

While this study primarily contributes conceptually to social science research on gender and sexuality, it may also have implications for HIV and gender-based violence intervention research. In many ways, South Africa is similar to other countries in the region that have worked to prevent HIV and GBV through right-based norms change and address social and economic inequality. However, Cape Town's racial diversity, and the distinct tensions that surface because
of it, makes it an outlier in the region and may limit the generalizability of my findings to other urban contexts throughout Africa. Still, I believe that similar tensions along the axes of ethnicity and religion are quite prevalent in these urban centers and might be comparable to how racialization intersects gender and class othering in Cape Town.

Institutional Authorization and Research Ethics

The dissertation project was reviewed and approved by the University of South Africa (UNISA) College of Graduate Studies’ Research Ethics Committee and Columbia University’s Institutional Review Board. UNISA formally approved the study on November 15, 2013 (Appendix 10) and Columbia University on November 17, 2013 (Appendix 11). I include the study instruments in the appendices. The study guides and consent forms were translated into isiXhosa and Afrikaans. I completed all required responsible conduct of research training courses and ensured that research assistants on the project were trained in human subjects’ protection and required to maintain self-reflexivity and cultural sensitivity.

The possibility of any research-related risks to study participants was minimal. Discussion about sexual relationships at times elicited an emotional response from study participants. All study participants were informed, verbally and in writing, that they could refuse to answer any question and withdraw from study at any time, even after their consent was obtained. They were also reminded that they could discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of compensation to which they were entitled.

To protect participants' privacy, screening questionnaires and other study documents did not include personal identifying information. Instead, these documents only displayed participants assigned study identification number. I stored contact information sheets that included identifying information (a participant's pseudonym and mobile phone number) in a securely locked file cabinet.
separate from hard copies of other data. As previously described, consent forms describing the study were read to all participants in the language of their choice and then given to them to keep if they desired. Once participants had agreed to participate, oral consent was obtained, and they were not required to sign the consent form.
CHAPTER FOUR – YOU CANNOT LEGISLATE FREEDOM AND EQUALITY: YOUNG ADULTS’ EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Democracy is about empowerment. Now together we can begin to make the equality of education the right of all our children; to begin to remove homelessness, hunger, and joblessness; to begin to restore land to those who were deprived by force and injustice; to break the cycle of stagnation in our economy.
Nelson Mandela’s address to the plenary session of the Multi-Party Negotiations Process, 1993

Human rights scholars (Christiansen, 2006, Mutua, 1997, Risse and Sikkink, 1999) often herald South Africa's transition to a democratic state as a quintessential success story of the global human rights project. Although many other political democracies have formed during this period, South Africa is unique in several ways. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights served as a foundation on which the anti-apartheid movement was waged and the basis for the equal protection and non-discrimination clauses outlined in the African National Congress' (ANC) 1955 Freedom Charter. South Africa's current Constitution and Bill of Rights draw extensively on international human rights doctrine and incorporate both traditional political and civil rights as well as second generation social, economic and cultural rights. Moreover, the Constitutional Court has consistently ruled that social and economic rights are fully and directly justiciable. Despite this unparalleled commitment to rights as a political, social and economic development strategy, as Mutua (2008) notes, “a rights-based revolution has been unable to fundamentally transform deeply embedded social dysfunction and the perverse legacy of apartheid.”

In this chapter, I explore young adults’ perspectives on social and economic transformation

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13 The social, economic and cultural rights enshrined in South Africa’s constitution include rights to education, food, health, land, water, housing, social security, and environmental rights. Additionally, South Africa’s Bill of Rights includes special protections for children and the right to equality and to be free from all forms of violence from either public or private sources.
in the post-apartheid era and the factors they believe inhibit their realization of rights. First, I describe the social and economic disparities that constitute post-apartheid South Africa, and young adults’ divergent views on the causes and consequences of what they perceive as a lack of progress in achieving socio-economic equality and inclusion. I discuss how rights laws and discourse that coexist alongside popular discourses of personal responsibility, gendered sexual morality, and post-racialism are selectively deployed by young adults as a language of social critique. Young adults express that democratic freedoms have in large part failed to address entrenched inequalities, and in some cases, have made social and economic conditions worse and contributed to irresponsible attitudes and practices among their peers. The next section examines young adults’ experiences of rights and inequality and their ideals for the practice of rights in intimate relationships. To conclude, I argue that in a context of competing structural and cultural influences, young adults’ perceptions of rights express their disappointment that democracy has yet to bring forth the social and economic transformation for which they had hoped.

Unfulfilled Promises of Transformation

Social Equality Unrealized

Given the sweeping vision of liberal democracy promoted in South Africa over the past two decades, young adults’ expectations of human rights as a mechanism for social and economic change are very high. Study participants anticipated that laws and policies brought forth by South Africa’s groundbreaking Constitution and Bill of Rights would pave the way for greater social inclusion and a reduction in inequities across race, class, and gender. In essence, they believed that democracy and rights would redistribute social and economic privilege along these axes, and thus improve structural outcomes for those historically disadvantaged under apartheid. Moreover, they
envisioned that the implementation of rights-based policies would reflect the complexity of South Africa’s heterogeneous and culturally-diverse society.

Unfortunately, social indicators demonstrate that the equitable society envisioned for post-apartheid South Africa has not yet been realized. Over the past ten years, South Africa's gross domestic product has steadily decreased and is currently at the lowest point since 1994 (UN, 2016). Despite high rates of public investment in education and over 90% primary and secondary school enrollment across all racial groups, 50% of Whites enter tertiary education, compared to less than 15% of Coloureds and Blacks (BrandSA, 2016). Over the past ten years, young adult unemployment has risen to almost 50%, with striking racial and gender disparities among young adults not engaged in higher education or employment (SSA, 2016). In early 2016, rates for young adults not involved in employment, education or vocational training were highest among Black (56%) and Coloured (52%) women, followed by Black (48%) and Coloured (37%) men, and lowest among White women (21%) and men (14%) (SSA, 2016).

Young adults were deeply distressed about the lack of social and economic transformation in their country. Across race, class, and gender, participants expressed that despite rights-based laws and policies, economic inequality appears to be widening. As one young man shared,

Definitely, laws have changed, but I don’t know how much society has actually changed. There are obviously no segregation laws so people can and do mix, but there’s still that big divide between those underprivileged living in Khayelitsha [a Black township] and us living in town [middle-class neighborhoods]. And it is a racial divide still. People who were marginalized in the past, it’s really difficult to get out of poverty, like health care is not as good in those areas, education is like nowhere near what previously privileged people are getting. At the moment, the gap looks to be widening because it’s just getting worse. (single-sex FGD14, White Man, Middle Class, Postgrad Student, Age 23)

14 FGD – focus group discussion
A more troubling concern is that the policies themselves are not progressive enough to effectively bring forth economic justice. As a participant expressed,

We have a young democracy. Twenty years is too short to even **grasp** things like equality and fairness. I agree with you that’s what Nelson Mandela wanted, but a lot of people are very angry that he did not fight for the land, that’s why nationalization is such an important thing in our country right now. For us to speak about economic liberation we need redistribution of wealth, it needs to happen appropriately, and policy and implementation are quite important processes.

*(mixed-sex FGD, Coloured Man, Middle Class, Postgrad Student, Age 23)*

In the early 1990s, a primary area of contention during South Africa’s political settlement negotiations was how best to bolster the country’s diminished financial markets and deliver economic restitution to disenfranchised communities. Scholars (Mutua, 1997, Sarkin, 1999, Spitz and Chaskalson, 2000, Allen, 2006) noted that during these negotiations, the African National Congress (ANC) conceded its redistributive economic policies in the face of mounting pressure to align with global financial powers that favored trickle-down economics as a preferred development strategy. Unfortunately, this approach has not benefitted the majority of South Africans who remain at the margins and have grown increasingly impatient with the pace of economic transformation brought forth by ANC policies. A testament of their frustration is the rising popularity of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), a recent breakaway party of the ANC, whose platform centers on economic redistribution and nationalization of corporate assets.

South Africans also feel that ineffectual policy implementation by the ANC leaders, who are often portrayed in popular media as systematically corrupt and at times incompetent, has hindered social and economic transformation. Study participants, across social groups, view government officials as formerly-honorable anti-apartheid struggle leaders who form a new corrupt Black élite in South Africa and have done little to change the conditions of the Black
majority that remains economically marginalized. In a group discussion among working-class Black men, the views of government were highly unfavorable.

Another problem in South Africa is the issue of corruption, and it starts with the people at the top. With regards to money, they spend it alone there at the top levels of government; it never reaches us.

*(single-sex FGD, Black Man, Working Class, Working on Matric, Unemployed, Age 21)*

A group of working-class Coloured women echoed similar sentiments about how government corruption filters down to the local level where police in their neighborhoods often work with gangsters for personal profit. The majority of participants expressed disgust about a lack of government accountability in rights-based policy implementation, as evidenced by frequent media reports of political scandals, mismanagement of public funds and a lack of quality service delivery.

**Children’s Rights Contested**

In addition to sharing their perspectives on the causes of a lack of economic progress in the post-apartheid era, young adults also spoke passionately about deeply-held reservations to particular rights and freedoms enshrined in South Africa’s Constitution. By far the most discussed among these rights was the broad scope of children’s rights and specifically corporal punishment in schools and the home, and girls’ sexuality. Children, as a vulnerable group, are offered special protections under South Africa’s Bill of Rights from maltreatment, neglect, abuse and degradation. The Constitutional Court has prohibited corporal punishment in schools and religious institutions, and stated that children’s rights supersede the religious and cultural convictions of their parents and guardians. These policies have stirred passionate public debate in South Africa with disapproval of state intervention on one side and on the other hand children’s rights’ advocates have called for a full ban on corporal punishment even in the home.
In nearly every focus group and interview with Black and Coloured women, they discussed children's rights, typically about the causes of entrenched adverse socioeconomic outcomes for historically disadvantaged communities. The consensus was that children’s rights have as a pretense to protect children from abusive adults, but in practice, they empower children to make harmful decisions about their lives and punish adults for responsible parenting and teaching. In focus groups with Black and Coloured striver-class women, many of whom worked with children professionally, participants spoke vehemently about their frustrations with the broad application of children’s rights in South African society.

They don’t know their schoolwork, but they can read the Constitution to you. There’s this one guy in class; I said, ‘can you please stop [misbehaving]’ and he sucked his teeth. I ignored him, and he was going on and on. I said to him I am going to throttle you! And he said ‘you can't touch me.’ I said who says I can’t, and he says ‘the Constitution says.’

*(single-sex FGD, Coloured Woman, Striver Class, Undergrad Student, Age 27)*

Children have more rights than anybody else... We have children who took rights into their heads, and they misuse them. When they go to the police station, the parent has no rights; the child has rights. They forget that at the end of the day we as the parents sit with the responsibility of the children and if they mess up, we are supposed to take care of them, they [the authorities] are not there at that moment. My mom used to say, ‘if I hit you and you go to the police, you must bring them here. I'm going to tell them to take you with them, so they can take care of you because I'm not going to stay here with a mother in the house, I'm going to stay with a child.'

*(single-sex FGD, Black Woman, Striver Class, Some College, Career Path Employment, Age 26)*

Participants also felt that children’s rights protections authorize preteens to learn about sexual and reproductive health and rights, which young women believe condone early adolescent sexual activity and decision-making. Women repeatedly spoke about the differences between how they were raised and how children are raised today. Several women said it was not until their late teens that they understood fully about human reproduction. They felt that preteens exposure to this
information through life orientation classes\textsuperscript{15} in school offers them a license to have sex. Furthermore, they felt that rights-based policies give children more control over sexual decision-making than their parents, which is particularly harmful as it significantly restricts adolescent girls' life chances. As one young woman stated,

Back then if you made a child under the age of 18 pregnant it was molestation; you'd go to jail. But now the mother will go to the court to make a case, and the child will say 'you don't tell me what to do, it's my life.' You're 13 years old; your life is only starting, and now you're sitting here with a baby. And your \textbf{whole life} is ahead of you, and you can't do anything because you have a baby. That's how things go on in our community.

\textit{(Interview, Coloured Woman, Working Class, Matric, Unemployed, Age 28)}

Through one lens, these rights’ contestations can be read as emerging adults’ adoption of cultural and religious scripts on the value of generational power hierarchies. However, it is important to note the gendered dimension of children’s rights criticism – both who is contesting and what is being contested. Another interpretation is to see these objections as Black and Coloured women, many of whom have direct responsibility for caring for children, repudiation against the state’s perceived overreach in applying equal rights protection to children. They believe these rights have in part caused the proliferation of teen pregnancy and parenting, gangsterism, and secondary school dropout rates in their low-resourced communities. In making this link, they are trying to make sense of the fact that 20 years into democracy many children in their communities have worse socioeconomic outcomes than their parents who lived under apartheid. Still, young adults’ objections to children’s rights, specifically as they relate to teen pregnancy and parenting, are aligned with social norms that encourage policing women’s and girls’ sexual practices.

Participants spoke against preteens’ exposure to sexual and reproductive health and rights

\textsuperscript{15} Life Orientation is a compulsory subject in South Africa’s secondary school curriculum. It covers six topics: development of the self in society, social and environmental responsibility, democracy and human rights, careers and career choices, study skills, and physical education. The curriculum includes modules on gender inequality and sexual health. (RSA 2011)
information, which they perceive as endorsing sexual activity. Interestingly, there was no mention of the sexual practices of adolescent boys and how teen pregnancy and parenting impacts their life chances and choices.

Young women’s objection to the scope of children rights protections – expressly limited disciplining practices and preteen girls’ sexual freedom – also stems from concerns about the objectives and consequences of transformation in the new South Africa. They fear children’s rights have allowed freedoms that upend generational power relations that they consider foundational in a path towards upward social mobility. In their view, these freedoms foster a “slacker” mentality among adolescents in their communities who choose to engage in morally-objectionable behavior. In discussions on regulating the sexual practices of young teenage girls to further their life chances, they employ gendered sexual morality discourse to support their arguments. Yet, young adult women also object when society judges their premarital sexual practices using gendered double standards derived from the same discourses on gender and sexuality (see Chapter Five).

**Race-based Affirmative Action Contested**

Affirmative action is another hotly-debated rights-based social policy in South African society. The Constitution’s equal protection clause establishes a foundation for policies to address racial discrimination that was cemented under apartheid and colonial rule. Historically-disadvantaged groups recognized by the state include non-whites (Black Africans, Coloureds, and Asians), women, and people with disabilities. The state's primary justification for affirmative action policies is to remediate and compensate for historical disadvantage, and secondarily to address current discriminatory practices, promote social integration, and stimulate economic growth. Affirmative action is applied to education, specifically tertiary education, and employment policies through
redistributive mechanisms. Additionally, Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) is a policy that seeks to further economic opportunities for non-whites through equity ownership in private companies, skills development, and workplace hiring practices in both public and private businesses.

Although affirmative action policies seek to advance equality in South Africa, in this study White and Coloured young adults, across class categories, frame it as an unjust race-based quota system. They feel it offers education and employment opportunities mostly to undeserving and unqualified Blacks. Following are a few opinions shared by participants across gender, race, and class.

Like university entrance… I can be a Coloured person coming from the same school as a White and Black person, getting the same marks and applying for the same degree. Yet the Black person will have a better chance than the Coloured person who will have a better chance than the White person, which is really unfair. At the end of the day, we're all just three people applying for the same degree and working our butts off at the same level yet you’re looking at colour. It’s really quite sad because you want to think we’re just human beings. (single-sex FGD, Coloured Woman, Striver Class, Undergrad Student, Age 22)

As White males, we’re at the end of the ladder, the bottom. It’s quite difficult for young White men trying to enter the job place because with the transition there's a lot of young Black guys who’ve got the same degree. (single-sex FGD, White Man, Middle Class, Postgrad Student, Age 23)

Those who oppose affirmative action feel that social and economic policies predicated on racial classifications are antithetical to the philosophy of equality and fairness that signify South Africa's post-apartheid era. One argument is that it serves as a form of ‘reverse apartheid’ in which Blacks receive socioeconomic privilege, Whites face discrimination and Coloureds remain in the middle as non-recipients of social and economic advancement. Another line of reasoning is that affirmative action breeds and is emblematic of a societal culture of entitlement and reliance on government for socioeconomic progress.
Participants’ views exemplify the hegemony of a post-racial ideology, a neoconservative paradigm to understand the persistence of racial inequality, in post-apartheid South Africa. Post-racialism is based upon the ideas of colorblindness, reverse discrimination and practiced victimology (Winant, 2007). Bonilla-Silva (2010) describes color-blind racism as an ideology that draws on elements of liberal thought that is used primarily by Whites to explain contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of Black culture and market dynamics. Those who adopt a colorblind stance to understand racial inequality embrace political and civic rights, but tend to favor race-neutral social and economic policies that result in the preservation of white privilege and power (Bobo et al., 1997). Most contemporary theorizing on post-racialism is limited to the U.S. context, historically constituted by a binary racial structure. South Africa’s historically tiered racial structure complicates the ways in which post-racialism is taken up or rejected at the intersection of race and class.

In this study, the most vocal opponents of affirmative action in principle were working- and striver-class Coloured men and women. In their discussions, Blacks, meaning Black Africans as a social category in the post-apartheid era, are the only beneficiaries of affirmative action. Their beliefs run contrary to affirmative action policy that includes Black Africans, Coloureds, and Asians as racial groups that were historically disadvantaged. When Coloured striver-class young adults discussed university bursaries they received and favorable hiring practices from which they benefitted, they did not link these advantages to affirmative action policies. In many ways, working- and striver-class Coloured young adults’ contestation of affirmative action is about how South Africa’s racial hierarchy has transformed since the transition to democracy. Particularly, there is a sense among Coloured South Africans of a perceived loss of social and economic status in the new South Africa which they attribute to the emergence of a Black political elite and a
burgeoning Black middle class. As Adhikari (2005) notes, during apartheid the state established a
tiered racial structure in which Coloured people served as an intermediate status between the ruling
White minority and the marginalized Black majority. He suggests that Coloured identity came to be
defined by a desire for assimilation into white privilege and respectability, and a fear of
association with perceived Black cultural and intellectual inferiority. These racial logics, still
salient in South Africa, are reflected in affirmative action discourse on Black entitlement, and
merit-based social and economic advancement.

Middle-class Coloured men\(^{16}\) in the study supported race-based affirmative action, which
is in stark contrast to striver- and working-class Coloured young adults. These divergent views are
explained in part by differences in social mobility experienced among Coloured young adults,
where those in the middle-class have grown up and primarily exist in predominantly white middle-
class social and professional spaces. In their discussions, the persistence of racial discrimination
in their interactions with professors, employers, and peers featured prominently. During a rather
heated conversation about the merits of affirmative action in a group discussion among Coloured
striver- and middle-class young adults, one man opined,

We must be very skeptical to use phrases like reverse apartheid because what we are going
through now is \textbf{nothing like what happened then}. Affirmative action and BEE and all the
other policies to strengthen Black qualifications or entrance into particular roles and
occupations, I think that was an important policy. The biggest problem was with
implementation strategies; it wasn’t necessarily the policy itself. I think policies like
affirmative action are important \textbf{still} because we still have disparity within our country. Over
half of our population is Black, 30-40 percent are Coloured, Asian, or mixed, and \textbf{10 percent
of our population is White}. And you can see obviously White people; they are the most
advantaged group \textbf{still} in our country.

\textit{(single-sex FGD, Coloured Man, Middle Class, Postgrad Student, Age 23)}

\(^{16}\) A few middle-class Coloured women were recruited for this study, however due to scheduling conflicts, none
were able to participate in focus group discussions or individual interviews.
In general, Black young adults, across class categories, challenged post-racial ideology and felt that affirmative action policies were appropriate given the persistence of entrenched social and economic inequalities in South Africa. However, proponents were concerned about ineffective affirmative action policy implementation. Others were deeply critical of affirmative action's marginal effects to address economic disparities. A common refrain was that most of the impact of these policies were evident among the Black middle-class and has not adequately reached the Black working class who make up the majority of South Africa's population. Similarly, the following quote illustrates Black young adults’ concerns that affirmative action policy implementation does not capture the nuances of privilege and disadvantage:

In some areas, you find that more women are needed; it makes sense to me that you factor in gender and race equality. I don’t think the way they allocate funding is as complex as things are in reality. It’s easy to say let's have 50/50 men and women, but of your 50% women, 75% are white women. It’s more complex than just getting the numbers. And not just gender and race, but class too. The system should be more complex than it is now. (Interview, Black Man, Middle Class, Undergrad Student, Age 21)

While affirmative action supporters focus their critique on policy implementation, opponents feel that these policies are fundamentally contrary to South Africa’s transformation imaginary. Post-racial ideology is deeply entrenched in South Africa's post-apartheid discourse of a democratic society that levels the playing field for equal access to socioeconomic opportunities and integration across racial groups. The ethos of post-racialism, coupled with neoliberal ideals of personal responsibility, thwart real conversations about the ongoing significance of race in South Africa, and the mechanisms through which systemic racism is linked to current socioeconomic inequalities.

Young adults’ ardent contestations of the broad application of children’s rights protections and affirmative action policies are partly attributed to the unfulfilled promises of what South
Africa's social and economic transformation would deliver. The discourses they draw upon - maintenance of generational hierarchies, gendered sexual morality, and post-racialism – to ground their ideological positions reveal anxiety about the directions in which power is perceived to be shifting in South Africa. While there is consensus across social groups that the pace of change has been slower than expected, young adults’ intersectional social locations tend to shape their perceptions on what constitutes transformation and who is to blame for the maintenance of unequal power structures.

**Young Adults’ Experiences of Democracy and Rights**

**Social Location and the Experience of Rights**

As mentioned, South Africans had high hopes for social transformation at the dawn of democracy. This change was supposed to be most present in the lives of young adults, the first generation to benefit from the rights-based laws and policies. Paramount among these rights was access to quality education and meaningful, well-paid employment. They were led to believe that expanded access to economic opportunity was the primary vehicle through which to achieve social equality. Unfortunately, for the majority of young adults social and economic rights on paper have not translated into expanded life chances. Participants in this study cited several factors that contribute to unfulfilled promises of transformation, including government corruption and mismanagement, and exclusionary practices in education and employment that maintain social distance and race, gender and class privilege.

One example is a working-class Coloured man who described his employment with a small business run by a White Afrikaans family that routinely engaged in illegal labor practices with their low-skilled Coloured and Black workers. When young workers prepared to file a labor discrimination case, the owners assured them that they had the financial means to drag the case
through the courts for years, and the workers would never receive redress. Other Black and Coloured working-class young adults shared stories of similar experiences of racial, gender and class discrimination in schools and the workplace. Another participant described how socioeconomic rights on paper fail to translate into substantive change for the majority of working-class young adults.

There’s a lack of proper implementation by government. They have all of these nice rights but none of them ever translate into something meaningful. And the sad thing is when you get to this side of Cape Town [middle-class neighborhoods] there are so many options. You find a kid who passed matric at Rondebosch or Bishops [predominantly White well-resourced high schools], they have the option of saying, mom, I want to take a gap year and travel the world. Obviously, there are endless benefits to this, which can change a person tremendously. That is how life is supposed to be for everyone. That is what the Constitution of South Africa was envisioning, a new democracy in South Africa. But that’s where it ends, abstract. It never really translates to the working class.

(Interview, Black Man, Middle Class, University Grad, Career Path Employment, Age 25)

For striver-class young adults who are pursuing tertiary education and career path professions, their experience of rights has been more favorable compared to their working-class peers. However, along the pathway to success, they are met with obstacles that threaten to derail them – a missed tuition payment, the death of a relative or an unplanned pregnancy – and send them free falling back to a space of constricted life chances. They are also disillusioned with the pace of change which is often most apparent to the striver-class since they often straddle two worlds – the under-resourced working-class communities where they currently live and the universities and workplaces that offer a window into the lives of their middle-class counterparts. Their exposure to middle-class lifestyles is both a source of inspiration and a bitter reminder of the vast gap between them and their more privileged peers despite access to opportunity structures that a democratic society affords them. As one university student opined,
I think economically we are still living in apartheid. Because the gap between the rich and poor is too vast, and the majority of South Africans are still living in poverty. South Africa has become much more liberal on paper and in theory, but not practically. Apartheid still lives on, it’s still here, it’s alive, I can still feel it. As a born free person or young adult, I shouldn't experience apartheid; it should be something that's not familiar to me at all. (single-sex FGD, Coloured Man, Striver Class, Undergrad Student, Age 24)

At the end of the spectrum, are the middle-class ‘exceptions’ – for example, young women who make up half of medical school cohorts, Black and Coloured men with internships at major investments firms – they are the success stories, the rights-dream realized. However, critical reflections on their experiences in education and the labor market reveal that even for the privileged few the road is still rocky. During a mixed-sex focus group of middle-class White participants, one man suggested that for the most part South Africa has achieved gender equality in tertiary education as evidenced by the number of women classmates he has had in both undergraduate and graduate courses. He surmised from these experiences that the gender gap in employment has also narrowed, and sex-based affirmative action policies were no longer necessary. One woman countered that although more women are pursuing tertiary education, there are still more men in fields that are financially lucrative and that have been historically dominant by men. Moreover, she offered insight on how discrimination continues to play out in the workplace.

I have noticed amongst my friends, men are promoted fairly regularly and women who have been working really, really hard, they always go up for that promotion, and they're sitting there ready for it and giving all the reasons why they should have it and they're still not quite getting there although they're ticking all the boxes. So, I'm seeing my male friends doing very, very well, and the women are doing well, but they are still staying in the same position for longer. So, in that respect, I feel there is inequality on the promotion front. (mixed-sex FGD, White Woman, Middle Class, Postgrad Student, Age 28)

As scholars (Lacy, 2007, Lareau, 2011, Pattillo, 2013) have noted, the experience of middle-class status can be very different for Whites and people of color. These distinctions are particularly notable for middle-class Black and Coloured young adults in South Africa, who are
the first generation to access academic and professional spaces previously reserved for Whites exclusively. The few middle-class Black and Coloured young adults in this study spoke at length about their experiences of being the racial exceptions in schools and workplaces as well as their frustrations with the lack of socioeconomic opportunities for their working-class peers. As one participant stated,

We shouldn’t be talking about exceptions. We should be talking about a sustainable system, which understands the values of equality. Everyone should have access to quality schools, not just the exceptions. That’s what is happening right now.

(Interview, Black Man, Middle Class, University Grad, Career Path Employment, Age 25)

These young men and women readily acknowledge the rights and privileges that are bestowed upon them by growing up in middle-class neighborhoods, attending high quality primary and secondary schools and establishing social networks rich in resources. Despite their academic and professional achievements, they described personal accounts of racial, class and gender bias that are acutely unsettling given their privileged status. They are also deeply troubled that 20 years after the end of apartheid, gender inequity persists and so few Black and Coloured people have achieved middle-class status. They do not embrace their exceptionalism or see it as a symbol of substantive social and economic transformation.

Individual Rights and Personal Responsibility

Although the state is much maligned for its failure to deliver on the promise of rights as a vehicle for socioeconomic change, young adults, across social groups, also blame peers whom they view as unwilling to take on the responsibilities associated with rights and freedoms. Neoliberal beliefs that place a high value on personal responsibility and individual agency exist alongside human rights discourse in post-apartheid South Africa and shape young adults' rationale on why entrenched inequalities persist. The following quotes express their sentiments.
This is a democratic country; we have been given education. The government made good progress; it is the youngsters who are dropouts. It is the youngsters who are making bad decisions.

*(single-sex FGD, Black Man, Working Class, No Matric, Unemployed, Age 27)*

Our generation, we are not driven by anything. During apartheid, they were fighting for us so that we can have freedom. Now we have freedom, and we don't have anything to fight for, so we are all just laid back.

*(mixed-sex FGD, Coloured Woman, Striver Class, Undergrad Student, Age 25)*

We're used to democracy now. We borrow our mom's cars and flash around. Kids go to parties with their mom's credit cards and swipe all day. Head honcho parties, buying 1000 rand [$75] bottles. We don't buy for ourselves; we buy to impress chicks. That's where society is today.

*(single-sex FGD, Black Man, Striver Class, Undergrad Student, Age 25)*

We've got rights, but we leave the responsibilities. I'm not against abortion, but someone would rather sleep with another person without protection and then go to the clinic for an abortion. That's how scared we are of taking responsibility.

*(single-sex FGD, Black Woman, Striver Class, University Grad, Career Path Employment, Age 23)*

In these accounts, respondents employ the discourse of personal responsibility to critique a variety of attitudes and practices they consider irresponsible. The majority of participants declared that democratic rights are inextricably linked to personal responsibility, and young adults should be held accountable for their choices associated with these rights. Interestingly they assume that their generation is uniquely reckless when it comes to exercising social and economic rights.

Although across groups, participants felt that young adults tend to disassociate rights and responsibilities, there were marked gender, class, and racial differences in how they viewed the causes for this uncoupling. In general, striver-class men and women had little empathy for working class ‘slackers’ who have failed to succeed in education and employment. The general belief was that democracy provides opportunities for social mobility and it is up to each person to create a better future for his or her self. As in other studies on class prejudice (Bettie, 2003, Day and Fiske, 2016, Henry et al., 2010, Loury, 1977, Orfield and Miller, 1998, Valentine and Harris, 2014), they
describe the socioeconomic opportunities made available to them as merit-based and their success as a result of personal achievement despite the odds. As a Coloured striver-class man stated, ‘you cannot blame your circumstances for you not achieving or succeeding in life, I think that’s a feeble excuse. Our generation, they are choosing not to take responsibility’. In other discussions, a striver-class Coloured woman and Black man both shared stories about how some unemployed young adults in their communities with low-educational attainment mock them for trying to succeed through tertiary education.

During a focus group discussion among Coloured middle- and striver-class adults, a counterclaim against strivers’ critique of irresponsible working-class slackers was offered. The two middle-class men in the group noted that while personal responsibility is important, structural factors limit personal choices in real ways, and to label working-class young adults as lazy slackers is too simplistic. Distinctions between middle-class and striver-class views on working-class values and practices are apparent in discussions on both personal responsibility and affirmative action. As it relates to personal responsibility, striver-class young adults tend to employ neoliberal discourse to draw class distinctions between themselves and young adults in their low-resourced communities who they feel are under-achievers. Middle-class young adults are less compelled to position themselves favorably relative to working-class young adults given that they possess a healthy proportion of both inherited and acquired capital.

Adolescent girls’ and young women’s perceived sexual promiscuity were also evidence of an embrace of rights while failing to make responsible choices. Across race, class, and gender, young women’s socially-illicit sexual practices were generally condemned. Despite broad exposure to sexual and reproductive health and rights education, participants’ sentiments were quite harsh as illustrated by the following quotes.
A lot of youth actually blame their community. **Why are you blaming your community? They never said go and have sex.** Just because they’re educating you about things doesn’t mean they’re saying do it. I mean it’s a choice you make. If you want to call it rape at the end of the day, then call it so.

*(single-sex FGD, Coloured Woman, Striver Class, Undergrad Student, Age 22)*

In Cape Town, young girls drink on purpose, so their child is born with fetal alcohol syndrome, then they get a disability grant which they can live off of. *Man, Age 23*

It happens; these 16, 17-year-old moms, they just want their grant and then they dump their kid on the grandparents. It is horrible, a grant dependent society. *Man, Age 26*

*(single-sex FGD, White Men, Middle Class, Postgrad Students)*

We have rights now, but people abuse these rights. They forget about the responsibilities that go with rights. Madiba [Mandela’s clan name] tried to ensure that we live a better life. For instance, if a woman has a child she can receive grant money. Madiba did this thinking that it would help those who can’t take care of their children. But, some people see it as motivation to get pregnant knowing that they’ll receive a grant.

*(single-sex FGD, Black Man, Working Class, No Matric, Employed Periodically, Age 28)*

As mentioned in participants' opposition to children's rights, views on adolescents and young adults who ‘abuse' rights and make irresponsible choices about sex were nearly always leveled against working-class women, which has historical racial connotations in the South African context. In this case, critiques of working-class women's sexual practices are an example of gendered, racialized and classed othering practices by men across race and class, and better-resourced women. As Bettie (2003) suggests, gendered- and racialized-class differences are often understood as sexual differences where "the working-class is cast as the bearer of an exaggerated sexuality, against which middle-class respectability is defined.” In contrast, there was no conversation about the responsibilities of young men in making “good” choices around sex, contraception, and parenting except when it related to maintaining fidelity in relationships and financially supporting their children.

Not surprisingly, working-class young women in this study repudiated the vilification of the perceived sexual practices of women who occupy their social location. During a mixed-sex
focus group with Black working-class participants, I shared some of the quotes mentioned above. All of the women reacted with irritation but did not seem surprised. They rejected the stereotypical claims made by others about working-class women’s motivations for sexual and parenting decisions.

I would like to disagree with the statement that women just get pregnant for a government grant because to me it does not make any sense. There is no one that would take this decision based on a few rands’ motivation because parenthood is a lifelong commitment. Woman, Age 21

She is perfectly right; there is no way that a woman would fall pregnant just for the grant money. Even if the government gave more money, women would not just fall pregnant for it. Woman, Age 28

I agree, with them. Woman, Age 27

(mixed-sex FGD, Black Women and Men, Working Class, No Matric and Working on Matric, Minimal Vocational Training, Mostly Unemployed)

The discourses of personal responsibility and human rights, which seemingly contradict one another, both feature prominently in contemporary South African society. The former is used to shed light on the individual-level causes of young adults’ adverse socioeconomic outcomes in an era of broad democratic rights. Young adults in this study, particularly socially-mobile strivers, link rights and responsibilities discursively as a language of social critique to distinguish themselves from the perceived negative values and practices of their working-class counterparts. Young adults across class categories also seek to hold their peers, often young women, accountable for poor decisions that they believe contribute to entrenched adverse socioeconomic outcomes in working-class communities.

**Ideals for the Practice of Rights in Intimate Relationships**

Gender equality was foundational to the ANC's rights-based anti-apartheid platform, and current legislation and policies reflect a commitment to women's and girls' empowerment. Notably, the Constitution's equal protection clause, the Employment Equity Act, and the Sexual Offences Act
secure women's social and economic rights. Over the past 20 years, these rights have resulted in increases in women's participation in the paid labor force, girls' enrollment in secondary and tertiary schooling, and women's representation in public office. South Africa was also the top ranked country in the most recent Africa Gender Equality Index\(^\text{17}\) (AfDB, 2016). Despite these accomplishments, the scope of women’s rights has been an area of contention in South Africa, since the waning years of the apartheid era.

Study participants across social groups overwhelmingly favored the principles of equality that support women's and girls' rights in the public sector and uphold gender-based violence prevention efforts. However, there was a lack of consensus about the extent to which the Constitution’s equal protection clause should dictate the negotiation of power in intimate relationships. Perceptions that gender equality in relationships should be limited were often grounded in cultural and religious beliefs about appropriate and differentiated roles for men and women in domestic life. As one man explained,

\begin{quote}
In terms of equality, I think it is a good thing. It's just that women abuse their rights. For instance, if we both work at the same place and the woman is my boss she will think she is the boss even at home forgetting that the man is the head of the family. We might be equal in the place of work, but at home, I am still the head of the family.
\end{quote}

\textit{(mixed-sex FGD, Black Man, Working Class, No Matric, Unemployed, Age26)}

Although mainly Black and Coloured striver- and working-class men expressed these views directly, participants across social groups reported that some of their peers believe gender equality should be limited in intimate relationships. Three distinct domains of gender equality and power in relationships were discussed across groups: a balanced division of household labor, joint decision making, and equal financial contribution to relationship expenses between partners (these

\footnote{\textsuperscript{17} The Africa Gender Equality Index measures these differences across three dimensions: economic opportunities, human development, and law and institutions.}
domains are discussed in detail in Chapters Five and Six). Considering these domains, men voiced concerns about the division of household labor and joint decision-making. There was little discussion and no hard-held objection to equality in financial provision. Mostly men shared that they were willing to contribute to household chores traditionally assigned to women, primarily when women were working, but men did not want to feel obligated to do these chores. They proclaimed that existing customs ascribe specific household duties, roles and responsibilities to men; they were happy to continue this work and support women as needed. Some Black and Coloured striver- and working-class women also shared similar views. As one woman explained, "it is good that a man can spoil his wife and family by cooking for them, but it's not right when it's the duty of a man to cook and look after the children because his wife is out working."

While some young adults opposed how the state and their peers apply rights to gender equality in relationships, there was near unanimous support for laws and policies to prevent gender-based violence (GBV) and provide justice and services to abuse survivors. Beyond specific GBV laws, many participants felt that rights-based legislation has increased women's participation in tertiary education and paid labor, and thus improved their negotiating power in relationships. Theory of change frameworks that guide many material interventions to prevent GBV propose that as women's socioeconomic status increases, they are better able to protect themselves against GBV in general and intimate partner violence (IPV) in particular. However, Connell (1987) argues that gender domains – labor, power and cathexis – do not change in unison. Thus, improvement in women's economic empowerment within the home does not necessarily translate into equitable and non-violent power dynamics in intimate relationships. In this study, in nearly half of the single-sex focus groups and interviews women, across social groups, shared accounts of the physically,
emotionally, financially and sexually-abusive practices they and their women friends had experienced by intimate partners. Following are excerpts from their stories.

With my ex-husband, I was never strong because I was so scared he would leave. That's the problem with women; we think so little of ourselves. We think it’s our fault. Maybe he wouldn't have cheated if I did things differently if I slept with him more. My husband's infidelity was very hurtful. I went into my next relationship with this mindset that I must never withhold sex. Whenever he wanted sex I was available even if I was cross; I was available. I would cry and beg him, please don't go. That part of me is long gone.

*(Interview, Coloured Woman, Working Class, Matric, Stable Employment, Age 29)*

With my ex, one day he'd say to me, oh you’re the most beautiful girl in the world, and the next day he’d say you’re so unattractive I can’t look at you, what are you wearing today, you look funny. He was trying to get my self-esteem so low; I was so insecure that I would just completely cling to him and be like ‘oh my gosh you’re the only person that loves me, I can’t leave you!’ I think that a lot of women are very forgiving, and if you’re completely dependent on this person… all these factors make it really difficult to get out.

*(single-sex FGD, White Woman, Middle Class, University Grad, Career Path Employment, Age 23)*

I was in a marriage that was very abusive… We met while in [vocational training] school and had a child. I didn't want to disappointment my parents so when he asked for my hand in marriage, I said yes… I didn't have much time to get to know my husband because I was in school, working and a mother. There was not a lot of time for us to bond. It wasn't until we were married that I began to know the type of person he was. I think my husband got married before he was ready. He still wanted to be out there and have girls... I tried to talk to him, I cried and shouted like all women do, and he would beat me up for that. I decided not talk to him about these things, and when I didn't confront him he beat me up for that, why am I not asking about the infidelity, am I also cheating on him. He made a neighbor pregnant, and things were getting out of hand… After our first two children, I was pregnant with triplets and miscarried because of stress, and I didn't want more bad things to happen, so I had to leave the relationship before I lost my own life.

*(Interview, Black Woman, Working Class, No Matric, Stable Employment, Age 30)*

Across race and class, women began dating men whose abusive attitudes and behaviors revealed themselves during the relationship and subsequently most women eventually left their abusive partners. Although economic independence did not protect young women from entering relationships that turned abusive, it provided an exit strategy. For example, the Black working-
class woman quoted above was able to divorce her abusive husband after several years because she worked full-time in a stable position that offered her a living wage. However, there were no punitive repercussions for her husband's abusive behavior, and he received all joint assets in their divorce settlement. As she explained,

In my marriage, it was 50/50 when it came to money. When we wanted to buy a house, we purchased it together. We saved money in one account to build our children’s home. He stays in the same house now. I packed up my kids and left. I can't stand outside the house now and say that's your brick, and this part is mine.

(Interview, Black Woman, Working Class, No Matric, Stable Employment, Age 30)

A Coloured working class woman shared another tragic account. At the time of the interview, she was in a toxic marriage with the father of her youngest child. She shared that he withheld money to support their infant child and spent his earnings on other women and luxury items. When she confronted her husband about his infidelity, a tactic that for many women results in physical violence from their partners, she used the language of rights as a source of protection from abuse. As she explained,

I told him don't do something that you don't want me to do because I'm going to do something and then you're going to want to beat me up. I don't have your power, but I have my powers. I know the South African flag; I have my law.

(Interview, Coloured Woman, Working Class, No Matric, Unemployed, Age 30)

In this case, the young woman references the South African flag as a symbol of equal rights and protection of the law that in theory seeks to improve gendered power relations and decrease intimate partner violence. In the previous case, while the young woman’s employment earnings allowed her to escape an abusive marriage, loss of her financial investment in the home she shared with her ex-husband signals a preservation of inequitable gender norms. Similarly, in this latter case, social expectations about feminine respectability through marriage and mothering compel a young woman with a history of maintaining living wage employment to remain in an abusive
relationship. When I asked her if she would leave her husband once she found a good job, she responded,

I love my husband, and I will stay with him. I want to raise this child with a father, so I just go along, I don't complain… If I were working, I would provide for my kids and not care what he gives. But I wouldn’t leave him; I would just ignore him. I don't want stress. I stay with him for the child's sake. I'm not interested in having partners anymore. Three sexual partners are enough in one lifetime. Men are a bunch of pigs, not all but 80%… The only thing that keeps me going in my life is my kids. The only motivation is my kids, to ensure that they go to school.

(Interview, Coloured Woman, Working Class, No Matric, Unemployed, Age 30)

Despite rights-based laws that serve as a vehicle to empower women socially and economically, entrenched gender norms that dictate women's worth and status through relationships, marriage and mothering continue to put women at risk for intimate partner violence. While young adults in this study reject intimate partner violence, they employ personal responsibility discourse, with gender and race connotations, to label working-class women who raise children through social grant assistance as rights’ abusers. These critiques are leveled despite that fact that many working-class women turn to social assistance to leave abusive or toxic relationships. Similar, moralistic judgment is directed towards young women who in the pursuit of upward mobility choose to engage in transactional sex, have an abortion, or hand over parental responsibilities to their families. The contested landscape of gender in South Africa, especially gendered sexual morality, is central to debates about how young women exercise their rights and the scope of gender equality in private life.

Discussion
Young adults' concerns about the application of rights in public and private life and their experiences of rights express their disappointment about the fact that two decades of democracy have failed to bring forth the social and economic transformation for which they had hoped. In a
recent ethnography, Hickel (2015) explores how labor migrants in KwaZulu-Natal perceive the introduction of democracy in South Africa as a form of social death. They note that the ideals of liberal democracy and individual rights protections enshrined in the Constitution have obliterated gender and generational hierarchies that are the foundation of social life and fruition among the Zulu ethnic group. Coupled with the ANC-led government's neoliberal economic policy, individual rights and freedoms have resulted in what several scholars have identified as a ‘crisis in social reproduction' in South Africa (Decoteau, 2013, Fakier and Cock, 2009, Hunter, 2010). In Hickel's study, participants perceive nearly every current social ill – decline in marriage rates, and increases in poverty, unemployment, HIV, female-headed-households, sexual promiscuity, and gender-based violence – as a manifestation of this crisis. Thus, to understand the discordance between entrenched social inequality in the era of rights, people tend to reject aspects of equal rights protections in principle and rationalize that their application has resulted in economic decline and the breakdown of moral order.

In this study, a racially- and class-diverse group of urban young women and men in Cape Town’s metropolis echo many of the concerns of middle-aged Black migrants from rural KwaZulu-Natal. In both cases, the underlying frustration among South Africans is that democracy and human rights protections have only marginally addressed the drivers of structural inequality, and it is perceived that in some circumstances, social and economic conditions are worse. One of the primary culprits is public officials who are viewed as either corrupt or ill-equipped to implement the laws and policies put in place to address social inequality. Often missing from participants’ criticisms is an acknowledgment of structural factors, specifically a need to align the country’s economic framework with global capitalist interests, which have in part constrained the implementation of social-democratic policies originally envisioned by the state.
In this study, young women and men are also deeply concerned about how society is transforming and about perceived shifts in power relations. For many, the state has failed to adequately improve social and economic conditions in the public sphere while simultaneously overreaching into the private lives of citizens by dismantling established generational and gender hierarchies. Their anxieties are illustrated through debates about particular children’s rights protections and the broad scope of women’s rights that extends to the negotiation of power in intimate relationships and women’s and girls’ sexual freedom. Some feel rights-based freedoms have given children and young adults license to make irresponsible life choices that further entrench social and economic inequalities. Concerns about children’s rights often overlap with gender politics, notably young women's and girls' freedom to engage in sexual practices that violate social norms.

Still structural inequality persists in a context where rights laws and discourse exists alongside competing discourses on gender sexual morality, post racialism, and personal responsibility. Tensions among these context factors contribute to the contested landscape of transformation in post-apartheid South Africa. Young adults’ use of rights and other popular discourses as a language of social critique illustrate how they try to make meaning of these contextual contradictions. Some young adults acknowledge the role of structural factors in the maintenance of apartheid-era power relations. Yet, the majority draws upon these discourses to reinforce their views that the individual choices of immoral state actors and young adults are the cause for lack of social and economic liberation.

Social location shapes young women and men's views on transformation and how they morally position themselves in relation to young adults who are labeled as rights abusers. This strategy is evidenced most clearly by those who hold intermediary status positions (in terms of
class and race) and aspire for privileged status and thus are fervently compelled to disassociate from those deemed culturally inferior. This results in a reinforcement of inequitable power structures. Coloured striver-class adults’ opposition to affirmative action can be read as an attempt to situate their access to educational and employment opportunities as merit-based while marking Black middle- and striver-class adults as receivers of undeserved social advantage.

Similarly, striver-class Black and Coloured women’s vehement rebuke of the perceived sexual practices of working-class women (i.e. transactional and casual sex, single motherhood) serves to distance themselves from racialized gender stereotypes about Africa sexuality and associate with the mythology of respectable White middle-class femininity. However, when striver- and middle-class women, across race, discussed their own experiences of rights, they often lamented over how entrenched gender and sexual norms continue to define women's value and status through relationships, marriage, and mothering. Indeed, these women were frustrated that they were also the targets of gender morality discourse to censure their "responsible" choice to engage in premarital sex in stable relationships (see Chapter Five). The tensions among competing contextual factors – rights, structural inequality, and popular discourses – surface in young adults’ practices of relative positioning and othering that they employ to make meaning of the unfulfilled promises of transformation. These contextual factors also intertwine with competing cultural scripts for gender and sexuality and re-emerge as young adults construct gender ideals for sexual relationships in South Africa’s contested post-apartheid context.
CHAPTER FIVE – GENDER IN FLUX: YOUNG ADULTS’ DEPLOYMENT OF CULTURAL SCRIPTS IN CONSTRUCTING CONTEMPORARY GENDER IDEALS FOR SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Culture has to adapt and move. That’s my problem with culture; it’s become stagnant. The practices of the past were great for that time, but not now.

(Interview, Black Man, Middle Class, Some University, Career Path Employment, Age 26)

Post-apartheid South Africa presents contrasts across every sphere of society. Notable advancements over the past 20 years include the proliferation of human rights-based laws and discourse, as well as substantial foreign and national investment in infrastructure, the financial sector, education, and health, with a particular focus on women’s empowerment across these sectors. Progress in these areas is juxtaposed against the infiltration of post-racialism and personal responsibility discourses, the entrenchment of social and economic inequalities and spatial segregation, and the tragically high prevalence of HIV and gender-based violence. Daily life offers many young women and men increased access to and consumption of global media images, technology, and goods, while they are surrounded, simultaneously, by values and messages that call into question the benefits of modernity.

Building on Simon and Gagnon’s sexual script theory (1986, 2003) this chapter argues that in pluralist “modern” South Africa, cultural scripts that operate within and between a variety of influential social institutions – the family, ethnic communities, media, religion, and the state – offer conflicting messages about gender and sexuality. To begin, I describe two overarching sets of cultural scripts for gender and sexuality to which young adults are exposed, those that promote gender equality and others that establish restrictive sets of roles and values for men and women. I then explore how these scripts shape young adults’ gender ideals, and how these ideals are critical to understand the aspirations and expectations they bring to sexual relationships. The findings
reveal how young adults use sexual relationships as a domain in which to refashion masculine and feminine ideals by both selectively adopting and actively challenging competing scripts. Young women and men struggle to make sense of conflicting cultural messages about masculinity and femininity, and internal dissonance in their gender ideals for relationships suggest that in an uncertain social and economic climate, young-adult masculinities and femininities are in flux. Analyzing the claims, counter-claims, personal stories, and disagreements that emerged, I conclude by arguing that tensions and contradictions in their gender ideals point to disputes over the uneven pace and multiple directions of change in post-apartheid South Africa.

Cultural Scripts for Gender and Sexuality

A considerable amount of research has demonstrated the importance of cultural scripts that shape young adults’ lives and sexual scripts for relationships (Caceres et al., 2000, Hoffman et al., 2006, Hynie et al., 1998, Maticka-Tyndale et al., 2005, Rose and Frieze, 1993, Stephens and Phillips, 2003). Sexual script theory posits that cultural messages about gender and sexuality serve as instructional guides to organize sexual behavior and relationships. Cultural scripts provide a shared set of reference points for people to negotiate interpersonal sexual scripts and fashion intrapersonal sexual identities. Young women and men in this study discussed the social norms and cultural expectations that serve as guides in their transition to adult lives and relationships. The primary themes of the two overarching sets of scripts were: gender equality, prescribed masculine and feminine roles and responsibilities, and gendered sexual practices. The vast majority of young adults reported that cultural messages about socially-appropriate behavior and interaction in relationships were transmitted by their families and ethnic communities, by the state and from

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18 I use the terms “cultural scripts” and “cultural messages” interchangeably
religious institutions with which they were affiliated, and through media platforms such as popular music, movies, and social networking applications.

**Gender Equality**

Regionally, the democratic South African state has been at the forefront of articulating women’s rights as integral to sustainable development, and legislation and policies reflect an abstract commitment to gender equality. The state has contributed to the proliferation of gender equality as a normative cultural script in the post-apartheid era, and in some cases, state directives have led to tangible improvements in women's and girls' social and economic empowerment. However, laws and the state’s policy implementation by themselves are insufficient to shift entrenched relations of power codified in scripts. Thus, South Africa’s robust civil society sector have played a pivotal role to shift gender norms, and has implemented gender transformative projects, increased exposure to gender equality messaging through mass media campaigns, and advocated for the institutionalization of gender equality at all levels. Parallel to these efforts, the promotion of gender equitable norms has been central in public health and development sector HIV and gender-based violence interventions that seek to empower women and girls in sexual relationships, and transform masculine ideals towards less harmful attitudes and practices.

Given the breadth of these initiatives, it is no surprise that in nearly every group discussion and interview, young adults expressed that throughout their lives they have been exposed to cultural messages that promote gender equality. Their primary sources of exposure have been educational institutions and the media, and to a lesser extent through values passed down to them by their families. Following are a few opinions shared by participants across race, class, and gender that illustrate their knowledge and awareness of gender equality scripts.
In culture and society, we come from a time when there was patriarchy and ladies had to know their role and accept that. But because we’ve moved away from that now and there’s a lot of equality, I think the most difficult thing for guys to do is accept that chicks are now equal to us and democracy offers them that role.

*(single-sex FGD, Black Man, Striver Class, Undergrad Student, Age 25)*

Rights have given women in South Africa the ability to say no one deserves to be treated differently because of their gender, because you are a woman you are less, it doesn’t work like that anymore.

*(Interview, Coloured Woman, Working Class, Matric, Unemployed, Age 29)*

I think there is a lot more equality, not with everyone, but more than what I imagine it to be 20, 30, 40 years ago. Women have more say and more power in relationships, at least in liberal, middle to upper-income groups.

*(single-sex FGD, White Man, Middle Class, University Grad, Career Path Employment, Age 25)*

Young adults seem to believe that gender equality scripts have shifted gendered power in relationships, which has primarily benefitted women. Similar to other studies gendered sexualities among young adults in South Africa, with the declining dominance of patriarchal values, men are struggling to adapt to these changes. Yet, there is an assumption by some that middle-class men are more likely to accept gender-equitable norms.

**Binary Gender Roles and Responsibilities**

In line with much of the existing literature (Caceres et al., 2000, Hoffman et al., 2006, Rose and Frieze, 1993), young adults in this study are also exposed to cultural messages that dictate and differentiate masculine and feminine roles and responsibilities. Participants spoke about men’s financial provision for and physical protection of women, their children and immediate family members as key masculine roles. Both men and women said that the masculine breadwinning ideal is prevalent in religious discourse, ethnic “traditional” values, and popular media. A young man expressed,
The Bible says *indoda iyotya ukubila kwebunzi layo* [a man will benefit from what he produces]. He needs to provide for his wife; I would say the society expects us to be providers for females and for our families.

*single-sex FGD, Black Man, Working Class, No Matric, Employed Periodically, Age 28*

In group discussions and interviews, men echoed this feeling of a social expectation for them to serve as providers and protectors. A young middle-class White man suggested that gender roles are still quite traditional in South Africa; men are viewed as providers and thus the primary decision-makers in their households. He mentioned ethnic and religious cultural values supported these masculine practices. Yet, participants also stressed that there is discordance among a variety of cultural scripts for gender and sexuality that guide their lives and relationships. One topic discussed across groups was the mixed cultural messages men receive on gender equality and masculine practices to provide for and protect women. A participant illustrates this contradiction in the following quote:

One guy hears that he should be chivalrous and he is but maybe that’s all that he does, he doesn’t respect women on any other level, he’s just doing it because culturally that’s the acceptable thing. A lot of messages are contrasting and contradictory to each other. Like being respectful of women and treating her as equal but at the same time treating her like a delicate, petite flower type thing.

*single-sex FGD, White Woman, Middle Class, Postgrad Student, Age 28*

Cultural scripts for women’s roles and responsibilities in many ways serve to complement those applied to men. Several participants stated that young women receive intense social pressure to take on “traditional” women’s roles to provide instrumental care (cook, clean and care for loved ones) and emotional support for men, children and their families. Moreover, defined gender scripts dictate that women should prioritize marriage and domestic caregiving over their own social and career aspirations as evidenced in the following quotes.

Speaking from Jewish culture, there is like a little bit more pressure in Judaism. If you’re 19, you should be finding that partner. And I think… if you’re like 28 years old and you’re not married, it’s considered like ‘oh no we’re going to be stuck with her forever.’
(single-sex FGD, White Woman, Middle Class, University Grad, Career Path Employment, Age 23)

I’m going to speak of my family. I’m trying to renovate my family’s house. My cousins and brothers, they’re in their 30s now and haven’t seen the point of renovating our house. They’re working and get well-paying salaries. For them, it’s all about me; I’m going to buy myself a GTI [Volkswagen car]. On the woman’s side, I’d rather renovate the house and then maybe I can buy myself a car. I still want to do a course in something else, but at the same time, I still need to look after my family. The responsibilities that we’ve got as young women, most ladies take on more than guys do.

(singl-sex FGD, Black Woman, Striver Class, College Grad, Career Path Employment, Age 23)

**Gendered Sexual Practices**

Binary gendered scripts also embody sexual morals to limit and control young women’s sexual practices, especially as it pertains to premarital sex. Similarly, cultural messages strongly prohibit women’s sexual infidelity once they are in a relationship. In single-sex focus groups, women, across race and class, discussed this topic in great detail and reported that young women receive more social pressure than young men to restrict their sexual behavior. A young striver-class Black woman stated, “I know for instance when you get pregnant, and you’re not married, the church will cut you off for a certain time.” In another group, a striver-class Coloured woman said that in her ethnic community, conversations about sex are still taboo and most women in her social circle, university students, received sex education and resources from educational institutions. In contrast to sexual restrictions applied to women, in discussions on young men’s sexual practices, the majority of participants declared that scripts encourage men to engage in casual sex with multiple women before they commit to a monogamous intimate partnership. According to religious doctrine and ethnic customs, men’s sexual infidelity within stable relationships is seen as socially undesirable but still widely condoned.

Young women, and in some cases men, often cited the double standard of a society that
allows men’s sexual activity but reprimands women for the same behavior. A group of working-class young Black women shared that in their neighborhood young men “get away with many things”. When a young couple is seen kissing in the streets, it is often only the woman who is judged harshly by the community. All of the women in this group still live with their parents and extended family, which was common for working- and striver-class men and women in this study. The women stated that their brothers’ girlfriends were allowed to sleep over in their families’ houses, but their boyfriends were prohibited. Moreover, their family and neighbors often chastised them for sleeping at their boyfriend’s houses. Cultural messages that legitimize the double standard for gendered sexual freedom was fittingly described by a striver-class Coloured woman, “there’s this saying, a master key that can open many locks is considered awesome, but a lock that can be opened by any key is kind of shitty.” Interestingly, women participants were more likely to point out glaring contradictions between defined scripts on gender and sexuality than men, possibly because they more often are the targets of conflicting messages and suffer the consequences of being sexually-active compared to men.

Parallel to cultural messages on gendered sexual practices, young adulthood as a period of sexual experimentation is also a popular script. Participants cited that the media was an influential source for messages that promote sexual freedom, as illustrated by this quote:

It’s happening everywhere; you’ll hardly see a movie where girl meets boy, boy meets girl, they go on a date, the first date they kiss. That’s how I grew up, that’s what I always imagined my first dates would be like, romantic. But the movies that you see now, you don’t kiss on your first date anymore, you have sex. We watch movies and we see this as sooo romantic, oh my word, I want that.

*(single-sex FGD, Coloured Woman, Striver Class, Undergrad Student, Age 25)*

During this transitional period in their lives, some young adults see these messages as giving license to explore their sexual desires before they settle into a long-term stable relationship. Others were quite critical of media messages and their potential consequences. A Black working-class
young man expressed, “on TV now they say we should be allowed to talk about sex and educate people and distribute free condoms, to me that is motivation to go around having sex.” A Black striver-class woman shared a popular youth lifestyle branding slogan; “you only live once” which she felt gave young adults a pass to indulge in reckless and irresponsible sexual behavior. Most participants suggested that the script of sexual freedom has yet to achieve widespread currency in their social networks. This critical opposition to sexual freedom was interesting since many participants stated that they engage in premarital sex.

These findings illustrate a multiplicity of cultural scripts to which young adults are exposed as they engage with and are influenced by multiple social institutions. Cultural messages that tacitly endorse men's sexual freedom but discourage women’s sexual activity outside of married monogamous relationships also call for an intensely gendered division of labor, with women as caregivers and men as financial providers. Gender restrictive scripts transmitted through family and ethnic communities, religious doctrine and media images are often in direct conflict with scripts for gender equality and sexual freedom disseminated by the state, civil society, and other media messages. Discordance between cultural scripts transmitted across social institutions resurface in young adults’ construction of gender ideals for sexual relationships.

Young Adults’ Gender Ideals for Sexual Relationships - Adopting Cultural Scripts

Competing cultural scripts – those the promote gender equality and others that are gender-role restrictive for women and men – play a prominent role in shaping young adults’ masculine and feminine ideals for sexual relationships. This next section outlines three approaches young adults employ to make meaning of competing cultural messages and incorporate them in the construction of their gender ideals: adopt, challenge, and contend with scripts. I argue that competing scripts that lack a coherent and stable set of messages about gender and sexuality contribute to
contradictions in young-adult gender ideals and tensions about how scripts should influence power dynamics in sexual relationships. Moreover, they allow young adults to use of gender as a language of social critique.

As mentioned, the promotion of gender equality is a cultural script that has permeated South African society over the past 20 years. In nearly every group discussion and interview, young adults reported that cultural messages, which promote gender equality in schools, the workplace, social settings and most importantly in sexual relationships, were commonplace in South African society. Three distinct domains of gender equality and power in relationships were discussed: a balanced division of household labor, joint decision making, and equal financial contribution to relationship expenses between partners. Some young adults described masculine and feminine ideals that align with scripts that endorse gender equality and relationships as mutually-beneficial partnerships. The following quotes illustrate young adults’ relationship ideals that embrace gender-equitable cultural scripts.

I’m working; it’s just walking distance from home. I’ll send my boyfriend a message, ‘you know I am hungry, and I don’t feel like takeaways [fast food]’. And he’ll say okay I’ll cook for you and bring lunch for you. That is the ideal man. When I ask he will do and when he asks I will do.  
(*single-sex FGD, Black Woman, Working Class, Matric, Stable Employment, Age 28*)

You must have a 50-50 relationship, girl and boy both give. I can’t date someone who just buys for me. I would feel so uncomfortable. Certain girls love that their boyfriend gives them money or whatever they want. If he’s just giving you money, he doesn’t love you. He’s like ‘keep quiet and enjoy this’. If the guy just buys, buys, buys for his girlfriend after a while he starts lifting his hand and beating her. I want a guy that gives to me, and I give to him, there’s understanding, trust, and love in that relationship.  
(*Interview, Coloured Woman, Working Class, Matric, Unemployed, Age 28*)

I think we have a very democratic or equal type of relationship. For instance, I’m really bad with money; I’m not the money guy, that’s her. So, she definitely has more say in that area. It’s about strength, like what things are you more strong in. She’s not really good at human interactions and reading people. I’m very sensitive to those things. I’m that guy.
While most participants across race, class, and gender embraced gender equality scripts, they also reported that the majority of young men they know subscribe to normative masculine practices of providing for and protecting the women and children in their lives to some degree. As a working-class Coloured man stated, “I have a baby, I want her to grow up in a house and give her the life I didn’t have.” Another young man also embraced a ‘men as protectors’ ideal:

I started going out at 14. My daughter will go out when she’s 21. As a guy, as a father, you’d be more protective over a daughter because you know what you used to do to girls. Will Smith [American actor] said ‘you don’t really know what you do to hurt a girl until you have a daughter’. That’s why I know I will be protective.

Young adults’ adoption of gender-equitable scripts and support for prescribe masculine roles might be partly a response to contradictory messages that they receive about modern masculinities. Throughout South Africa, and globally, “engaged fatherhood” campaigns utilize media messages to increase men’s active involvement in caregiving and fatherhood, encourage a balanced division of domestic labor, and promote gender equitable norms more broadly. The primary aim of fatherhood campaigns is to bring more gender equity to parenting and caregiving. Yet, an unintended result could be to reinforce a masculine ideal of financial provision and hold men accountable for the physical protection of their intimate partners and children. Gender-restrictive cultural scripts about men’s financial provision for and physical protection of women and children are often used to legitimize men’s claims of dominance in decision-making within relationships,

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19 Over the past 20 years, UN agencies have worked in conjunction with local and regional non-governmental organizations to advance gender equality and redistribute the burden of domestic care work through the promotion of policy solutions and implementation of public awareness and educational campaigns to engage men to take a more active role in fatherhood and domestic care work, and encourage them to adopt gender-equitable attitudes and practices.
which is the actual problem these campaigns seek to address.

While there is a substantial literature on men’s attitudes towards gender-equitable and gender-restrictive cultural scripts, there is very little written about the masculine and feminine roles, responsibilities, and practices that young women idealize (Groes-Green, 2011, Hunter, 2010, Macia et al., 2011, Mojola, 2014, Spronk, 2005). In this study, women were encouraged to share their expectations of men in sexual relationships and the masculine practices they find desirable. Similar to men’s responses, the majority of women indicated that protecting, and to a lesser extent providing, were responsibilities that women expect of the men in their lives, and especially in relationships. Due to high rates of crime and violence in South Africa, some women talked about the importance of having a boyfriend to feel safe and protected. As a middle-class White woman stated, “you feel safer when you have a boyfriend in some ways. My boyfriend and I broke up recently; I’m like oh my god I’m driving everywhere by myself, I’m going out by myself, and I’m scared all the time”.

Some participants revealed that women they knew were unlikely to date a man if he was unable to provide some form of financial support for them. A young woman illustrates this sentiment in the following quote.

The man that you’re dating wants to see you in a weave, with long eyelashes, and applied makeup, right? So, if he is not working where does he think you will get these things? It’s not like you’re selling yourself to him, it’s just that you want to look good for him and he has to contribute to you looking good. He is your boyfriend after all. You can’t pay for all of that. (single-sex FGD, Black Woman, Working Class, Working on Matric, Unemployed, Age 21)

An important element of this quote is the participant’s recognition of the circumstances in which women expect men to provide, specifically when women lack employment. This is significant in South Africa where unemployment rates among young adults are estimated at 50 percent and slightly higher for young women than men (SSA, 2016). However, the desire for financial support
from men was not limited to working-class women who were more likely to be unemployed and lack the necessary skills for gainful employment. Across race and class, participants gave examples of women they knew who expected men to pay if they were on a date and wanted men to provide them with gifts to show love and affection. However, the majority of women in this study were reluctant to openly acknowledge that they held expectations of men to serve as providers although they shared that these ideals were quite normative among women in their neighborhoods and social circles. Women’s desire for men to protect and provide for them has the potential to increase women’s emotional and financial dependence on the men in their lives, especially sexual partners. This may result in skewed gender power imbalances in these relationships.

In other conversations, participants shared that their peers who are men embrace scripts that establish successful masculinity in part through men’s sexual prowess. In a group of White middle-class men, the following views were shared:

The ideal of masculinity of being able to drink as much as you want and to hook up with as many women, at our age that’s probably like the ultimate image of masculinity. Having that life, nightlife, and single and sleeping around and drinking and taking drugs. Yah, that’s idealized. Age 23

Guys who do that are respected like people aspire to be like that still. Age 25

They’re always the popular-type people. Age 23

It just happens to be that the three of us, as far as I can tell, don’t really fit that mold Age 25 (single-sex FGD, White Men, Middle Class, University Grads and Post Grad Students)

Similar to young women’s attempts to distance themselves from expectations of men’s financial provision, in most cases, men disavowed attitudes and practices that they said were normative amongst their peers, but that may be considered morally-transgressive and counter to gender equality discourse. This form of gendered moral posturing was observed in both group discussions and individual interviews, and across race and class categories. These findings illustrate that as a whole young men’s and women’s relationship ideals contain aspects of gender equality scripts, as well as cultural messages that allow for men’s sexual freedom alone and emphasize their role as
protectors of and providers for women and children. Noteworthy is that as young adults incorporate competing cultural scripts into their gender ideals, it becomes clear that they do not endorse all aspects of either set of scripts wholesale. In nearly every instance, young adults qualified and contextualized the adoption of restrictive-gender scripts. Additionally, men and women’s disinclination to personally endorse gender ideals they said were normative might indicate a tension between their motivations for relationships and gender equality scripts to which they have become accustomed and may be somewhat hesitant to challenge openly.

**Young Adults’ Gender Ideals - Challenging Gender-Restrictive Cultural Scripts**

There were several instances in which participants’ gender ideals challenged cultural scripts that restrict women and men’s practice to specific roles and responsibilities. In this study, men across race and class contested cultural messages that require them to assume the role of financial providers in intimate partnerships. Striver- and middle-class women opposed feminine scripts that compelled them to prioritize caregiving over their life aspirations, and women across class and race shared feminine ideals that countered scripts that constrict women’s sexual freedom. Both young women and men often employed gender equality discourse to challenge gender-restrictive cultural scripts.

The majority of participants in this study felt that both men and women should contribute financially in sexual relationships. Among men, this sentiment was most pronounced among working- and striver-class men. During interviews and focus groups, young men expressed their frustration with women’s expectation of men to provide for them. The following discussion among working-class Coloured men and women illustrates this point.

I want a wife that works; money plays a huge role in intimate relationships, otherwise, how are you gonna get where you wanna be? If I date a girl, I owe her nothing; I'm not gonna buy
her anything. She’s just gonna wonder ‘yor this guy is working, and he’s driving a car’…

*man, Age 22*

He’s unromantic… *woman, Age 25*

‘now why doesn’t he buy me something?’ Because you’re not my wife and as soon as I make you my wife you’re gonna go work for what you want. That’s how I was raised. *man, Age 22*

My boyfriend, when we started dating, I was a very dominant girl. I always wanted a guy that would do everything for me because my parents have done everything for me. My boyfriend taught me something different; we’re equal. We can provide equally. If he feels because he is the male he must provide more, it’s his choice I won’t force it upon him. At the end of the day its equal. *woman, Age 25*

If I’m married and my wife earns more than me, I won’t get angry, especially in today’s life. I would be glad she earns more. It’s hard outside; I can’t still keep being Mr. Man. *man, Age 22*

If I get married, it would be 50/50; everyone helps out. *woman, Age 24*

*(mixed-sex FGD, Coloured Men and Women, Working Class, No Matric and Matric, some Vocational Training, Employed Periodically)*

These examples illustrate how young adults draw on the language of gender equality to challenge the ideal of men’s financial provision. Importantly, men directly contest women’s expectation that they should provide material support. In the group discussion, women called for gender equality in relation to financial provision but as one woman explained her views on this issue were heavily influenced by her boyfriend’s suggestion that they approach the relationship as a financially equal partnership. As mentioned previously, South Africa’s economic context of high unemployment often fuels women’s desire for men to provide in sexual relationships. This would seem particularly relevant for women who are unemployed and lack the skills and education to afford desirable lifestyles. Conversely, these contextual factors can lead men with similar socioeconomic realities to counter women’s expectations for financial support and adopt gender equality scripts to refashion masculine ideals of men as providers.

In several discussions, striver- and middle-class women forcefully challenged gender-restrictive scripts that compel women to prioritize caregiving and intimate relationships over their social and professional aspirations. In the following quote, a young woman who migrated to Cape
Town from a small rural farming community describes her decision to break from the caregiving role.

In my family, no one is educated. None of my aunts have a degree, to them, it’s just ‘get married, have children, and work in my kitchen’. I told myself, I really don’t aspire to be like that, I want to have a job, I want to buy a house, I want to have the biggest car ever. It’s all about how you see life. Yes, family and community do play a role, but at the end of the day, this is my life.

*(single-sex FGD, Black Woman, Striver Class, Working on Matric, Stable Employment, Age 27)*

Another young woman offers a similar perspective in comparing her desired lifestyle to that of her girlfriend.

My Afrikaans friend, she’s 23, she’s going to be a teacher and live in Port Elizabeth with her husband, they’re getting married in May, and that’s going to be her life. I was like I’m going to get married in my 30s. She was like ‘your kids; you’re going to be old when you have kids’. I’m like, I don’t care; I will have lived my life.

*(single-sex FGD, White Woman, Middle Class, University Student, Age 23)*

In both of these examples, young women embrace an independent “modern” woman ideal and reject lifestyles and responsibilities required of women in previous generations. They distinguish between their life aspirations and those of other women on the basis of class (level of educational attainment), culture (English versus Afrikaans), and place. The latter signals the currency of gender equality scripts in Cape Town, a cosmopolitan metropolis, which may offer some young women an opportunity to pursue careers and lifestyles that are less available in rural and smaller urban communities were gender-restrictive scripts might be more valued.

Similar to Spronk’s (2005) research in Nairobi, young women in this study also contested gender-restrictive scripts about women’s sexual behavior that are deeply ingrained in religious doctrine and ethnic values. As one woman expressed,

I have an Afrikaans family but I went to an English private school, I grew up English. English and Afrikaans people are put in the same category, White South African, but it’s very different. The biggest thing that was so different, that barrier between the Afrikaans and
English, between my family and I was that I had sex before marriage. Like I’m a whore going to hell. They believed that this English man comes in with his liberal views and he stole me from Christianity. Afrikaans people, anything that’s against your religion, it’s the devil’s work. My sister is so different. She married an Afrikaans man at 23. Last week she had her second baby. She doesn’t work, stays home, and she looks after the kids. She didn’t have sex before marriage. I have a completely different experience with sex.

*(single-sex FGD, White Woman, Middle Class, Postgrad Student, Age 23)*

The majority of young women reported that they and their girlfriends engaged in premarital sexual relationships despite the stigma they experienced from family and community members who at times openly admonished their behavior. Women, across race and class, discussed their desire for and experiences in sexual relationships with a steady partner but drew on gendered sexual morality discourse to criticize young women who engage in casual and transactional sex.

Working-class women were more open to discuss their sexual experiences with casual partners compared to their striver- and middle-class counterparts. Still, working-class Black women were frustrated that while women in previous generations complied with social norms about women’s sexual propriety, women of their generation do not. As one woman stated,

Our mothers, they would arrive at their boyfriend’s [house] after midnight, after everyone has gone to sleep because they feared being seen. And they would leave early if they slept over, as early as 4 o’clock in the morning. With us it is different because we want to be seen by everyone that I slept at this particular [man’s] house.

*(single-sex FGD, Black Woman, Working Class, Working on Matric, Unemployed, Age 21)*

They felt that it is disgraceful that young women today make little effort to show discretion about their sexual practices, which is seen as a sign of disrespect in their neighborhoods. Working-class Coloured women shared that young women’s sexual experimentation was common in their neighborhoods. However, in contrast, they and their peers did not view the practice negatively despite the social backlash.

Coloured females like experimenting. They don’t want to just stick to one person, like we are still young, in our twenties. They have the freedom, why stick to one person. They need to gain experience *Age 21*
It’s almost like you kiss for the first time; it’s like yor! This is nice let me try there! Age 25
And let me try there! Age 21
That is also how you learn how to get better Age 25
(single-sex FGD, Coloured Women, Working and Striver Class, Matric, Some Vocational Training, Employed Periodically)

This particular ideal of young women’s freedom to engage in casual sex seemed to be unique to working-class Coloured women. Striver-class women, across racial groups, spoke distastefully about working-class women’s sexual choices. In their discussions, they drew upon racialized gender stereotypes of Coloured women as domineering and sexually adventurous and Black women as sexually immoral to draw distinctions between their engagement in pre-marital sex and working-class women’s sexual practices.

What is evident in these findings is that both young women and men construct gender ideals in response to shifts in gender politics in contemporary South Africa. Young adults are exposed to competing scripts on gender and sexuality, and how they relate to cultural messages about race and class belonging, and modern identity. New scripts on gender equality, rights, and freedom allow them a legitimate means to oppose other cultural messages on prescribed masculine and feminine practices, specifically men’s financial provision, women’s caregiving, and women’s sexual propriety. Although young adults contest some aspects of gender-restrictive scripts, they also employ personal responsibility and gender sexual morality discourses to position their attitudes and practices in a more favorable light compared to those of their age-related counterparts.

Young Adults’ Gender Ideals - Contending with Competing Cultural Scripts

The vast majority of young adults’ feminine and masculine ideals for sexual relationships fell somewhere in the middle of a wholesale adoption of gender-equitable scripts and full-scale rejection. Young adults grappled with what competing cultural messages mean to them and how best to incorporate these messages into the ideals from which they draw to build gendered lives.
and relationships. The process of refashioning competing scripts into relationship ideals often resulted in conflicts among young adults about which gendered practices are considered socially-acceptable. At times, young adults’ personal ideals also appear inconsistent as they embrace certain aspects of gender equality while simultaneously challenging others. The next section offers a window into the tensions in young adults’ ideals on gender equality in relationships that are in part a reflection of competing cultural scripts that are intertwined with other contextual factors. In addition, I highlight the various strategies used by young women and men to justify ideals that are at times contradictory and fraught with discrepancies.

**Love, sex and money - Men’s financial provision in relationships**

In patrilineal societies throughout Africa and South Asia, marital unions that include marriage transactions are a generally accepted practice. In many African societies, transitions to respectable adult status, for young men and women, hinge on bridewealth transfers that flow from men’s families to women’s families. This exchange signals the transfer of women from their father’s home to that of her husband’s family. As feminist scholars (Rozario, 1992, Rubin, 1975, Wardlow, 2006) have argued, the negative consequences of bridewealth-based unions include marriage transactions that commoditize women’s and girls’ value. They also note that the exchange of bridewealth may have implications for women’s ability to negotiate power dynamics with their husbands. They suggest that in contemporary times bridewealth transfers have been further commodified and used by men to justify dominance in their marital unions (Cornwall, 2002, Hunter, 2010, Magorokosho, 2011, Mojola, 2014, Smith, 2007, Wyrod, 2008).

In this study, the tension between gender-equitable scripts and a men’s financial provision

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20 According to Amin and Bajracharya (2011), ‘marriage transactions are payments or transfer of property that occur between families of the bride and groom during the time of a marriage.’
ideal was central in discussions on lobola (the transfer of bridewealth in South Africa) among Black working-class men and women. During a men’s single-sex focus group, a participant posed the question that in an era of gender equality, why women still embrace the practice of lobola.

How can they say we are equal if I am the one that should give lobola for you? Why don’t you give one for me if we are equal so that I will know even here around the house I will do the dishes on certain days or cook on certain days, clean the house, watch the kids. Do they see that thing?

*(single-sex FGD, Black Man, Working Class, No Matric, Employed Periodically, Age 28)*

His argument against the coexistence of lobola and gender equality was shared during a mixed-sex focus group discussion among working-class Black women and men. The women in the group vehemently denounced his suggestion that lobola should be discontinued. As one woman explained, “he has to pay lobola, he cannot use that as an excuse not to want to do things or help out [in the house]. He is the one that wanted to marry me, so he had to pay, not me paying for him.” All the women agreed with this assertion. A man probed, “are you then saying there is no 50/50 when it comes to lobola?” The women emphatically responded that when it comes to “traditional” cultural practices, such as lobola, gender equality does not apply. However, women argued strongly that gender equality scripts should guide decision-making and the division of household labor between partners outside of the larger cultural and extended family context. The woman mentioned earlier stated,

If we are going to speak about tradition, there is no 50/50 there, once lobola has been paid by you guys that means now I belong to your family. But the moment we have our own house, there we are equal partners.

*(mixed-sex FGD, Black Woman, Working Class, No Matric, Unemployed, Age 27)*

One of the men protested and questioned if by accepting lobola women were ascribing to an ideal of men’s dominance in their relationships. Another man entered the conversation siding with the women and shared the following:
I agree with them, the moment you get into your new home with your wife the 50/50 rule starts. When you got married, you agreed that in that marriage you will go 50/50 and yes when she is at your [parents’] home she needs to respect your elders and family. Lobola is about thanking her family for bringing her up. As a man, you know that she is part of your family and you have to make sure that she does not starve. When you say 50/50, it does not mean you neglect that responsibility you have to her.

*(mixed-sex FGD, Black Man, Working Class, Working on Matric, Unemployed, Age 21)*

This discussion exemplifies the inconsistencies in young adults’ gender ideals for sexual relationships. Young women advocate for gender-equitable partnerships while simultaneously calling for the maintenance of lobola appears to be an obvious contradiction. The use of cultural arguments in support of lobola leads one woman to seemingly change course in support of men’s dominance in relationships, while the other women attempt to justify ways that gender equality and the practice of lobola can coexist. The young man who supported the coexistence of lobola and gender equality asserted that men have a responsibility to provide for their wives and pay lobola as a sign of respect to their families as well as to uphold the gender-equitable values they agree upon with their wives.

What is absent from the discussion is that lobola-based unions are often a communal sign of a woman’s value and social status, which is similar to the role of marriage in many societies around the world (Ampofo, 2001). As Hunter (2010) notes, it is understandable that women, especially women who have not achieved high educational attainment and stable employment, would argue against any threat to one of the only remaining pathways to achieve social respectability in their ethnic communities. The strategy of parsing out the social spaces where gender equality is acceptable, at home alone with their partners, allows young women to rationalize their desire to hold on to the potential of acquiring social status through receiving lobola while advocating for equal decision-making power with their partners.

Men use the practice of lobola to argue either for or against gender equality in relationships.
In the single-sex group, the participant who shared the first quote argued against gender equality discourse and used the case of lobola to bolster his opinion. However, other men were somewhat undecided on the issue. At some points in single and mixed-sex discussions they embraced gender-equality, and at other times they held onto masculine ideals of financial provision for and protection of women and their families. Scholars have also drawn attention to how high unemployment rates among men in East and Southern Africa over the past few decades have resulted in a sharp decline in marriage rates, given men’s inability to pay lobola (Dworkin et al., 2012, Hunter, 2010, Mojola, 2014). Similar to women, marriage is a primary means for young men to gain social status and respectability in their ethnic communities; financial constraints and a lack of economic opportunity thwart their ability to achieve this position. Under these constrained circumstances, young men may adopt gender equality scripts to diminish the social value of lobola and create new pathways for “modern” marriage that are not dependent on their financial worth. The issue of lobola offers a clear illustration of how young adults wrestle with competing scripts that, when read against each other, generate inconsistencies in their relationships ideals.

Social norms that drive men to support women financially were also hotly debated in other group discussions. There was a consensus that men’s financial provision remains a gender role that many young men feel pressured to fulfill and that most young women are compelled to accept. Some of the disagreement, most intense in mixed-sex groups, stemmed from a lack of consensus among participants on the extent to which money should play a role in sexual relationships in general. Another interesting aspect of the debate was an at times sharp criticism leveled against women who overtly expect financial support or material possessions from men. During a mixed-sex conversation among striver- and middle-class Coloured young adults, women participants were quite critical of women whom they felt engaged in transactional sex relationships at
university in exchange for money and gifts from older men. A man in the group challenged this critique and shared that one of his women colleagues was in medical school primarily to increase her chances of meeting a wealthy man to marry. He felt that it was inappropriate to view young women’s relationship motivations with contempt.

In a discussion among striver-class Black women and men, participants expressed fairly divergent views on the role of money in relationships and how to balance this with desires for companionship and emotional support.

First, the guy asks, ‘where do you stay, where do you work?’ It’s none of their business, but they want to know. He wants to know if you’ve got money and then he’s going to spend a bit less, it’s kind of budgeting. But we have girls who are out for money, and some don’t even want to work, they want a guy with money. Money is a part of life, but as a partner, you should love each other and help each other grow instead of wanting the other one to bring money. *Woman, Age 26*

If you get a rich guy marrying a rich woman, a poor guy marrying a poor girl then the relationship is better, there’s balance. **Money is there; you need it but also love.** You can have all the money, but your girlfriend can still cheat on you if you’re not there for her emotionally. *Man, Age 24*

My cousin says love doesn’t pay the bills. I agree, but not completely. In a relationship, you don’t love the person’s money; you love the person that you know, the one that’s there for you, the one that you **want** to be with. Money is one element in a relationship because really I want to be taken out, not that you have to do it all the time, I can do it tomorrow, and you can do it today. *Woman, Age 27*

If you’re a guy who’s wearing no name brands and someone is wearing name brands, a guy who’s rocking [wearing] a cheap watch and someone has a Rolex, someone comes with an old car, and a Lamborghini rocks [drives] up. Obviously, the girl is going to be like that guy might be a **nicer person,** might provide support, time, emotions all of that, but the money is going to talk. *Man, Age 25*

(*mixed-sex FGD, Black Men and Women, Striver Class, Technical College and University Students and Graduates, Career Path Employment*)

In a single-sex group of middle-class White men, participants discussed masculinities portrayed in the movie “The Wolf of Wall Street”. Most participants indicated that some of the misogyny portrayed in the movie of men who treat women as sexual objects, and often commodities, was
prevalent among their peers, but they clearly stated that they did not personally identify with these values. The conversation continued in a mixed-sex group of White men and women. The women in this group agreed that some of the masculine ideals in the movie, specifically men’s financial provision, were common among women they knew. One woman shared,

A lot of my friends go on a date with a guy or get a boyfriend, and they sort of expect him to pay. It’s a first date, if you don’t pay, then you’re making a bad impression because you’re not trying to impress me. A lot of my friends want a boyfriend that’s going to shower them with gifts! I think it’s an unrealistic expectation.

(mixed-sex FGD, White Woman, Middle Class, University Grad, Career Path Employment, Age 23)

During this discussion, another woman pointed out that women who engage in relationships with these types of men have little to no recourse to challenge their partner’s abusive behavior and infidelity. The men in this mixed-sex group affirmed that the sexist masculinities prevail but offered alternative images of men who exhibit “quiet confidence and power” and respect for women. However, men who offered this alternative ideal did not address how men’s financial provision factored into these more positive masculinities. Most salient across these discussions is how young adults use gender as a language of social critique in a context in which both gender-restrictive and gender-equitable cultural messages are heavily contested. This is illustrated in tensions over the role of money in love-based relationships. Also apparent is a strong critique of young women who are presumed, by men and some women, to prioritize money or love in relationships. In addition, by clearly designating their peers as holders of a ‘men as providers’ ideal, young women and men in this study distinguish themselves as more “modern” in comparison. They make these distinctions even though they have not fully resolved how money and power should be negotiated in their own relationships.

**Religion and men’s dominance in relationships**
Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Ephesians 5:22-25 ESV

This biblical scripture was referenced in three separate focus group discussions in conversations on women’s ideals of masculine roles and responsibilities in sexual relationships. In all instances, citing this scripture elicited both favorable and disapproving responses from other group participants. In a group of middle-class White women, a participant cited the text to explain how her religious faith guides the type of man she desires. She stated, “the thing I’d look for most in an ideal partner is someone I really respect. Someone whose attitude and values, I really look up to, that’s the most attractive thing.” The other participants, who did not share her religious convictions, respected her opinion and did not openly challenge it, but their body language and descriptions of their own gender ideals indicated that there was some discomfort with her reliance on religious doctrine to determine partner selection.

During a conversation among striver-class Black women, participants debated the exact wording of the text with respect to gendered responsibilities and behavior in relationships. One woman referenced the scripture to support her belief that women and men should practice monogamy. She exclaimed, “God says we mustn’t fornicate, but we still do. If we followed our religion more, I think we would have more stable relationships, and we would have guys value us as women. God said this is how you’re supposed to treat women.” In a mixed-sex group, participants engaged in a contentious discussion about the interpretation of this scripture in terms of men’s dominance in decision-making.

I grew up in a Christian home; according to the Bible, the male is the head of the house, who basically has the most power. I agree to some extent. I believe the male should have the power in the house; he is supposed to look after the female. Because we live in a new society
where females have degrees, we work, we have our own money, I’m not saying the male should tell me what to do or order me around, he should respect me enough for me to have my own life. But he should also be the one that makes the main decisions in the house. My daddy is that type of guy in my household, and I respect him for that. Yes, my mommy is the one who’s his strength, but my daddy is the head of the house, and that’s why I want a husband like that, a husband that can take a stand, not order me around, don’t get me wrong, but look after me and protect me and guide me. Woman, Age 25

I know what verse you’re talking about in the Bible. So, the verse actually says, it’s not just the man that’s the head of the house, they both form the head. It’s just that men had the voice and would speak on behalf of the house. But the woman and the man are there to make decisions. You’re on the same playing field, but the Bible says man must put it into action and speak. But it does not mean that the woman is taking a minority role. Man, Age 23

Different types of relationships are accepted now. If you have a homosexual male relationship, who is the head because we have two males? Or in a homosexual female relationship, you don’t have a man so who is the head, do you bring in a man? I don’t agree that there should be someone that’s more dominant, I feel like in a relationship we should be equal; our decisions should be made together. Woman, Age 22

(mixed-sex FGD, Coloured Women and Men, Middle and Striver Class, University and Postgrad Students)

This discussion illustrates the contestations that result among young adults as they try to interpret and incorporate competing cultural scripts into their relationship ideals. Internal dissonance is also evident in the first woman respondent’s masculine ideals as she attempts simultaneously to advocate for men’s dominance in relationships and to claim freedom from it. These accounts across social groups demonstrate that young adults who identify as Christians have different understandings of the underlying values conveyed by religious doctrine. Moreover, respondents tend to selectively interpret the text in a way that aligns with their specific gender projects – to construct an ideal partner, to admonish men’s sexual infidelity, and to justify support of men’s dominance in decision making in relationships – as opposed to willfully adopting the text verbatim.

“Modern” Femininities

For the most part, young women are struggling to find a balance between adhering to religious and ethnic cultural values while trying to forge a new path for themselves in contemporary society.
Cultural scripts about men’s dominance and women’s respectability and sexual propriety still loom large, and challenge the extent to which young women can achieve their vision of successful womanhood (Harrison, 2008, Pattman, 2005). In a conversation among striver-class Black women, a participant voiced her frustration with trying to construct a “modern” feminine identity that incorporates competing cultural scripts.

I’m in a relationship with my boyfriend, I work, and he works, so we both have to provide 50/50 for the expenditures in our home. When I look back, my father was working; my mother wasn’t allowed to work because he was the head of the house, that’s how I grew up. At times, my boyfriend tells me what to do; I’m like we’ve got 50/50 rights so you can’t tell me what to do automatically. I think it’s all confusing. As a Black South African woman, you are told you must respect your husband, you must submit to your husband. We have religion on this side, respect your husband, love your husband. On the other side, I have to be the independent woman that I’ve always aspired to be.

(similex sex FGD, Black Woman, Striver Class, College Graduate, Career Path Employment, Age 23)

Similar concerns were shared by a striver-class Coloured woman who expressed that she wanted to move in with her boyfriend of six years but experienced harsh resistance from her conservative family who disapprove of men and women living together before marriage. She compared her situation to what she sees on TV and the Internet about the lives and relationships of young adults in other societies, “I look at America and overseas and there, people live together for 10 years, and they don’t get married, but I’m not allowed to sleep over by my boyfriend, he is not allowed to sleep over by me.” She stressed that she values and respects her culture but feels that some of the restrictions placed on her are unrealistic, given how young adults live today compared to previous generations. Even though she attends a technical college and can pay for many of her personal expenses, her family still refuses to allow her to live with her boyfriend and have threatened that if she chooses to move out, “take your stuff and never come back.”

In the aforementioned quote, the striver-class Black woman expresses how competing cultural messages on men’s dominance and gender equality play out in women’s lives. While she
clearly attempts to incorporate gender-equitable scripts in her relationship, the pressure of religious doctrine and ethnic values impose limits on her ability to fully actualize her gender ideals. The second example clearly demonstrates the costs of challenging cultural norms that limit women’s sexual freedom. The very real threat that her family will sever ties if she chooses to live with her partner limits her options to comply with a marriage ideal, which may not be desirable at this stage of life, or live with the social restrictions imposed upon her. Both of these striver-class young women have achieved financial independence from their families and partners, yet social pressure still limits their aspirations to achieve the ideal of the “modern” young woman.

As a whole, these findings throw into sharp relief how tensions and contradictions in young adults’ gender ideals for sexual relationships reflect competing cultural scripts. Participants hotly-debated the underlying social values conveyed in gender-equitable and gender-restrictive scripts on issues that ranged from whether men’s dominance is endorsed in religious scripture to the role of money in love-based relationships. As in other studies (Dworkin et al., 2012, Nzioka, 2001, Strebel et al., 2006, Swartz et al., 2016), these discussions elucidated internal dissonance in young men and women’s ideals, which support men’s dominance in certain domains of relationships and simultaneously advocate for gender-egalitarian norms in others. In addition, there was a lack of consensus, within and between groups, on relationship ideals about men’s responsibility to financially support women, women’s expectation that men serve as material providers, and “modern” femininities.

Discussion

This chapter explored how powerful cultural scripts shape young adults’ masculine and feminine ideals for sexual relationships, as a critical object of study in the sociology of gender. The study reveals that scripts, created and reproduced within and between social institutions, offer conflicting
messages about gender and sexuality. Moreover, the findings demonstrate that for the most part, young men and women struggle to make sense of conflicting scripts and manage these divergent messages in a variety of ways. Tensions among young adults in describing ideals of masculinity and femininity and internal inconsistencies within their personal ideals reflect competing scripts that they struggle to disentangle and incorporate in their lives and relationships.

These findings support scholarship on sexual relationships and modernity, which suggests that some young adults adopt restrictive gender norms, while others challenge traditional cultural messages and embrace new scripts on gender equality as they construct relationship ideals. Yet, this study departs from the adoption versus challenge paradigm. An assumption in much of the current literature is that young adults’ ideals either cluster around “traditional” gender models that delineate specific masculine and feminine roles and responsibilities or around “modern” gender models that favor gender equality in sexual relationships (Bhana, 2016a, Hoffman et al., 2006, Pettifor et al., 2012). Intervention research that draws upon this theoretical framework aims to promote the wholesale replacement of restrictive gender norms with egalitarian attitudes and practices. This has oversimplified the relation between the contextual and the interpersonal and suggests that either set of cultural scripts offers people a clear and cohesive message about gender and sexual norms and values. This study advances the application of sexual script theory by arguing that this binary framework does not capture young adults’ actual expressions and experiences of gender. Findings indicate that the majority of young women and men described emergent relationship ideals that embrace some cultural messages on gender equality and simultaneously reject others. This application of sexual script theory is aligned with Simon and Gagnon’s original framework; they contend that people fashion interpersonal scripts within the frame of cultural scripts, which allows space for variation and reconstruction.
In the face of constrained economic realities, working-class men openly adopted gender equitable scripts based on equal financial provision in relationships, but were hesitant to extend their support for joint decision-making and a balanced division of domestic labor. Working-class Black women and men disagreed as to whether the cultural practice of lobola and gender equitable partnerships could coexist. At times, middle- and striver-class men and women who strongly endorsed gender-equitable scripts engaged in gendered moral posturing and disavowed support for masculine ideals of financial provision and sexual promiscuity, which they said were common amongst their peers. These instances of internal dissonance and the discursive use of gender as a language of social critique further reflect the contested landscape of gender, and transformation more broadly, in contemporary South Africa. The majority of young adults are contending with competing cultural scripts, which suggests that they envision and anticipate change towards more gender egalitarian unions in the future, but are not there yet as far as their aspirations for and experiences in relationships. While gender equality scripts have support in the post-apartheid context (Dworkin et al., 2012, Strebel et al., 2006), the pace of change is slow and shaped not only by the resilience of gender-restrictive scripts but also popular discourses on rights, neoliberalism, gendered sexual morality and personal responsibility. Further, these cultural factors intertwine with economic stagnation to shape young adults’ social and material realities and gaps between their gender ideals for sexual relationships and their ability to actualize these ideals.

In South Africa, changes in the gendered structures of power and work have destabilized the existing structure of cathexis through laws and discourses that promote gender equality as well as broader discourses on social and economic freedom and rights. Shifting norms are evidenced by some gender ideals expressed by young adults – embracing gender-egalitarian partnerships, challenging expectations for women to prioritize marriage and caregiving over their personal
aspirations, and women’s rejection of prohibitions on premarital sex. Yet, the maintenance of a restrictive gender structure is apparent in other ideals – some young adults’ advocate for men’s dominance in relationships, a sustained expectation for men to serve as providers for and protectors of women, and the inability of some women to actualize ideals of “modern” femininity.

In this chapter, I also emphasize variation in contemporary femininities, the masculine practices that women idealize, and women’s expectations of men in sexual relationships, which have been largely neglected in gender and sexuality scholarship. In applied research, women’s and girls’ empowerment interventions in South Africa, as in many places around the world, are typically designed to improve women’s material realities and increase their agency and decision-making power within intimate relationships. Gender transformative programming, a parallel approach, works to transform men’s attitudes and practices in an effort to promote gender-equitable norms. However, these approaches miss how competing scripts, discourses on personal responsibility and gendered sexual morality, along with changes in the gendered structure of work lead some women to support masculine ideals that reinforce men’s dominance in relationships. It is equally important to understand what women want and expect from men in sexual relationships and why, as well as, the contextual realities that shape their ideals. Chapter Six examines the ways in which young adults draw on contextual influences to decide how gendered power should be negotiated in their conceptions of an idealized intimate partnership-type relationship. I also explain how social location, along the axes of gender, class, and race, shapes desirability in the relationship market and the relationship pathways available for young women and men to pursue.
CHAPTER SIX – DOES CLASS MATTER?
YOUNG ADULTS’ ASPIRATIONS FOR THE GOOD LIFE AND DESIRABLE PARTNERS

In this chapter, I explore young adults’ gender ideals and motivations for sexual relationships across the axes of class, gender, and race. To begin, I examine young adults’ good life aspirations and how an intimate partnership features prominently in their desired lifestyles. From there, I discuss their conceptions of an idealized intimate partnership and how they draw on competing cultural scripts for gender and sexuality and popular discourses to decide how power should be negotiated in these relationships. Next, I explain how social location – primarily at the intersection of gender and class - shapes desirability in the relationship market, and the relationship pathways available for young women and men to pursue. I argue that despite their privileged status, middle- and striver-class young adults face gendered pressures in pursuing idealized relationship pathways that align with their life goals. Given their material realities, working- and some striver-class men and women experience greater challenges, and often choose temporary alternative gendered relationship pathways to the good life.

Young Adults’ Good Life Aspirations

For centuries, scientists have studied conceptions of the good life and the means to obtain desirable lifestyles. Drawing from Aristotle, Arendt (1958) interpreted the good life as the freedom of citizens to pursue a quality of life beyond satisfying basic material needs. In contemporary studies on happiness and well-being, Veenhoven (2013) describes the good life as incorporating Bourdieu’s concept of life chances and the tangible outcomes of one’s pursuit of their life goals. Others have emphasized that the good life is both culturally-specific (time and place) and takes on both individualized and collective forms (McKenzie, 2016, Pflug, 2009). Moreover, Cairns and
colleagues (2010) argue, although those with greater economic and cultural capital are better able to achieve desired lifestyles, good life ideals tend to have broad cultural resonance.

In this study, young women’s and men’s idealized conceptions of the good life as they transition to adulthood in post-apartheid South Africa was a key area of inquiry. When asked, ‘what constitutes the good life?’, young adults’ perceptions, across race, class, and gender, mostly focused on material consumption and obtaining “modern” markers of success.

A lot of young adults I know just want to study the bare minimum, get out of university, find an amazing paying job, have an awesome car and flat, and go to music festivals every weekend. Unlimited funds, unlimited everything.
(single-sex FGD, White Woman, Middle Class, University Grad, Career Path Employment, Age 23)

We all want to work so we have the ability to live a nice life, provide for our family one day, and not be in debt or living paycheck to paycheck. I think we just strive to have a comfortable life.
(single-sex FGD, Coloured Woman, Striver Class, Undergrad Student, Age 22)

At our age, we want money, beautiful women, and nice cars. We’re chasing money, and we’re trying by all means. If it wasn’t for university, if there was any other way of getting money, I would do anything. But, the other ways get you in trouble.
(single-sex FGD, Black Man, Striver Class, Undergrad Student, Age 24)

However, respondents’ reports of their personal life goals stood in stark contrast to their perceptions of how young adults they know envision the good life. While their perceptions of desired lifestyles centered on individual material consumption and excess, communal values appear to guide how they envision their future lives.

I am not supposed to be still living with my parents. I am supposed to be spending my own hard earned money. They should be receiving from me, not the other way around… At this age, we should be married and have our own homes. I do not see why we still stay with our parents and are still unmarried. I really don’t see the reason why.
(single-sex FGD, Black Woman, Working Class, No Matric, Unemployed, Age 26)
In five years, I want to start settling into a job that I will have for the next 10 to 20 years. That’s number one, starting a career and being done with my studies. Also, starting a relationship that is heading towards marriage. Just being happy and healthy.
(Interview, Black Man, Middle Class, Undergrad Student, Age 21)

My life now is settled, the only thing I want is to do my studies, do what I love [a career in nursing], buy a house, raise my children, and give them a good education.
(Interview, Black Woman, Working Class, No Matric, Stable Employment, Age 30)

The good life, [laughs] when I was 20 all I wanted was to party; that’s basically normal for young people. Now I’ve been married for five years; the good life is about settling down with my own home and car, a good job and to be able to look after my family.
(Interview, Coloured Man, Working Class, No Matric, Unemployed, Age 28)

In five years, I see myself as a documentary filmmaker. I have my own house, living in Pretoria. I want to have one child with a stable partner; somebody who understands me and I understand them, who loves me. We show understanding, trust, and love.
(Interview, Black Woman, Striver Class, Vocational College Student, Age 20)

Their personal visions of the future offer a more nuanced depiction of the good life characterized by a blend of personal gratification achieved through hard work, the ability to care for loved ones, and a meaningful intimate relationship. Their accounts mirror those of respondents in Pflug’s (2009) research on conceptions of happiness among young men and women in Johannesburg, South Africa. In a comparative study of young adults in South Africa and Germany, she found that freedom, interpersonal relationships, and material needs featured prominently in South African young adults’ descriptions of well-being. She suggests that South Africans’ perceptions of the good life result from a combination of traditional collectivistic and contemporary individualistic values. To build on these findings, my work explores how these competing value systems, exemplified in post-apartheid South Africa, inform how young adults rationalize discrepancies between their generational good life desires and their personal life and relationship aspirations.
Partnership Pathways to the Good Life and Young Adults’ Gender Ideals for Relationships

Balancing gender power and responsibility in relationships

Often “modern” heterosexual unions are envisioned as romantic love-based relationships in which women and men view each other as partners who work together in the pursuit of compatible life goals (Hirsch and Wardlow, 2006, Jankowiak, 2013, Langford, 1999, Layder, 2009). When asked what a “partnership” relationship looks like, respondents in this study mentioned love, companionship and mutual support as important relationship motivations, and stated that trust, respect, understanding, and communication were desirable partner traits. Many described a life partner as someone willing to invest time to help you achieve personal life pursuits and felt a partnership creates a space for people to become better versions of themselves. While respondents clearly stressed the important role of emotional attachment in relationships, this chapter focuses on how young adults’ good life aspirations, pursued through idealized and alternative relationship pathways, are reflected in their gender ideals for relationships.

Men and women, across class and race, shared that securing a ‘partnership’ relationship was a key pathway in pursuit of the good life. Yet, their descriptions of partnership relationships were diverse, especially in terms of how gendered power should be negotiated. Several respondents used the terms “equality”, “joint”, “50/50”, and “balanced” to describe their intimate partnership ideals. Three distinct domains of gendered power in relationships were discussed across groups: a balanced division of household labor, equal financial contribution to relationship expenses, and joint decision making between partners. In general, young adults’ partnership ideals indicate that they support incorporating some gender-equitable scripts in intimate relationships and they feel less obligated to ascribe to restrictive gender roles and responsibilities than previous generations. However, the pertinence of and how to apply gender-egalitarian values to each
domain of power to build a partnership varied across groups. Moreover, South Africa’s contemporary gender politics and the persistence of structural inequalities create a rocky course for young adults to pursue the good life through a partnership-type relationship.

**Balancing domestic labor**

The majority of women and men felt there has been some relaxing of adherence to restrictive gender roles in the division of labor in households for their generation and several participants grew up learning tasks that were previously ascribed to only men or women. The relaxing of gender-specific roles and responsibilities has contributed to young adults’ support for a balanced division of domestic labor between intimate partners. However, there was less agreement as to what equal contribution should look like in practice. Discussions about the conditions under which a balanced division of domestic labor is pertinent to an intimate partnership were broached in most focus groups and interviews. As a working-class Coloured woman stated,

> Women work, they can’t come home from work and look after the husband, cook, help the children with their homework, run the bath, and clean the house. And the husband can’t work all week and on Saturday and Sunday mow the lawn and fix the car. It doesn’t work like that anymore where you must be the provider, and I must be the caretaker. It’s a partnership. *(Interview, Coloured Woman, Working Class, Matric, Unemployed, Age 29)*

In general, participants felt that women’s involvement in paid labor outside the home was the main driver behind efforts to balance the division of household labor. Several men prefaced their support for a balanced division of labor with the condition that their partner was engaged in paid labor; as a Coloured striver-class man stated during an interview, “if she’s working and tired, of course, I’ll help out”. However, there was almost no discussion on how household work should be split when men are unemployed. An exception was an account shared by a Coloured working-class, unemployed man who was living with his employed girlfriend who supported him financially. He
explained that due to his upbringing and unemployment status, he contributed the majority of time and effort to household chores in the relationship.

Support for a balanced division of household labor did not always equate to men taking on work previously ascribed to women. At times, participants employed gender equality discourse to bolster their desire to maintain gender-specific roles and responsibilities within intimate partnerships. This point is illustrated in the following conversation among working-class Black women and men.

If we are both working, he has to do his part as well because we are both in this. woman, Age 21
There is a need for equality, yes, but for me to wash the dishes though my wife is around that is another issue. That is outside equality. man, Age 26
If you are not going to wash the dishes, there must be something else that you can do around the house. You cannot just sit around and wait for a warm plate and then go straight to bed. woman, Age 21
As a woman, there are jobs or chores that are designated for you, like inside the house that is your territory and me as a man; mine is outside like making sure that the yard is clean at all times and making sure that I repair all the broken things. man, Age 26
I totally agree, as much as things might have changed there are things that still need to remain the same. woman, Age 28
So, we all agree that he must do something even if it is outdoors. woman, Age 21
(mixed-sex FGD, Black Women and Men, Working Class, No Matric and Working on Matric, Minimal Vocational Training, Mostly Unemployed)

In this discussion, a consensus was reached among participants by agreeing that half of the work should be done by each partner, but there are specific chores that are suitable for men and others for women. In another focus group, Black striver-class women and men also debated about how a balance of domestic labor should be achieved. A young woman in the group suggested that both partners should contribute equally to household chores and a schedule was a good way to keep couples accountable to each other. A young man in the focus group retorted,
Obviously, if your wife is busy, you have to understand. Like I can cook, clean, do everything. But she mustn’t be like okay this is like a schedule, Monday it’s me, Tuesday it’s you. No, we’re not going to share these pants like okay one leg you’re going to put on and the other side me. I’m going to wear both, but sometimes I’m going to take them off and say okay now it’s you.

*mixed-sex FGD, Black Man, Striver Class, Undergrad Student, Age 25*

Young adults’ views on when and how a ‘balanced’ division of household labor is achieved are in many ways aligned with a traditional view of domestic labor (cook, clean and care for loved ones) as women’s work. In general, they envision partnership-type relationships as those in which men compassionately support women to complete household chores, under the condition that women are engaged in paid labor. This understanding of a partnership does not refute restrictive gender roles but suggests that in modern dual-income partnerships men acknowledge that the “second shift” should not be a burden that women bear alone. The underlying assumption is that men continue to engage in paid labor and contribute at least 50 percent to household expenses. There was little discussion about what a partnership looks like when men are unable to contribute in relationships financially.

**Equal financial contribution for relationship expenses**

Discussions about the role of money in relationships were common, and many participants shared that in modern times, both partners contributing financially is essential to the pursuit of the good life. Similar to conversations about maintaining a balanced division of labor, respondents reflected on the conditions under which contributing equally towards relationship expenses was desirable, and when men taking on a great role in financial provision was acceptable. Across race and class, young adults distinguished between how couples should approach negotiating relationship expenses while dating, and how expenses should be handled in a marital union. The following quotes illustrate this point.
If you’re married, you can try that 50/50 thing and put money together. If you’re not married, I don’t think it’s good to have 50/50 at all because you don’t know what’s going to happen tomorrow.

(Interview, Black Woman, Working Class, No Matric, Stable Employment, Age 30)

My partner and I, our lives are intertwined, but we independently make decisions about our own money. When we get married, and it’s a joint venture, then it’s like here’s the money what should we do with it. For now, we both have a say, like ‘man, why are you doing that?’ Not really to control, just concern.

(Interview, Black Man, Middle Class, University Grad, Career Path Employment, Age 25)

In a marriage, you have to be a unit; you have to be one. Whether it’s with disciplining your children, or with finances, or whatever the case may be. When you are just starting a relationship, you should be independent, you need to be able to make your own rules and say I want to go out, and if you want to go out, then you go out. I don’t need to depend on you to pay my bills.

(Interview, Coloured Woman, Working Class, Matric, Unemployed, Age 29)

These accounts suggest that in dating relationships, men and women should independently control and make decisions about their own money, while marriage requires interdependence between couples to decide how finances are managed.

In general, women and men shared different motivations in their support for equal contribution to relationship expenses. Women stressed that doing away with the ‘men as providers’ ideal for relationships serves to balance power between women and men, and financial independence is a protective factor to decrease women’s risk of intimate partner violence. Overwhelmingly, men across class and race were adamant that women who could contribute financially in relationships were desirable partners.

If I had money, she [his ex-girlfriend] wanted to take 300 for herself and leave 200 for me. She liked money a lot; she was a spoiled brat. She wore fancy clothes, like 2000 rand takkies [sneakers]. She doesn’t work and bought herself those shoes. I gave her the 300 because I loved her; I tried to compromise. Sometimes you must do things even if you don’t like to do it. Now, I want to date someone who is educated and is working and knows what she wants in life. I want a dreamer; I’m still looking.

(Interview, Black Man, Working Class, No Matric, Some Vocational Training, Unemployed, Age 28)
I think girls are very materialistic. They are looking for prince charming to take them out and pay for everything. I’ve found that academic females don’t mind going out and paying half, or you pay one day, and I pay the next. I think that’s cool, that’s something I can deal with. But if you expect me to do all the paying, I’m going to kick you to the curb because that shit just ain’t working. Ideally, I’d like a 50/50 relationship; you want that balance.

(Interview, Coloured Man, Striver Class, University Student, Age 20)

These sentiments exemplify an overall disparaging view of women who expect men to provide for them financially especially instances where men pay for what are viewed as lifestyle-necessities – beauty products, ‘smart’ clothing, and expenses-related to partying with friends. Working-class women grappled with whether it is acceptable to depend on men financially since they lack access to basic goods (i.e. mobile phones and money for transportation) and lifestyle-necessities. During a single-sex group discussion, Black working-class women shared critical reflections on why they engage in relationships where they expect men to provide for them.

These days we don’t even work because we tell ourselves there is a sugardaddy, let me go over there and get his money and spend it with my friends. Age 26

We spend most of our time on alcohol and sex. The reason for that is because we are bored and we have nothing else to do. It is difficult to go and look for a job because someone tells herself why should I go look for work when I have a boyfriend that will give me 500 to do my hair and 300 to go and drink with my friends every month. Age 21

The relationships that we are involved in these days are more like prostitution because we’re kind of selling ourselves to our boyfriends. I would never date someone who is not working. You can grow out of love for that person, but you will stay because of that money that he gives you to make yourself look beautiful. Age 26

Sometimes you find that he will ask you to do something that you don’t want to do, but you will do it because you are thinking about the money that he gives you that you will lose if you don’t do what he asks you to do. If you were working, you would be doing things on your own and would not be thinking of what you will be losing if your boyfriend leaves you. Now you know that you are not working you find yourself thinking I should just suck it up even though maybe I don’t like the way he does things or the way he treats me. Age 21

(single-sex FGD, Black women, Working Class, No Matric, Limited Vocational Training, Mostly Unemployed)
For the most part, these young women are unapologetic about what they describe as personal choices made under constrained economic circumstances. They provide a counter-narrative to the adoption of gender equality discourse that supports young adults’ gender ideals of equal financial provision in relationships. Working-class women fully acknowledge the risks associated with their relationships, yet question the utility of modern gender equality discourse that has not contributed to their ability to access quality education and living wage employment. In contrast, several working- and striver-class men wholeheartedly embrace gender equality discourse to support their desire for the new ‘modern’ woman who has her own source of income, which relaxes pressure on young men to provide financially.

Middle- and striver-class women were especially critical of women who depended on men’s financial provision. However, these same women expressed that their boyfriend’s desire to provide for them was a signifier of love, and acceptance of money and gifts from their partners did not contradict their partnership ideals. As one woman described,

My boyfriend doesn’t have matric. My salary will be more than his one day when I graduate. But what I like about him is that even though I have 500 rand in my wallet and he has 100, he is willing to give his last little so that my 500 can be my pocket money. It doesn’t matter if he’s not studying, if he doesn’t have an established career. He has a job. It’s not perfect, but it suits me this way.

(single-sex FGD, Coloured Woman, Striver Class, Vocational College Student, Age 20)

Middle- and striver-class women sharply differentiated their acceptance of men’s financial provision in their relationships with women who expect men to provide. The key distinction was that they are able to financially contribute to relationship expenses and their lifestyle necessities, but their boyfriends choose to provide more in their relationships. Thus, they accept but do not expect men to provide for them in love-based relationships. In contrast, they cast working-class women as the maligned gold-digger archetype who prioritize money over love and use sex to achieve their lifestyle desires. In general, men across race and class agreed, men’s financial
provision is acceptable in intimate relationships as long as women did not expect or depend on men’s financial support.

How young adults rationalize the conditions under which equal contribution towards relationship expenses is desirable and when men’s financial provision is acceptable exposes their performance of social location along the axes of gender and class. Gender equality discourse allows working- and striver-class young men to envision intimate partnerships in which they are not responsible to provide for women. However as mentioned, the expectation that men should engage in paid labor and continue to contribute to relationship expenses is still widely held by men and women, and often restricts a partnership pathway\textsuperscript{21} for under- and un-employed men. Striver- and middle-class women justify their acceptance of men’s financial provision by juxtaposing it against working-class women’s objectionable expectation of men to provide for them. Working-class women partially dismiss gender equality scripts as they pertain to men’s financial provision as these cultural messages do not address the material realities of their everyday lives.

**Joint Decision-making**

Participants shared a variety of opinions on how couples should approach decision-making in relationships, and if this domain of gender power should be shared jointly or dominated by men. For young adults who equate a partnership to a 50/50 relationship, joint decision-making is quite literal, and the belief is that in theory, each partner should contribute equally in relationship-related decisions. For others, decision-making is more nuanced and they referred to both cultural and structural conditions that determine how decision-making should be negotiated between partners in practice. For several young women and men, religious and cultural beliefs guide their views on decision-making in relationships. As discussed in Chapter Five, a striver-class Coloured woman,

\textsuperscript{21} I use the phrases ‘partnership pathway’ and partnership-type relationship pathway interchangeably
who described her relationship as a partnership, referenced biblical scripture to support her opinion that men should take a primary role in decision making in household affairs. However, she clarified that men should not abuse their power and attempt to control women’s lives. In several discussions, across racial groups, participants perceived that in African cultures a man is considered the head of the family, and thus the primary decision-maker in relationships. A working-class Black woman challenged the view that conflates men’s role as head of the family with decision-making power. Drawing on gender equality discourse, she explained,

[Men as head of the family], I think that is a very old-fashioned family structure. Today if one still believes in those things they will die a slow death I am telling you. Yes, he might be the head only because he is my husband, but that does not mean he makes all the decisions. Today it does not work like that; we are equal now. (mixed-sex FGD, Black Woman, Working Class, No Matric, Unemployed, Age 28)

Many participants across class, race, and gender shared this woman’s belief that in modern relationships couples should make decisions jointly. As part of individual interviews, I asked women and men questions from the Sexual Relationship Power Scale (Pulerwitz et al., 2000). The decision-making dominance subscale includes questions about control over sexual decision-making and spending money, as well as which partner holds more decision-making power in sexual relationships. The majority of young adults reported that they made decisions jointly in their current or previous relationships, and almost all wanted joint decision-making in a future long-term partnership. Of 21 respondents, only 4 reported that their partners had more say in making important decisions in the relationship. Two of these respondents were working-class women who reported abuse in their previous and current relationships, and the third was a working-class man who described a toxic relationship with his ex-girlfriend (see page 137). An outlier was a young, affluent career-oriented Black woman who desired a long-term partnership in which her husband took responsibility in decision-making. She reported that she would likely allow her
partner to make decisions about what she does and wears if she agreed with his rationale, but stated, “if he thinks this means I am his property that will not work for me.” She explained,

The bible says how a woman should be towards a man and a man towards a woman. A man is supposed to be responsible, giving, compassionate, kind, and uplifting. The woman’s side is about submission and serving your husband. I value these roles. Growing up, even if my mom [who worked as a nurse] had the money, you had to ask my dad for it and justify your request. I value this because it provided structure in the family. I want this in a partner.

(Interview, Black Woman, Middle Class, University Student, Age 21)

The respondent and the Coloured striver-class woman mentioned above (see page 140), both want to marry responsible men like their fathers and seek a partnership similar to their parents’ relationships. Their belief that women and men should contribute to decision-making but men should have the final say was shared by participants who justified their views through reference to religious doctrine and ethnic values. Yet, these young women also embraced aspects of gender equality scripts as they relate to women’s empowerment in public institutions and to an extent within intimate relationships. They were career-oriented and stressed that men should not abuse their decision-making power and attempt to control women’s actions and life choices unreasonably. Since they draw on competing scripts to construct gender ideals, it is likely that these contradictions will surface in the future as they attempt to negotiate power with their intimate partners.

Young adults’ conversations about the domains of gendered power in relationships illustrate that their conceptions of an idealized partnership-type relationship vary widely, yet most accounts emphasize the conditions under which gender equality is desirable. By drawing on competing scripts for gender and sexuality and popular discourses instead of rejecting restrictive gender roles and responsibilities, they attempt to reconfigure them for modern times. In large part, masculine ideals centered around employed men who financially contribute equally, if not more, to relationship expenses; compassionately share in domestic labor; and do not abuse their decision-
making power with women. The feminine ideal was a working woman who is able to contribute to relationship expenses, graciously accepts her partner’s willingness to help out around the house, and appreciates her place at the decision-making table. Across race, gender, and class, the clearest sign of change in scripts for gender and sexuality is the expectation that women engage in paid labor and contribute to relationship expenses. However, with regard to decision making and domestic labor, the evidence suggests a relaxing of strict gender roles and responsibilities, but not the deconstruction of gendered expectations.

Participants also employ competing scripts and discourses on gender and sexuality in the performance of social location to position their beliefs and choices favorably relative to differently situated others. In addition, they draw upon these contextual influences to explain internal dissonance in their gender ideals for relationships. Working- and striver-class women used gender equitable scripts to call for a more balanced division of domestic labor, while men used these scripts to maintain gender-specific tasks and set conditions for their contribution to women’s chores (when women work). For the most part, middle-class participants did not discuss how best to balance household labor, which is not surprising given that hiring domestic workers is commonplace among the middle-class in South Africa. Striver- and middle-class women who supported men’s dominance in decision-making based on their religious beliefs couched this gender ideal by clarifying that abdicating power in this domain did not equate to men’s right to control their actions and choices. Working- and striver-class men also draw upon gender equality discourse to advocate for women’s equal contribution to relationship expenses and disparage women who use men as economic life support. Striver- and middle-class women use these same discursive tools to castigate women who expect men to provide but simultaneously justify their own acceptance of men’s financial provision by chivalrous boyfriends. Working-class women
embrace ideals of joint decision-making and a balanced division of domestic labor in relationships but reject gender equitable scripts when it comes to financial provision given their limited ability to achieve financial independence.

Young adults’ conversations about the domains of gendered power in relationships and a partnership pathway to the good life were for the most part at the level of ideals that were often not grounded in their lived experience. The majority of participants were not in a long-term relationship at the time of data collection and had not previously been in a relationship that they would describe as a partnership. Their lack of lived experience in partnership relationships is primarily a factor of life stage – many are still in the early period of working towards their life goals, and a partnership-type relationship is something they idealize for the future. For example, to make sense of this gap between their current realities and future prospects they draw distinctions between the role of money in their dating relationships versus how they would manage finances with a long-term partner. The evidence shows that middle- and striver-class young adults are better positioned to pursue a partnership pathway, and their relationship experience was with women and men with the requisite traits and resources of an ideal partner, which includes high future earning potential. In contrast, often unemployed and under-educated working-class adults faced fragile financial situations and social barriers to a partnership pathway to the good life. They described past and sometimes current dating relationships and marriages in ways that suggest they did not consider these men and women as desirable life partners.

Partner Desirability and Relationship Pathways in Modern Times

The good life; it’s very complex. Money, the job, that nice car, and house, hanging out at the beach. That’s the good life in so many people’s minds. And then you find those guys who want that great position, find a great woman and marry her, settle down and just focus on their careers and build their lives together. It’s employment, which actually affords these things or materializes them. So, you find that only a few people are actually able to
materialize it; do exactly what they see on TV, what they hear on the radio. These guys become idols overnight, and this attracts so many women. Ideas about relationships are always centered around this image of the good life. If you don’t manifest that picture, you’re not going to really get the person you want.

*(Interview, Black Man, Middle Class, University Grad, Career Path Employment, Age 25)*

The respondent depicts the good life in two distinct ways; the first represents immediate gratification through material consumption, and the second emphasizes an intimate partnership as a pathway that leads to one’s long-term life goals. Both images underscore the centrality of acquiring capital (economic, social and cultural) in determining young adults’ capacity to fashion their good life aspirations as well as who is considered a desirable partner in the relationship market.

Thus, young adults’ social location at the intersection of gender and class – and race in the South African context – shapes partner desirability and the relationship pathways available to young adults in modern times.

### Table 6. Partner Desirability in the Relationship Market - Gendered Class Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle- and Striver-class</strong></td>
<td>Miss Independent (highly desirable)</td>
<td>Real Man (highly desirable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working-class</strong></td>
<td>Able to achieve desirability by conforming to restrictive feminine roles (physical beauty, sexual provision, domestic labor)</td>
<td>Able to achieve desirability by conforming to restrictive masculine roles (physical strength and protection, financial provision)</td>
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Figure 1 illustrates my conceptualization, grounded in the data captured in this study, on how social location shapes young adults’ ability to pursue a partnership pathway to the good life. In the upper left quadrant are middle-class young women who have inherited economic and social capital signified by growing up and attending schools in affluent neighborhoods and building the social networks required to pursue their life goals successfully. Also included are striver-class women who grew up in working-class neighborhoods, but have gained access to quality education.
by attending well-resourced Model-C\textsuperscript{22} or private secondary schools. Both groups of women have or are completing technical college and university education, which sets them on a path with the skills and competencies to pursue professional well-paying careers. In contemporary South Africa, these young women are more financially-independent from men due to greater access to quality education and paid labor compared to their mothers’ and grandmothers’ generations. In this study, both women and men reported that current social norms hold well-educated and professionally-employed young women in high favor.

These women – whom I describe as Miss Independent – fit a cultural ideal of heterosexual young-adult femininity and are highly sought out for long-term intimate partnerships. Middle- and striver-class men across racial groups said they desired women who are ‘relationship material’ – independent, driven and ambitious. The following quotes exemplify this sentiment.

My ideal partner would be someone who I’m obviously sexually attracted to, someone who I would call beautiful, regardless of race or whatever. That’s important to me because it’s a sexual interaction, you have to be sexually attracted to the person number one. What adds to that in a massive way is intellectual interaction. Can I talk to this person? Can this person challenge my ideas? That’s what broadens your mind, broadens your relationship.

\textit{(single-sex FGD, Coloured Man, Middle Class, Postgrad Student, Age 23)}

Now I want an intellectual connection; beauty has taken a backseat. If I can’t have a conversation with you, then it’s a waste of time.

\textit{(Interview, Coloured Man, Striver Class, Vocational College Student, Age 20)}

The woman that I’m in a relationship with should complement me mentally, intellectually. I want my wife to challenge me. If I feel like ‘man those guys [at work] are too strong for me’ when I come home she should say ‘go back to those guys!’ . If she said, ‘okay baby just give up, don’t you know your level.’ That’s the last thing I want to hear. So, I want someone who’s very intelligent and has their own life career-wise. It’s very critical because the person I choose to fall in love with now will impact my direction 13 years from now. Like if I fall in love with someone doing nothing with their life, I’ll likely compromise my potential. But if I find

\textsuperscript{22} Model C schools are well-resourced primary and secondary educational institutions that under apartheid only allowed admittance to White students.
someone who’s like a lawyer, doctor or scientist, they will say ‘man do something too, make sure that you really establish and sharpen your skills.’

*(Interview, Black Man, Middle Class, University Grad, Career Path Employment, Age 25)*

As mentioned, most working-class men also desire women who are gainfully employed and described partnership-type relationship ideals. As a working-class Coloured man reported, “women of today, they are empowered. Men and women work, and I prefer how things are now. I want my girlfriend to do her own thing. I don’t really like the housewife thing. I’ve never had a girlfriend like that.” Many of these men asserted that pursuing a partnership relationship with Miss Independent required a shift towards more gender-equitable attitudes and practices in general and more balanced gender power in relationships. In turn, young men receive less pressure to serve as primary breadwinners compared to previous generations because ‘modern’ women contribute more to relationship expenses and household income generation. Participants asserted that ‘good life’ aspirations were a key motivation for reconfiguring restrictive gender roles, and most men felt that the most feasible pathway to their desired life goals was through dual-income intimate partnerships with independent women.

In the upper right quadrant are young men who like ‘Miss Independent’ are successfully pursuing the good life through formal educational and employment opportunity structures. They too are primarily from middle- and striver-class families and serve as the ‘Real Man’ cultural model for young-adult masculinity in contemporary South African society. These young men are on the path to representing the hegemonic model of success and often because of their socioeconomic achievements they are bestowed with virtuous qualities requisite in young women’s conception of quintessential boyfriend material (Bhana and Pattman, 2011, Hunter, 2010, Macia et al., 2011). When asked to describe their ideal partner, women across race and class provided the following narratives.
The one thing I look for in a guy, if he is hard working and if he will be able to give me a life. I'm studying; I'm not going to go for someone that’s gonna live off my pay [check]. I wouldn’t go for someone like that. Also, he has to be respectful as well.

*(single-sex FGD, Coloured Woman, Striver Class, Vocational College Student, Age 21)*

Women who stay in the suburb areas [middle-class neighborhoods] stand a good chance of meeting nice and well-behaved men because they go to those classy places. Here in the locations [townships], you won’t find those types of facilities. The kind of men you find here are the ones that we don’t want. *Age 27*

From my side, I would say I want a man that will be able to treat me with respect and dignity. For instance, I don’t want a man that will think whenever he takes me out to have fun he should take me to a tavern or a club. He should be innovative maybe take me to the movies or just walking at the beach. Someone that will give me love, and I mean the love that I have never seen being given to anyone or even more than the one that my mother has given me. I would love that man forever. *Age 21*

I would love that kind of man too. *Age 28*

I want someone that will love me and love my children as well, but then he must have money because nowadays everything revolves around having money. I want someone that has his own things; maybe if he doesn’t have everything at least, he must be someone that is independent. *Age 27*

*(single-sex FGD, Black Woman, Working Class, No Matric, Limited Vocational Training, Mostly Unemployed)*

The first question from your friends when you’re dating a guy is ‘what does he do?’ If someone is a sculptor, that’s almost like very romantic and interesting. But oh, he’s a plumber ughh… I don’t think many of my friends would date him. You feel like you need to be on the same common ground in terms of tertiary studies.

*(mixed-sex FGD, White Woman, Middle Class, Postgrad Student, Age 28)*

An ex of mine, he wanted to get married, but he wasn’t ready to have a white wedding. He was so old fashioned; I was surprised to find that here in Cape Town. He still had all these old ways of doing things; you slaughter something, the traditional thing and then you’re married. I was like ‘puti [man] in the 21st century, really?’ I told him this is not what I want and I dumped him. He tried to make things right and I asked him the same question, ‘are you ready to give me what I want?’ He said, ‘no, that’s going to be a lot of money.’ Then you’re not ready for me.

*(single-sex FGD, Black Woman, Striver Class, Some College, Career Path Employment, Age 26)*

In the relationship market, the vast majority of women want to be in an intimate partnership with a man who has achieved socially-acceptable success through formal education and employment.
Thus, these men have a clearer pathway to pursuing their lifestyle goals in general and specifically through a partnership pathway with financially-independent women. Relationships with ‘Real Men’ are also very desirable to working-class women who view these young men as partners who can assist them to navigate elusive formal opportunity structures or who can provide a pathway to the good life through financial support. Given their higher status in the relationship market, ‘Real Men’ have the luxury of pursuing an intimate partnership with middle- and striver-class women or casual, short-term relationships with working-class women as they see fit, and may choose to engage in both simultaneously.

In the lower left quadrant are working-class women with low-educational attainment, and who have limited access to career path employment. Not surprisingly, these women are from low-income communities with poor quality public schools and few formal employment opportunities. Unlike their well-resourced middle-class women, these young women are not the ‘wifey’ ideal and thus must often find alternative means to attract a ‘Real Man’ for a partnership-type relationship and pursuing their broader life goals. Interestingly, gender equality scripts and ‘50/50 relationship’ discourse, concretized in modern relationships, have made it increasingly difficult for these women to find desirable partners since they do not bring their own social, economic, and cultural capital to the table. Men across class categories desire career women; and thus, unemployed women with low educational attainment must use other bargaining chips to compete in the relationship market. Alternative pathways include conforming to restrictive gender roles, attracting men through physical beauty, or engaging in what is often described as transactional sex relationships.

In the lower right quadrant are unemployed and underemployed young men with low educational attainment who live in disadvantaged communities. These working-class men are far from the “Real Man” cultural ideal that women across class and race desire. Despite their lack of
socioeconomic resources, they still prefer a partnership pathway to the good life with financially-independent and well-educated women. However, similar to working-class women, they often seek alternative means to attract women. Some men choose to engage in the illicit economy of gangsterism, robbery, and drug dealing to gain status amongst their peers and display this status by acquiring symbols of the modern lifestyle – ‘smart’ clothing, mobile phones, and participating in the party scene. This route to make money also creates a pathway for men to attract working-class women who seek men’s financial provision, even though this is not the idealized partnership either has envisioned. Others choose to avoid the violent risks of the illicit economy, and the majority of working-class men in this study fall into this particular category. Like working-class women, they are constantly in pursuit of low-cost vocational training and meaningful work experience. When these opportunities fail to materialize, their options to fulfill a ‘Real Man’ ideal, and pursue intimate partnerships and the good life are also limited and gendered.

**Idealized Relationship Pathways**

While partner desirability is both gendered and classed, so too are the relationship pathways available to young adults in contemporary South Africa. As these findings have shown, working-class men and women face numerous obstacles to pursuing a partnership pathway to their good life aspirations. Their middle- and striver-class counterparts also foresee and experience barriers to achieving partnership ideals despite their acquisition of various forms of capital and desirability in the relationship market. Although current social norms allow for more gender-equitable relationships, the expectation that women eventually conform to a ‘marriage and children’ cultural ideal still exists even for desirable ‘independent’ young women. Middle- and striver-class women shared that by their mid-20s they feel either direct or implicit pressure by society and their families
to prioritize finding and settling down with a long-term partner over or parallel to pursuing their career aspirations. As one young woman shared,

I want to study; I want to do my Ph.D. and my post-doc. I might get married after my Ph.D. I **don’t even know if I want children.** My sister has these fights with me and says things like ‘I’m not going to be a good mother because I favor my education.’ I’d want a nanny so that I can pursue my dreams and not have to be tied down by the child. My sister was like ‘I would never have another woman bring up my child,’ like all of these very traditional gender roles are very much a part of the Afrikaans community.

*(single-sex FGD, White Woman, Middle Class, Postgrad Student, Age 23)*

The young woman has chosen to reject the gendered expectations of Afrikaans culture, and for now, prioritize her educational pursuits over marriage and having children. Cultural values also feature prominently in middle-class Black women’s decisions about balancing career and relationship aspirations. A well-educated woman with ambitious career plans explained why she wants a man who can provide for her financially.

You want to spend your life with a man who can take care of you. Despite all the rights and everything, in my culture, it is still taboo to have a woman who is the provider. So, I need a man who can provide for my children and me despite that fact that I earn R50,000 a month. I can pitch in, or we can come together, but I need someone who is responsible enough to be ‘the Man’. Going back to the Bible, he’s the head, and I’m the heart. I agree with that.

*(Interview, Black Woman, Middle Class, University Grad, Career Path Employment, Age 25)*

A woman from an affluent family who plans to take over her father’s successful business shared how she plans to negotiate gender power in her idealized partnership, which is also guided by her Christian faith.

[Men] providing is important to me, based on my dad. Even though my mom worked, my dad did everything. If I earn more money than my husband, it mustn’t become an issue. You still need to be able to be the man of the house. In terms of responsibilities I don’t mind it being 60/40, I don’t mind running the house; I enjoy doing stuff like cooking and cleaning. But if you’re going to make it seem like I have to do them, it’s not going to work out for us. If your attitude is in any way implying that I have this duty as a wife, then we’re going to argue about this, and the 50/50 splitting responsibilities will come into play.

*(Interview, Black Woman, Middle Class, Undergrad Student, Age 21)*
Similar across these three accounts is that young women must contend with entrenched
gender norms that compel them to prioritize relationships over their careers and abdicate power to
men in these relationships. Interestingly there is a racial and ethnic division on how these middle-
class women approach gendered cultural expectations. The White woman rejects restrictive gender
roles instilled in Afrikaans culture that is heavily shaped by Christian doctrine. In doing so, she
has distanced herself from her Afrikaans community and adopted the liberal English cultural norms
of her boyfriend’s family. The two Black women attempt to incorporate ethnic and religious values
into their gender ideals for relationships. I argue that these middle-class Black women foresee
some possible limitations to put gender-equitable scripts into practice in intimate relationships
given the intransigent nature of ethnic and religious value systems. They likely understand that
despite cultural support for young women’s career aspirations, they will experience communal and
familial resistance to an attempt to dismantle defined gender roles in long-term unions. Young
women reconcile this disjuncture by accepting that they must continue to uphold culturally-
imposed feminine respectability in relationships, which may include subservience to their
husbands in some areas. As such, they hold onto the expectation of men’s responsibility and
accountability in financially providing for their families and a less than equal division of domestic
labor, despite the likelihood that they will be more than capable to contribute financially in their
relationships. Thus, in the face of a contested landscape of gender, young middle-class Black
women reconfigure gender roles and responsibilities without attempting to deconstruct prescribed
cultural scripts for gender and sexuality completely.

Young middle-class men who are acquiring all the forms of capital necessary to achieve
their desired lifestyles still face struggles in pursuing a partnership pathway to their idealized ‘good
life’ goals. While many women across race and class seek these men out as desirable casual and
life partners, it is impossible for young men to check all the requisite boxes of the quintessential ‘Real Man’. As a middle-class Black man pointed out during an interview,

> With people I know, even if a guy is good-looking some girls wouldn’t date a guy if he doesn’t speak a certain way, or he’s poor; he’s immediately off the list. If a guy has the right accent and his parents are rich, that would probably be their choice.  

*(Interview, Black Man, Middle Class, Undergrad Student, Age 21)*

Even for young men who have attended the best universities and are pursuing lucrative careers, they sometimes still fall short of fulfilling the masculine ideal of middle-class women. In the following quote, a middle-class Coloured medical resident expresses his frustration with the rejection he experienced in pursuing an interracial relationship with a fellow graduate student.

> I was in a three-year relationship with a woman and just before it ended, I found out that her parents thought I was just a friend. We had been dating for three years, and she didn’t tell them because she said, ‘they would never accept you because you’re not White enough’. And I was like ‘You are effectively *racist* by extension, and I can’t see this going anywhere. I’m not going to carry this on’. And I find that’s that biggest challenge. With people of color, there is absolutely no problem. You are in an intimate relationship with them; they are fully committed to the relationship, regardless of your race. The only thing that would maybe stop them from speaking to their parents about you is your academic standing. Something more tangible to affecting their social circumstance, other than race.  

*(single-sex FGD, Coloured Man, Middle Class, Postgrad Student, Age 23)*

In another interview, a middle-class Black man shared the overwhelming sense of gendered pressure high-achieving men experience to live up to the ‘men as providers’ ideal even though their intimate partners are financially independent.

> You have to pick up the bill as a guy; it’s one of the things that I hate. I’m a very simple guy. My ex, she was working in advertising and would always want to go to those prim and proper places which are always a bit more expensive. I didn’t mind that once a month. But the bill was like R700 and she expected me to pick it up. I would spend the money, and then later feel like ‘oh I shouldn’t have done that’… *Girls just want you to be established.* They want this guy to be perfect, to have money, good looks, he’s funny, and from a good family. *And we’re not that.* Sometimes we’re not earning as much as we want to at our job. We’d like to travel, go overseas and see the world with you, like the pics your girlfriends put on Facebook. That’s what we want to do, but we’re not there yet. They expect that from us…
there’s this **huge expectation** placed on guys by their girlfriends, by their families. Sometimes guys don’t meet those expectations, and they’re seen as a disappointment, and they see themselves as a disappointment. Men in this country suffer from a silent frustration… these expectations… and they’re screaming silently; **I’m not managing!** It’s a scream of being frustrated, but it’s silent. And it comes out in a lot of different ways. *(Interview, Black Man, Middle Class, Some University, Career Path Employment, Age 26)*

Similar to middle-class women, these men face cultural pressures that are gendered, classed, and racialized. Middle-class Black and Coloured men spoke of racial discrimination they endured living, working and socializing in predominately White communities and, in some cases, pursuing interracial, intimate relationships. While their access to privileged spaces and opportunities marks them as the representation of the “Real Man” ideal for many women, and other men, this favored status still has its limitations and comes with many unachievable expectations. In the latter narrative, the presumption that middle-class men possess an endless supply of disposable income that can be used on relationship expenses is one the respondent deemed unrealistic. Although many middle-class young men are pursuing financially lucrative careers, their road to the ‘good life’ may still require substantial financial investments that challenge their ability to live up to the lifestyle expectations of their girlfriends. An unwillingness to conform to the quintessential boyfriend ideal may limit their value in the relationship market among the women they consider desirable. Taken together these young men’s accounts speak to the struggles that men with inherited class-privilege experience in pursuing a partnership pathway to their life goals.

**Relationship Pathways – Love, Sex, and Money**

Compared to their more economically- and socially-privileged counterparts, working- and some striver-class women and men face different challenges to setting out on a partnership pathway to their good life aspirations. For many, an idealized partnership is not feasible due to their material
realities. Thus, they choose to explore alternative relationship pathways to their long-term goals or temporarily modify their aspirations and focus on momentary lifestyle pursuits.

Theoretical and empirical research portray heterosexual transactional sex as motivated by an exchange between men who provide money and gifts and women who offer sex, all supported by restrictive gender norms that maintain men’s dominance (Stoebenau et al., 2016). These relationships are often constructed as loveless encounters, where women with limited agency and economic options trade one of the only assets available to them to achieve much-needed resources for survival. However as mentioned in Chapter Two, other scholars re-conceptualize transactional sex relationships as either a pathway to acquire commodities of modernity or a reflection of modern relationships in which material expressions of love are commonplace. For example, Mojola (2014) examines how young women in Kenya navigate their quest for loving relationships and career aspirations in a context of entrenched gender inequalities and the continuous threat of contracting HIV. She contends that gender inequality in education and the labor market challenge young women’s pursuit of consumption-driven lifestyles, and so they engage in transactional sex as a means to attain goods and products that are essential for the ‘modern’ subject. Mojola also argues that young women’s material motivations in these relationships do not negate their desire for love and companionship. She suggests that relationships that involve love, sex, and money are an adaption of the classic marital bargain that entails an exchange of men’s financial provision for women’s domestic and sexual provision. Furthermore, historically and globally marital unions have been a primary means for young women to successfully transition to adulthood and achieve economic security and upward mobility (Ampofo, 2001, Budig and England, 2001, Glenn et al., 1974, Mann, 1985, Yngstrom, 2002). Thus, transactional sex relationships are not only different
than commercial sex work, but can fundamentally be perceived as intimate where the entanglement of both love and material desires are integral.

Still, negative stereotypes persist about relationships in which men provide money and gifts and women offer sexual pleasure. As mentioned in Chapter Five, conversations about sex/money and love/money relationships as both normative and problematic were common in this study. Across race and class, both women and men were highly critical of women who relied on men to provide for them, especially women who pursue relationships to secure what is seen as non-essential lifestyle expenses. Striver- and middle-class women, mostly supported by their parents, spoke with contempt about women university students who have sex with older men that pay for their housing fees and ‘modern’ lifestyles. In a focus group of Coloured women university students, young women lamented the sugar daddy phenomenon on campus. They believed women who engage in transactional sex relationships take advantage of married men so they can afford to attend college but also to purchase the latest mobile phones, ‘smart’ clothes and beauty products. Additionally, they felt these young women treat their bodies as an expendable commodity and downplay the sexual and reproductive health risks associated with transactional sex practices.

Some of these women university students joined a subsequent mixed-sex group discussion and engaged in a contentious conversation about relationship motivations and morality. Women again echoed their disdain for transactional sex relationships and stated that love should always be the primary motivation for entering and maintaining a relationship.

We find disgust in allowing yourself to be used for material things, … that isn’t what a relationship is about, that isn’t my definition of a relationship personally... don’t treat your body just like a piece of trash, there’s so much more to who you are than just being used up physically so you can get the latest technology or clothes. Woman, Age 22

As Stoebenau and colleagues (2016) note, in commercial sex work the nature of the exchange is explicit between people who identify as sex workers and their clients. People who engage in transactional sex typically refer to their partners as lovers or boyfriends/girlfriends, and financial provision may not be directly tied to a sexual act.
Let’s be honest ... Our age group has a higher prevalence of casual sexual than other sorts of relationships, well let’s call them romantic relationships, … at the end of the day people are going to want sex, money, a relationship, and intimacy and if people find that this is governed by love, people find that it’s governed by personal gain that’s why they’re going to get into it. *Man, Age 23*

I think we do stuff in life for two reasons, for love or money. You go to work either because you love what you do, or you want money. You go to university because you want to become something you love or you’re doing it to obviously get a job. I feel we enter relationships too easily; sex is the main thing in relationships for people in their 20s, that’s what relationships are about these days. *Man, Age 24*

Why is it accepted that you can be in a relationship with someone who just buys you things and why is it okay to just want material things all the time? For me personally what matters is who you are and what you’ve achieved as a person. In a relationship material things shouldn’t matter, what should matter is your affection, your love, and passion. *Woman, Age 22*

*(mixed-sex FGD, Coloured Women and Men, Middle and Striver Class, University and Postgrad Students)*

Women’s critiques of transactional sex were countered by middle- and striver-class men in the group who felt that women should not be rebuked for using sexual relationships as a vehicle for upward mobility, since money and love are underlying motivations for most things in life. Women’s vehement contestation of transactional sex is partly driven by complicit agreement with cultural scripts that condone the control of women’s sexuality and oppose women’s freedom to trade sex for any reason and especially for a desired lifestyle (Pattman, 2005, Sennott and A. Mojola, 2016). As mentioned, the use of gendered sexual morality discourse was often used by striver-class young women to distinguish their engagement in premarital sex with their boyfriends from transactional sex which is perceived as morally transgressive. However, young women also oppose the gender-inequitable power dynamics that are presumed to result from transactional sex relationships. Absent from this debate is an account of the socio-economic structure that drives women, even those actively pursuing upward mobility through educational attainment, to consider
transactional sex as a means to their desired ends. Moreover, young adults had little to say about
men who engage in transactional sex.

In a rare instance, during an individual interview, a young woman who attends vocational
college spoke about her experience in a transactional sex relationship.

Women who are not educated and don’t have proper jobs go for money in relationships. They
don’t have a choice; they can’t afford everything. Especially those who are in varsity, I tried
that once, but it didn’t work out. If your course is 4 – 5 years and you’re not working, you
feel like you’re asking your parents for too much and they can’t afford it. So, you go into a
relationship for money because you know he’s going to buy you clothes and expensive stuff.
You wouldn’t say no to that. It didn’t work out for me because I can’t be with someone I
don’t love. You have to spend all of your time with him, but you don’t have any feelings for
that person. He claimed that he ‘likes me’, and he still calls, comes to see me and brings me
stuff. But I’ve told him it’s not going to work.
I think people are in relationships for money and love, but mostly money, especially when
you’re talking about marriage. You can’t marry someone who doesn’t have money, how are
you going to survive? I’m going to be a filmmaker, so I’ll have lots of money. For me, I’ll
marry for love because I will have my own money, so we will survive.

(Interview, Black Woman, Striver Class, Vocational College Student, Age 20)

This woman’s account clearly illustrates the personal material motivations and socioeconomic
constraints that drive women into transactional sexual relationships. Also apparent is the
distinction she makes between her relationship ideals for the future, when she is financially stable,
versus her current choices to enjoy a modern lifestyle. To close the discrepancy between her ideals
and lived experience, she rationalizes that her desire for a relationship based on love guided her
decision to end a money/sex relationship. However, she concludes without an explanation of how
she will continue a modern lifestyle without the financial support of a man.

While some striver-class women engage in transactional sex relationships with older men
as a step towards achieving their career aspirations, working-class women have similar intentions.
In a group discussion, a Black working–class woman shared that she and women she knew wanted
“partners that will take care of them, even send them to school, so they can end up being
successful”. She felt that although young women are disparaged for having sex with men for the purpose of receiving money, the ends justified the means and “there are women who benefit from those kinds of relationships.” It is clear that some striver- and working-class women have similar desires for upward mobility through a transactional sex relationship pathway. However, while working-class women have access to transactional sex relationships, they lack a clear plan to translate men’s financial provision into viable education and work opportunities.

Social theory and public discourse on transactional sex relationships fuel criticism of young women who engage in these relationships regardless of their underlying motivations that may be linked to pursuing the good life through formal opportunity structures. The perception that young women who exchange sex for material resources make informed choices and lack remorse for these choices drive much of the disdain received from their age-related peers, and society at large. Yet, striver- and working-class women’s agency to explore alternate pathways for upward mobility are not unlike more privileged middle- and striver-class women’s ‘modern’ career aspirations and intimate partnership desires. Middle- and some striver-class women are more likely to encounter someone who approaches the ‘Real Man’ ideal at this stage in life and begin on a partnership pathway to the good life. In contrast, working-class women experience a wider gap between their gender ideals and current relationship experiences but envision similar partnerships in the future.

Some young men and women who envisioned a partnership-type relationship in the future also described short-term lifestyle desires that centered on the consumption of modern goods and products. Relationships, specifically men’s financial provision, played a central role for young women in obtaining this modified version of the good life signified by indulgence in temporary pleasures. Among this current generation of young adults, particularly in working-class communities, the gold digger - no romance without finance - feminine stereotype is promulgated.
In a mixed-sex group of Coloured working class adults, participants spoke disparagingly about women who view men as an economic lifeline.

I had a girlfriend, and she had a baby [from a previous relationship]. I worked at a warehouse. She needed help, so I got us a flat. She stayed at home, but one day I was thinking so I told her ‘I can’t pay for the rent and I have to buy food, nappies, milk, its expensive. Just get a job please man’ I told her look I'm gonna ask my daddy if he can pay for crèche [childcare] for the child. That girl stood her ground; she didn’t want to go to work; she wanted to stay at home. She would make food and just sit and watch TV the whole day, chat on the phone, listen to music. *man, Age 27*

You get some women that don’t even love the guy. They’re with him because the guy does everything for them. She will stay with him just for that benefit. *woman, Age 24*

(*mixed-sex FGD, Coloured Women and Men, Working Class, No Matric and Matric, Some Vocational Training, Employed Periodically*)

The young man’s description of his ex-girlfriend fits the quintessential gold digger archetype, a woman who expects a man to provide for her and is lazy and unwilling to work. Moreover, it is assumed that she only wants her partner’s money and love does not factor into her relationship motivations. These young women receive even harsher criticism than maligned striver-class women who engage in transactional sex for upward mobility.

In another group discussion, a working-class young woman describes the material motivations that propel her to continue a loveless and unfulfilling relationship with her boyfriend:

The benefit of the relationship that I am in is *money*. I really do not love him; I just love his money. I really don’t bother myself or even care when I hear that he was seen with another woman because I know I will have his money because he got paid. I will not sit here and lie to you; I do not love him… My boyfriend is very stubborn; he does not want to listen. The only thing he loves is drinking alcohol, so I really do not know what I can do to change him or at least make him want the same things that I want. I have tried to sit him down to talk some sense into him, but all that was in vain. I just become speechless talking about it. (*single-sex FGD, Black Woman, Working Class, No Matric, Unemployed, Age 26*)

On the surface, money is the key driver for this young woman maintaining a relationship with her boyfriend. While she states that she does not love him, only his money, it is clear that she wants to shift the dynamics of how they interact and tries to work with her boyfriend to strive for
something better. It appears that she desires an emotional connection with her boyfriend despite her frustrations. Her account suggests that even in the most obvious cases of sex/money relationships, affective desires come into play despite popular discourse on transactional sex.

But what about young men’s motivations for and experiences in transactional sex relationships? Across race and class, young men in this study engaged in money/sex relationships and described casual sex ‘hookups’ as a common practice, despite holding a partnership ideal for the future. Young men and women shared that people in their peer group engaged in these types of relationships although young men were more likely to discuss their personal experiences of casual sex hookups. In a group discussion among Black men university students, a participant gave the following account of hookup sexual relationships in his working-class neighborhood.

There’s a limit to wife material nowadays in chicks, in terms of how they act, how they groom themselves, and how they come up. One night stands have become the norm. Getting a chick by buying her a carry pack [of beer] has become the norm in Cape Town. And if my friends and I go out with money, we won’t come back alone, we come back with chicks that we’re going to end up sleeping with, and they [the women] are chilled with that, that’s how life is nowadays.

*(single-sex FGD, Black Man, Striver Class, Undergrad Student, Age 25)*

The participant’s description of the type of women with whom they hookup with is meant to distinguish them – working class, under-educated women – from those who represent the Miss Independent ideal with whom they envision building a partnership in the future. During an interview, a Coloured striver-class man shared that he has platonic friendships with young women on campus, and occasionally hooks up with young women from his working-class neighborhood. These striver-class men clearly noted that the women they have casual sex with in their neighborhoods were not candidates for long-term partnership-type relationships. In contrast, a White middle-class man shared that hookups – napping – were very common at his university and
money typically did not play a role in the casual sex relationships between men and women on campus.

The race and class differences between where and with whom young men engage in hookups are important to note. Black and Coloured striver-class men distinguish under-educated working class women who are presumed to want ‘a good night out’ as appropriate casual sex partners, while they envision fellow women students are ideal partners for the future. Their choice to engage in hookups can be read as a desire for the consumption lifestyle through immediate sexual gratification. However, as mentioned, striver-class and at times middle-class men often fail to live up to the ‘Real Man’ ideal of middle- and striver-class women so casual sex relationships with working-class women may be an alternate, yet temporary, relationship pathway for the meantime. In these scenarios, some working-class women view striver-class men as potential life partners with whom they can build loving relationships and achieve their desired long-term life goals but find this pathway is often difficult to pursue.

[Working-class men] are like us, they are not educated. They are criminals. They are always hustling just like us. Age 28
[Striver-class men] want girlfriends that have their own things. It is rare for a successful man to come to the location [township] and want to date a girl that is just sitting there and doing nothing. If you want a right person, you must be in a right place as well, so they won’t be afraid that you are just in it for their things. Age 21
Someone who is educated gets someone who is educated. It is 50/50 now. A man who is working will not want to be the only one contributing; he will go for a woman in his league. Age 28
(single-sex FGD, Black Women, Working Class, No Matric, Limited Vocational Training, Mostly Unemployed)

Unfortunately, these women are ill-equipped to compete with middle- and striver-class women who are the ‘wifey’ ideal for men. For striver-class men, working-class women are, for the most part, only eligible for short-term hookups and ‘maqupeni’/side chick status. Thus, young working-class women’s limited access to education and employment is coupled with constrained access to
desired life partners, which make sex/money relationships appear as one of few feasible options for something that remotely resembles the ‘good life’. The dynamics and motivations of casual sex hookups described suggest that these relationships reinforce a hierarchy of idealized classed masculinities and femininities in Black and Coloured communities where socioeconomic drivers heavily influence relationship pathways.

**Alternative Relationship Pathways for Working-Class Women and Men**

Transactional sexual relationships, as they are popularly conceived, are considered to be pervasive among working-class young adults in South Africa, yet young women and men in this study held a wide variety of relationship motivations and chose several relationship pathways. Given that they have yet to accumulate adequate social, economic and cultural capital, working-class women and men face numerous challenges to pursuing a partnership pathway to their life aspirations. These obstacles have led some young adults to forego relationships while they try to focus on gaining access to elusive education and employment opportunities. As a working-class Coloured woman stated, “I’m not going for a relationship now, where I’m depending on someone else to support me. Right now, I need to concentrate on finding a job.” Similarly, a working-class Black man expressed, “I don’t like dating while I’m struggling to find a job and trying to get back in school. If you’re my girlfriend and you ask for money, and I don’t have it, it doesn’t feel right.” For these young adults, relationships do not currently factor into their short-term pursuits. Others who have charted a course forward towards their life goals contemplate the extent to which relationships help to facilitate their progression. During an interview, a working-class Coloured woman who had stable employment and lived with the father of her youngest child shared the following account.

[My boyfriend,] he’s a good guy. He’s worked in manufacturing for four years. He’s comfortable and doesn’t seem to have much ambition. I’m ready to move forward. I have a
very busy life raising three girls and working full time. I’m looking for a better job that will allow me to study on the weekends. I want someone who is dreaming because I am dreaming.

*(Interview, Coloured Woman, Working Class, Matric, Stable Employment, Age 29)*

Unlike middle- and striver-class women who grapple with how they will balance career and relationship aspirations in the future, this young woman is deciding whether her current relationship, described as loving at the time, is a barrier to her pursuit of broader life goals. She shared that after a period of suffering through emotional abuse and infidelity from her partner, they worked hard to establish a healthier relationship and she felt that power between them was more balanced than before. However, his limited scope of his life aspirations has made her question if he a suitable life partner. Similarly, a working-class Coloured man shared how his good life aspirations have shifted his gender ideals and approach to intimate relationships.

The mother of my second child, she’s still young at heart and wants the good life, going out partying. If we didn’t have money, she would want me to borrow it so we could go to Spur [popular restaurant]. I did it at the time but then finally said no more loans, I’d rather work hard and save up. Once we’ve been through the hardships, we can have the luxuries for the rest of our lives. That’s why we split. She wanted to live the luxurious life immediately, and I wasn’t ready to give up on all my dreams. Since then, I’ve changed my mind about relationships. I’m not going to look for love anymore. Love is something that can be developed; you can learn to love. I’m looking for someone who understands me and who I can understand. Someone who’s working towards the same goal. As long as we are walking this path together.

*(Interview, Coloured Man, Working Class, Matric, Unemployed, Age 29)*

These accounts suggest that some working-class men and women construct gender ideals that reconfigure cultural scripts on gender equality and modern intimate relationships. Most notable about these stories are that young adults shifted their masculine and feminine relationship ideals based on their actual experiences with different types of intimate partners. Lived experience has allowed them to continuously assess the extent to which their relationship choices are aligned with their relationship and life aspirations. Through this process, some attempt to reconcile
discrepancies between their ideals and reality by developing new interpersonal relationships scripts that reflect both affective and material desires and de-emphasize restrictive gender roles and responsibilities. Still, culture and structure still hover in the background and only time will tell if these new interpersonal scripts create space for more gender equitable power dynamics in intimate relationships.

Discussion

Ideals for the future

The focus of this work is on the structural and cultural drivers of young adult’s gender ideals for relationships. Thus, the majority of participants’ reflections are at the level of ideals, and few have had an opportunity to try to live these ideals in practice. For some women and men, career aspirations or short-term lifestyle desires take center stage as they transition to adult lives, and a partnership-type relationship is envisioned for the future. Other participants indicate that they are ready to pursue a partnership at this stage in their life but face a variety of obstacles to enact their ideals and date someone they would consider for a life partnership. A few have chosen a different route. To narrow the gap between their material realities and good life aspirations, some working-class men and women are rethinking their relationship motivations and choices and reconfiguring how they envision a modern partnership pathway.

Social Location and Gendered Relationship Ideals

A sizable body of literature on socio-economic status (SES), gender and power in heterosexual relationships has emphasized how cultural factors drive gender inequitable values and practices among low-resourced men, and sometimes women. A common finding is that low-resourced men adhere to hyper-masculine ideals to reclaim status in relation to their peers and dominance in their
intimate relationships in the face of shifts toward gender equality in public and private spaces (Bourgois, 1996, Cooper and Foster, 2008, Jewkes et al., 2016). In contrast, well-resourced men are assumed to be more willing to hold gender-equitable ideals due to greater exposure to gender equality discourse and a willingness to implement gender transformative cultural messages in their everyday lives. A smaller body of work has measured class differences in women’s gendered beliefs and expectations regarding sexual relationships. Findings from this research suggest that financial constraints prevent low-SES women from pursuing gender-equitable relationships (Hanmer and Klugman, 2016, Higgins et al., 2010, Kabeer, 1999). Moreover, they are more likely to demonstrate attitudes and practices associated with emphasized femininity compared to women with high SES. In contrast, well-resourced women are portrayed as strong supporters of gender-equitable values since these beliefs support their advancement in the public life, and a perceived desire to balance gender power and responsibility in intimate relationships (Davis and Pearce, 2007, Jewkes and Morrell, 2010, Kerrigan et al., 2008). Thus, one of the main theoretical arguments that informs gender-based violence and HIV interventions is that women and men 1) who are more advantageously positioned vis-à-vis opportunity structures, and 2) who have greater exposure to the benefits of gender equality for both women and men, hold more equitable gender ideals for relationships compared to their low-resourced and less-exposed counterparts. Moreover, the literature suggests that those – typically referring to low-resourced young men – who uphold inequitable gender ideals often use cultural arguments to justify their attitudes and practices.

However, given the findings presented here, it is clear that this conceptualization masks the underlying drivers of young adults’ relationship motivations, and the complex ways in which social location shapes the relationship pathways available to young women and men. Across class categories, most young women and men considered an intimate partnership-type union as the
quintessential choice in their pursuit of the good life, conceived in a variety of ways. Moreover, young adults’ desire for the good life through a partnership pathway was reflected in their relationship ideals, which are informed by competing scripts for gender and sexuality and popular discourses on gendered sexual morality and personal responsibility. For the most part, variance between young adults’ support for gender equality and more restrictive gender roles and responsibilities was not determined by class status. Across race and class, young adults held gender ideals that supported a balanced division of household labor, and equal financial provision and joint decision-making between men and women in relationships. However, the majority of participants support for gender equitable scripts was typically conditional, and their conception of gender equality in one domain do not always translate to how they envisioned balancing power in others.

There was general consensus that a dual income partnership was a required component of modern intimate relationships in which women and men work together in the pursuit of compatible life goals. While this key feature restricts working-class men’s and women’s ability to pursue an idealized partnership-type relationship, they still held gender equitable ideals similar to their more privileged counterparts. Thus, the data suggests that class status is not a primary driver of women’s and men’s desire for a partnership ideal or their gender ideals for relationships. Still, their ideals illustrate that there are a variety of ways in which they envision balancing gender power in intimate partnerships. Further, their conditional incorporation of gender equality cultural scripts into constructing masculine and feminine relationship ideals suggest that instead of refuting restrictive gender roles, they are reconfiguring them for modern times. Consequently, this study problematizes the determinist ways in which previous work has understood an association between social class and people’s gender ideals and practices. As underscored by empirical research on
gender on modernity reviewed in Chapter Two, young adults’ motivations for relationships are heavily influenced by both desires for love and pursuit of the ‘modern’ good life.

**Social Location and Transactional Sex**

This work also seeks to advance scholarship on the economy of transactional sex in sub-Saharan Africa. A recent review of this literature, Stoebenau and colleagues (2016), emphasizes a near exclusive focus on the motivations and experiences of vulnerable young women in transactional exchanges with older men. The review also cites more recent conceptualizations of transactional sex as material expressions of love, and the personal agency expressed by young women who engage in relationships as part of fashioning themselves as modern subjects. Central to contemporary arguments is the conflation of love and material desires in young women’s pursuit of modern intimate unions.

Mojola’s work is particularly useful for thinking about the entanglements of love, sex, and modern consumption among young women. In this study, when faced with barriers to achieve their good life aspirations, some striver- and working-class young women engaged in transactional sex relationships as a temporary pathway to upward mobility. Their relationship motivations were not unlike more privileged middle-class women’s joint pursuits of careers and partnerships with desirable ‘Real Men’. Given their material realties, some striver- and working-class women reconcile transactional sex as a bridge that allows them to advance toward their good life goals, and improve their desirability in the relationship market. While they engage in transactional sex for the moment, most young women continue to hold an intimate ‘modern’ partnership ideal for the foreseeable future. Several working-class women imagined relationships with striver-class men that begin as transactional but eventually develop into long-term loving partnerships in which they are able to incorporate their gender equitable ideals for relationships. Accounts from young
men indicate they view these relationships as casual sex hookups with women they do not consider as desirable life partners. Like striver-class women, striver-class men view transactional sex as a temporary relationship pathway, while they continue to secure the necessary capital for “Real Man” status, essential for both their good life and idealized relationship aspirations. Thus, young adults’ experiences of transactional sex suggest that they embark on this relationship pathway at a particular life moment until they advance to a stage when they do not need them any longer and can pursue their idealized intimate partnerships. Still, these relationships reinforce partner desirability based on a hierarchy of classed masculinities and femininities in communities where socioeconomic drivers heavily influence available relationship choices and pathways.

As in other studies (Malinga and Ratele, 2016, Cole and Thomas, 2009), emphasizing the complex ways social location shapes young adults’ gendered relationship pathways is not meant to minimize the importance of love. Across gender, race and class, nearly everyone indicated that love was a primary motivation for steady and in some instances, casual sexual relationships. However, when conspicuous consumption underpins fashioning the ‘modern’ good life, prioritizing love above all else in relationships is rare and in many ways, a luxury afforded to those with privileged social locations. Balancing desires for both love and the good life is a challenge in any relationship, but may be particularly difficult for working-class young women and men. When the search for a seemingly unattainable pathway to achieve one’s life goals is the order of the day, relationships are viewed as one of few viable options, and in these instances, love may be desired and expressed in commodified ways.
CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSION

This study described and analyzed young-adult lives and sexual relationships in Cape Town, South Africa and the material, normative, and discursive dimensions of the context in which they occur. More specifically, the study aims were to:

- describe young women’s and men’s perspectives on social, economic, political, and cultural transformation in post-apartheid South Africa,
- explore their perspectives on young-adult lives and sexual relationships,
- examine how they discuss their experiences in navigating adult lives and relationships, and
- investigate young adults’ perceptions of the contextual factors that influence their lives and relationships.

Summary of Findings and Empirical and Conceptual Contributions to the Study of Gender and Sexuality

The Language of Social Critique in the Post-Apartheid Era

A Contested Landscape of Transformation

South Africa’s transformation to a democratic state and enshrining of human rights has created high expectations among citizens about the rights and opportunities afforded to people, and the impact of these changes in pursuit of an equal and just society. Gender is central to social change in South Africa, as an element of actual changes to social institutions that create new opportunities for women’s and girls’ social and economic advancement. Moreover, gender equality, as a cultural script, has become a language through which people talk about the broader social and economic reorganization that the country is experiencing in terms of gender as well as race, class, age, and sexuality. Legally-constituted rights’ protections and freedoms have prompted popular discourse on how gender and sexual relations should be constructed in public and private life. This study
set out to explore this transformative moment in South Africa and understand how young adults as a strategic research population are living these changes professionally, socially, and intimately.

One of the themes to emerge from an analysis of the material, normative, and discursive dimensions of post-apartheid South Africa is a contested landscape of transformation, specifically what equality and freedom should look like in people’s public and private lives. Structural inequality persists in a context where human rights laws and principles of social justice exist alongside neoliberal economic policies and rhetoric that place a high value on personal responsibility and individual agency. These opposing ideologies inform popular discourse on equality, post-racialism, and gendered sexual morality in the post-apartheid context. Consequently, young adults draw upon competing ideologies and discourses as a tool to re-establish and challenge existing power structures and to explain the persistence of structural inequalities 20 years after the formal conclusion of South Africa’s liberation struggle.

Young adults in South Africa today are unique in comparison to other age-cohorts as they are the first generation to be raised in the post-apartheid era. Their experience of the contested landscape of transformation is shaped both by cultural (scripts for gender and sexuality) and structural (education and employment opportunities) factors. Popular discourses operate as a cultural influence which establishes normative aspirations, while rights-based laws and neoliberal economic policies operate as a structural influence, which affects access to social and economic opportunities. The interplay among these cultural and structural factors shape young adults' life aspirations and experience of privilege and disadvantage, as well their discursive use and experience of rights. These contextual factors also influence young women’s and men’s gender ideals for and experiences in sexual relationships.
Crisis Tendencies and the Discursive Use of Rights

South Africa’s contested landscape of transformation points in part to “crisis tendencies” in the gender order produced by institutionalized measures for gender equality that destabilize the legitimacy of men’s dominance in gendered relations of power, work and cathexis (Connell, 1987). Evidence from studies across the region reveal similar disruptions in these gendered domains that have surfaced by way of tensions between new rights-based laws and discourse, entrenched gender norms, and an infiltration of neoliberal economic policies and values (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015, Hunter, 2010, Mojola, 2014, Spronk, 2005, Wyrod, 2008). This study extends work on crisis tendencies in the gender order by placing contestations over the meaning of equality and freedom, broadly conceived, in post-apartheid South Africa as the background upon which young adults’ lives and relationships are interpreted. Further, this study advances existing work by employing an intersectional approach to examine how privilege and disadvantage – across the axes of race, gender, and class – are perceived and experienced in a destabilized social and economic context.

The research found that discourses on equality, freedom, rights, modernity, and tradition, inscribed with gender, race, and class ideologies, offer young adults a language to talk about their generation’s lives and relationships. Young adults are frustrated with the pace of social and economic change, the direction it appears to be taking, and the state’s perceived disproportionate emphasis on particular issues. While there is evidence of moderate gains in access to educational and employment opportunities for those considered previously disadvantaged – specifically non-White racial groups and women – there are concerns about how rights-based policies are implemented. Many White middle-class and Coloured striver-class young adults firmly support the ideal of equality for all, yet draw upon post-racialism and neoliberal discourses to justify their opposition to race-based affirmative action. They believe race-based policies are antithetical to the
philosophy of equality and fairness, serve as a barrier to their economic advancement, and create a culture of entitlement among Black people in South Africa. In contrast, Black women and men, across class categories, and Coloured middle-class adults consider these policies just and beneficial given the persistence of entrenched interracial inequalities. However, they are concerned that affirmative action has not adequately benefitted the Black working-class which make up the majority of the country’s population.

Similar to anxieties about racial privilege and disadvantage, several young adults feel that government-sponsored initiatives to dismantle gender and generational hierarchies have gone too far. Black and Coloured, striver- and working-class women discussed how rights-based freedoms have given children and young adults license to make irresponsible life choices that further entrench social and economic inequalities. These concerns often overlap with gender politics, notably contempt for young women’s and girls’ perceived freedom to engage in sexual practices that violate social norms. Yet, when striver- and middle-class women discussed their experiences of rights, they were frustrated that they were also the targets of gender morality discourse to censure their “responsible” choice to engage in premarital sex in stable relationships. As in other work (Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg Jr, 1990, Chambers et al., 2004, Haram, 2005, Karlyn, 2005, Smith, 2007), men and women in this study drew upon personal responsibility discourse and a gendered sexual value system in debates about how young women and girls exercise their new rights and freedoms. Also, young adults alleged that gender equality promotion has extended beyond women’s and girls’ access to opportunities and fair treatment in public institutions, to concentrated advocacy to deconstruct relations of gendered power in people’s private lives. Some welcome the introduction of rights on gender equality and related discourse, given the persistence of entrenched social norms that dictate women's worth and status through marriage and mothering,
and men’s through financial provision. Still, most young adults grapple with the tensions among rights, structural inequality, gender norms, and discourses on personal responsibility and morality. They struggle with whether these contextual influences either combat or contribute to social and economic injustice.

Young adults’ debates about rights-based policies to dismantle race, gender, class, and age power structures offer a deeper understanding of the discursive use of rights in a context where the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice are contested. They also reveal the fault lines in disputes about the application of rights, and the power of discourse to reinforce moral positions and inequitable relations of power. A theme throughout this work is the nuances of how race, gender, and class privilege intertwine and are implicated in the preservation of power structures in a contested space. Specifically, young women and men in this study use the language of rights to draw distinctions between their morally-justifiable beliefs and choices and those of less-favorably positioned others. In discussions about rights and responsibilities, Black and Coloured striver-class young adults described their success as a result of personal achievement despite the odds. They employed neoliberal personal responsibility discourse to distinguish themselves from young adults in their working-class communities whom they feel are under-achieving ‘slackers’. White and Coloured young adults engaged in othering processes in conversations about the perception of a culture of Black entitlement reinforced through race-based affirmative action. They drew upon post-racial and personal responsibility discourse to situate their access to educational and employment opportunities as merit-based while marking Black middle- and striver-class adults as receivers of undeserved social advantage. These instances, also illustrate young adults’ performance as modern subjects who position themselves as responsible and deserving beneficiaries of post-apartheid era rights and freedoms. They employ neoliberal, post-racial, and
personal responsibility discourses in part to make meaning of a lack of social and economic progress in this transformative moment.

Across race, class, and gender, young adults' accounts and observations illustrate their disappointment with the unfulfilled promises of South Africa’s social and economic liberation. They are disheartened that 20 years into the democratic project, economic inequality is pervasive and social norms that are seen to entrench disparities remain firmly in place. The lag between post-apartheid ideals of freedom and equality and young adults’ experience of rights contributes to their perspectives on the politics of gender, and how women and men negotiate power in public and private life. The intertwining of cultural scripts for gender and sexuality with popular discourses – human rights, neoliberalism, gendered sexual morality, post-racialism, and personal responsibility – are expressed in young adults’ masculine and feminine ideals for sexual relationships.

*Gender as a Language of Social Critique*

Young adults also drew upon rights and popular discourses to reinforce a gendered class hierarchy of desirability in the relationship market and, for those who have types of privilege, to maintain their relatively favorable position within it. Across race and class, both women and men embraced aspects of gender equality scripts, yet often used gendered sexual morality and personal responsibility discourse to pathologize working- and some striver-class women who engage in transactional sex. For middle- and striver-class women \gendered moral posturing serves to distinguish their premarital sexual practices with boyfriends, read as sex for love, from transactional sex for upward mobility or money. These distinctions differentiate women who do not need but accept material expressions of love from chivalrous boyfriends from irresponsible women who expect and depend on men’s financial provision.
Black and Coloured women also use this moral posturing to distance themselves from denigrating racialized colonial-era discourses on Black and Coloured feminine sexuality that still have currency today. As Tamale (2011) states, “African women’s sexualities… were characterized as the antithesis of European mores of sex and beauty and were labeled as primitive.” Middle- and striver-class women employ these historical discourses, along with more recent manifestations, to position themselves favorably in respectability politics on gendered sexual morality and to malign the sexual practices of working-class women. In turn, women who engage in transactional sex dismiss discourses about personal responsibility and gender equality in financially contributing to relationship expenses, as these cultural messages do not mesh with their current material realities. Yet they embrace gender-equitable scripts as they pertain to the division of domestic labor and joint decision making as these aspects are aligned with their partnership ideals for the future.

Men across race and class also employ gendered sexual morality and personal responsibility discourse to categorize women as either suitable and desirable partners, or those that are only considered for casual sex hookups. However, middle-class men strategically distanced themselves from a masculine ideal of sexual promiscuity that is for the most part socially-condoned, yet seen to violate modern gender-equitable scripts. They expressed that the display of sexual prowess is normative in their peer groups, yet they personally did not subscribe to these ideals. Working-class men drew on gender equality discourse to challenge men’s financial provision, especially in reaction to women who expect men to provide. Still, an idealized dual-income partnership ideal still constrains their desirability in the relationship market given their experiences of under- and un-employment. Similar to work on the materiality of young people’s gender ideals for relationships (Bhana and Pattman, 2011, Groes-Green, 2011, Hunter, 2010, Mojola, 2014, Smith, 2000, Spronk, 2005), working-class men in this study lamented the continued
prioritization of men’s financial provision in modern relationships that are supposed to be built on love and equality. To their point, middle- and striver-class women expressed that in long-term partnerships gender equality and equal financial contribution were ideals, but if economic circumstances change men should take ‘responsibility’ and support women and children. This example illustrates that although cultural scripts and popular discourse are more often used to control and malign women’s sexual practices, at times women employ these devices to hold men to account in terms of fulfilling ‘Real Man’ ideals.

Cultural Scripts for Gender and Sexuality

Competing Cultural Scripts and Young Adults’ Construction of Gender Ideals

The study seeks to advance sexual script theory, and particularly how the influence of culture is considered in scholarship on young adults’ gendered sexualities. Sexual script theory emphasizes how powerful cultural messages organize interpersonal negotiation in sexual encounters and idealized patterns of gendered beliefs and practices. In this study, cultural scripts that dictate binary masculine and feminine roles and responsibilities are disseminated widely to young adults in South Africa primarily through family and ethnic communities, and through religious doctrine. These findings are in line with existing studies on culture and young-adult sexual relationships in sub-Saharan Africa (Harrison et al., 2006, Izugbara and Undie, 2008, Maticka-Tyndale et al., 2005, Smith, 2000). This scholarship has largely focused on how normative expectations for “traditional” masculine and feminine roles contribute to gender-inequitable sexual practices. Yet, sexual scripting, as originally envisioned, was not just about how people ascribe to a uniform set of cultural messages disseminated through a select group of social institutions. Thus, the way it has been interpreted and applied in previous studies is limited.

As Simon and Gagnon (1986) note, in societies where shared meanings about social life
are less cohesive, disjunction in the adherence to enact prescribed social roles becomes apparent. This study illustrates that gender equality as a state-endorsed cultural script has destabilized the “traditional” gender order and obligatory masculine and feminine roles and responsibilities in public and private life. These changes are demonstrated by participants who at times describe gender ideals that challenge prescribed gender roles and align with “modern” relationship models. The maintenance of restrictive gender scripts is also evident in other gendered beliefs and values that young adults hold. A general assumption in much of the research that applies sexual script theory is that people have coherent views on femininity and masculinity. However, this does not capture contradictions in actual expressions and experiences of gender.

Sexual script theory is also particularly useful for understanding the significance of sexuality as a terrain to demonstrate social and moral competence through the practice of normative gender roles and relations. Yet, Simon and Gagnon (2003) stress that the display of competence is not about merely adopting cultural messages wholesale, but calling upon them in a subjective construction of gendered sexual identities and relational negotiation in sexual encounters. This study illustrates the interface among the cultural, interpersonal, and intra-personal levels of sexual scripting. Young women and men selectively pull from the cultural scripts to which they have been exposed – gender-restrictive and gender-equitable – and reconfigure them into feminine and masculine ideals for relationships. Instead of deconstructing prescribed gender roles and responsibilities, they adapt them for modern times. Likewise, they disentangle an amorphous conception of gender equality and choose how they will approach negotiations of gender power within separate domains. Through these strategies, young women and men attempt to resolve the inherent discrepancies between competing scripts for themselves, and display proficiency in contradictory social mores they are expected to uphold.
As mentioned in Chapter Five, this study attempts to depart from the modern versus traditional paradigm in the examination of how men and women talk about gendered power in an era of new legally-constituted rights. The findings show that in South Africa young adults’ gender ideals often display internal contradictions by embracing new cultural messages on gender equality and modernity while simultaneously rejecting others. These findings are similar to critical studies on gender equality and women’s rights in the region. In a rural area in South Africa, Dworkin and colleagues (2012) examined masculinity, gender equality, and women’s rights with rural men and found that while men resisted some aspects of gender equality discourse, they supported other changes toward more equitable gender relations. In an analysis of gender equality and rights in Uganda’s capital, Wyrod (2008) found that while a masculine provider ideal was largely accommodated, other masculine norms about work, men’s dominance, and masculine sexual practices were highly contested. In more recent ethnographic research in rural South Africa, Sennott and Angotti (2016) illustrate how gendered sexualities are being reshaped in response to human rights and the AIDS epidemic. In their work, young women used rights discourse to challenge norms about appropriate styles of feminine dress in public, and young men grappled with the costs of sexual promiscuity. Women and men tried to make meaning of conflicting cultural messages by both reaffirming some obligatory gendered sexual practices and reconsidering others. Similarly, in this study, young adults in Cape Town did not endorse all aspects of either gender-restrictive or gender-equitable scripts and typically qualified and contextualized their support of scripts to rationalize discernible contradictions in their relationship ideals. Internal dissonance in and debates about masculine and feminine ideals reflect competing cultural messages that young adults struggle to articulate and incorporate in their lives and relationships.
Linking Crisis Tendencies and Sexual Scripting

These findings point to the permeability of both gender-equitable and gender-restrictive scripts in contemporary African societies and the emergence of new cultural messages that shape social norms. Young women and men embrace while also question these cultural influences, and selectively incorporate them in constructing gender ideals for relationships. In line with existing research on masculinities in sub-Saharan Africa (Bhana and Pattman, 2011, Decoteau, 2013, Dworkin et al., 2012, Groes-Green, 2009, Jewkes and Morrell, 2010, Malinga and Ratele, 2016, Stern and Buikema, 2013, Wyrod, 2008), this study shows instability in young-adult masculinities. This often referred to ‘crisis in masculinity’ is evidenced by a weakening patriarchal dividend in educational attainment, labor market advantage, and men’s ability to maintain the breadwinning role at home. Young men’s responses to shifts in gendered power vary, but tend to include practices to reassert masculine privilege in some areas and attempts to refashion masculine ideals and behaviors in pursuit of more egalitarian gender relations in others. In this study, the majority of working-class men openly adopted gender equitable scripts on equal financial provision in relationships but were hesitant to extend their earnest support to joint decision making and a balanced division of domestic labor. In instances when men across race and class supported a balanced division of household labor, it was under the condition that women were gainfully employed. These contradictions and qualifications highlight the complexity of men’s engagement with gender politics.

Contributing to an emerging body of literature (Groes-Green, 2011, Hunter, 2010, Mojola, 2014, Pettifor et al., 2012, Sennott and Angotti, 2016, Spronk, 2005), this research also indicates that young-adult femininities are in flux. A sign of instability in young women’s responses to the changing landscape of gender is that they hold partnership ideals for relationships which include
aspects of both gender-restrictive and gender-equitable scripts. During a mixed-sex discussion among Black working-class adults, women in the group argued to maintain the practice of lobola, which they felt was separate from, yet compatible with, a desire for joint decision-making between women and men in intimate unions. In other groups, several middle- and striver-class women challenged expectations to prioritize marriage and caregiving over their careers and personal aspirations, yet sustained masculine ideals of financial provision and protection. These results raise important questions about the diversity of what women expect from men socially, professionally and intimately as well as the ‘crisis’ to which women themselves are subject in terms of gendered aspirations and expectations.

Further, these results indicate that the crisis tendencies evident in South Africa’s post-apartheid gender order are a reflection of tensions in conceptions of transformation, modernity, equality and freedom more broadly. These findings strengthen Decouteau’s (2013) claim that crisis tendencies in contemporary South Africa – in terms of gender, race, and class - “signify and mask deep-seated concerns about the success of liberation”. She argues,

The sexualization of politics reveals a deep-rooted anxiety about the identity of the post-apartheid nation and its relationship to Western culture and politics. This concerns key questions about race, class, and nationalism—illustrating the way in which analyses of gender must be situated in broader contexts exploring the contingent relationship between structural forces and inequalities. Crises of postcolonial identity are articulated in and through the reconfiguration of gendered meanings and relations.

Crisis tendencies in social and economic liberation are reflected in how young adults weave together competing cultural scripts, human rights, and other popular discourses as discursive tools to talk about post-apartheid transformation and gender power in sexual relationships. Young adults embrace some of the freedoms and opportunities that rights and modernity have established, yet question the costs and consequences of these changes for the broader project of social and economic equality and justice. At the interpersonal level, they use sexual relationships as a domain
to articulate the tensions they witness and experience in society and through this process discuss and rethink what it means to be modern and free.

**Social Location and the Structure of Cathesis**

Connell uses the structure of cathesis to discuss the social reproduction of gendered emotional attachment and sexual desire. It has three organizing principles – hegemonic heterosexuality (sexual practice organized in married heterosexual relationships); presupposition of sexual difference between feminine and masculine patterns of desire; and support for sexual promiscuity among men but not women. Public health researchers have used cathesis as a conceptual framework to examine how gendered sexual norms increase women’s HIV and gender-based violence (GBV) vulnerability, and pressure men to take on a range of sexual and health risks. Notably, Wingood and DiClemente have incorporated cathesis in interventions to address the material conditions and gendered relationship norms that increase African American women’s HIV risk (Raiford et al., 2007, Wingood and DiClemente, 2000). Pulerwitz and colleagues (2000) drew upon Connell’s work on cathesis to develop the Sexual Relationship Power Scale, which is used in HIV and GBV research globally to measure gender power in intimate relationships. In general, these types of interventions aim to promote gender-equitable beliefs and behaviors among men and women at individual and interpersonal levels. Albeit secondhand, HIV and GBV structural interventions employ Connell’s theory in efforts to promote gender-equitable norms, empower women and girls socially and economically, and transform masculine ideals towards less harmful attitudes and practices. This study seeks to inform these interventions through a rigorous investigation of a context where gender politics in public and private life are hotly debated and reflect crisis tendencies in notions of social and economic equality and freedom. This work extends knowledge on the structure of cathesis by examining how contextual influences shape young
adults’ masculine and feminine ideals as well as who and what is considered desirable in the relationship market.

For more than a decade, scholars have contributed to an emerging body of work on the social and economic drivers of young women’s and men’s sexual relationships in modern times. In the African region, this research has centered on how shifts in relations of gender power across social institutions shape ‘modern’ relationship motivations and commodified expressions of love (Bhana and Pattman, 2011, Groes-Green, 2011, Leclerc-Madlala, 2003, Macia et al., 2011, Malinga and Ratele, 2016, Smith, 2007, Wyrod, 2016). In early work, Spronk’s (2005) ethnographic research illustrated how young professionals in Nairobi, Kenya managed their sexual lives in response to changing social norms related to gender, ethnic identity, and religious affiliation. In South Africa, Hunter (2010) employed a historical approach to map the social reproduction of intimacy in KwaZulu-Natal and to demonstrate how the embodiment of structural inequality has modified gendered cultural models over time and altered intimate relationships. More recently, Mojola’s (2014) work in Nyanza, Kenya elucidates how gender inequalities in education and labor, and young women’s aspirations to become modern subjects through consumption-driven lifestyles, draw them to sexual relationships in which love and money are implicated jointly. This study advances this body of work by investigating the cultural and structural factors that are reflected in young adults’ gender ideals and that shape the relationship pathways desired by and available to them.

Idealized Intimate Pathways

A love-based heterosexual marriage was the primary long-term relationship ideal for most young women and men in this study. Its near universal appeal is due in large part to the continued salience of social norms that place marriage as a primary means to demonstrate social competence and reap
the social rewards of a successful transition to adulthood. In contemporary South Africa, marriage as an institution is compatible with both gender-equitable and gender-restrictive scripts as well as a belief that an intimate ‘partnership’ is a fundamental component to pursuit of the good life. Participants’ portrayals of an envisioned idealized intimate partnership illustrate that they plan to negotiate gendered power in a variety of ways and not uniformly across gendered domains. Near consensus on dual-income as essential to a partnership-type relationship was predictable given that obtaining the commodities of modernity was an important aspect of many young adults’ good life aspirations.

In general, young adults’ gender ideals for intimate partnerships did not reject restrictive gender roles and responsibilities outright. Instead, they attempt to reconfigure them for modern times. As mentioned in Chapter Six, masculine ideals centered around employed men who financially contribute equally, if not more, to relationship expenses; compassionately share in domestic labor; and do not abuse their decision-making power with women. Feminine ideals focused on employed women who contribute to relationship expenses, graciously accept their partner’s willingness to help with domestic chores, and appreciate their place at the decision-making table. Across race, gender, and class, the clearest sign of a shift in gender relations is the expectation that women engage in paid labor and contribute to relationship expenses as part and parcel of a long-term partnership pathway to the good life. However, across the three domains of gender power, the findings suggest a relaxing of prescribed gender roles and responsibilities but not the deconstruction of gendered expectations.

Social Location and Patterns of Desire

As outlined in Chapter Two, research on gender, power, and sexual relationships demonstrates how gender inequality is maintained through opposing yet interdependent models of femininity
and masculinity. This study builds on existing work by applying an intersectional lens to examine how partner desirability is constituted among young adults in contemporary South Africa. As mentioned in Chapter Six, young men and women hold similar gender ideals for sexual relationships, which include the desire to pursue a partnership pathway to their good life aspirations. Social location – primarily at the intersection of gender and class – in part, shapes who is considered desirable in the relationship market, the relationship pathways available for young adults to pursue, and the gap between their ideals for and experiences in relationships. Across race and class, young adults wanted to build a life with an intimate partner who fit a ‘Miss Independent’ or ‘Real Man’ gender ideal. However, the acquisition of economic, social and cultural capital through inherited class status and labor market and educational opportunities influenced the type of relationships that young adults are able to form by attracting desirable companions. Social location allows middle- and some striver-class young adults to align their relationship ideals and life goals, although cultural and structural drivers continue to present obstacles in the pursuit of idealized partnership pathways even amongst the most privileged. In the face of pressure to prioritize relationships over their career aspirations, some middle-class women choose to break ethnic and religious ties, while others seek to reconcile competing scripts and re-imagine the structure of a modern relationship that takes culture into account. Middle- and striver-class men are challenged by expectations to exemplify a “Real Man” ideal, which even with their relatively privileged status they are often unable to achieve.

Still, middle- and striver-class participants had greater access to idealized relationship pathways and were more likely to date people whom they would consider for a long-term partnership compared to their working-class counterparts. Social location severely limits working-class men and women’s capacity to fashion their good life aspirations and achieve morally-
respectable desirability in the relationship market. In response, they attempt to reconcile the gap between their gender ideals and restricted pathways by setting modified aspirations for the present – for some a focus on material consumption – while holding onto an idealized partnership pathway for the future.

**Bridging the Gap – Temporary Alternative Relationship Pathways**

Mojola’s (2014) work is particularly useful for thinking about how young women in contemporary African societies construct sexual desire through the entanglements of love, sex, modern consumption, and aspirations for the good life. Findings in this study are consistent with her work, as some striver- and working-class young women described their engagement in transactional sex relationships as a temporary pathway to upward mobility when faced with barriers to achieve their broader life goals. Given their material realities, these women see transactional sex as a strategy to acquire the economic and cultural capital necessary to improve their desirability in the relationship market. While they engage in transactional sex for the moment, most young women continue to hold an intimate partnership ideal for the foreseeable future. Their relationship motivations are not unlike those held by more privileged middle-class women who jointly pursue professional careers and desirable ‘Real Men’ for long-term partnerships. What distinguishes them are the pathways they travel and the strategies they employ towards the same end goal.

Some working-class women described transactional sex relationships that on the surface could be read as purely an exchange of sex for money. Yet, their unfolding stories reveal how these women imagine relationships with striver-class men that begin as transactional but eventually develop into loving partnerships in which they are able to incorporate their relationship ideals. Accounts for striver-class men, in contrast, indicate they view these relationships as casual sex hookups with women they do not consider as desirable life partners. Like striver-class women,
striver-class men view transactional sex as a temporary relationship pathway, while they continue to secure the necessary capital for “Real Man” status, essential for both their good life and idealized relationship aspirations. Thus, young adults’ experiences of transactional sexual relationships reinforce a gendered and classed sexual value system in determining partner desirability, which further constrains the relationship pathways to the good life for working-class women and men.

**Redefining Freedom in Life and Love**

Overall, this study strengthens research that moves beyond reductionist views of culture, rights, inequality, gender, and power. Discourses on human rights, neoliberalism, gendered sexual morality, post-racialism, and personal responsibility have purchase in South Africa’s post-apartheid context and contribute to a contested landscape of transformation. Through this project, I analyze how multiple forms of gendered, classed, and race-based privilege and disadvantage influence young adults’ ideals for their lives and relationships and their experiences in trying to enact ideals. Their use of rights and gender discourse call into question global and local conceptions of modernity, progress, and tradition, and shed light on the unfulfilled promises of equality and freedom they experience in a country that is often lauded as a model for the institutionalization of a rights-based framework.

Sexual relationships are a terrain upon which the contested landscape of transformation in South Africa plays out. Young women and men employ popular discourses to challenge and reconfigure social norms on gender, sexuality, race, class, and age. Concurrently, they disentangle amorphous concepts of modernity and gender equality – served to them by the state, civil society, and global media – to consider the usefulness of these cultural messages in fashioning desired lives and relationships. Young adults also draw upon competing discourses and cultural scripts to position themselves morally as modern, respectable, and desirable in a country where gender and
sexuality are still coded by a history of racial and class oppression. These accounts reveal that young adults are acutely aware of the discrepancies among the values to which they are exposed. The gendered sexualities they construct suggest that sexual relationships are a key location to articulate these tensions and redefine equality and freedom in their own lives.

**Recommendations for Applied Research**

This chapter outlines the proposed conceptual and empirical contributions of this dissertation project to gender and sexuality theory broadly and the study of young-adult gendered sexualities in African contexts specifically. This work may also be informative for observation and intervention studies in the field of public health. Over the past two decades, intervention research to address the structural drivers of women’s and girls’ HIV and gender-based violence risk has increased exponentially. Structural interventions aim “to alter one or more aspects of the structural formations – politico-legal, economic and socio-cultural – through which societal power is distributed and diffused” (Evans et al., 2010). Public health and development sector HIV and gender-based violence structural interventions are designed to promote gender-equitable social norms, empower women and girls socially and economically, and transform masculine ideals towards less harmful attitudes and practices. However, HIV and GBV interventions are limited in how they apply gender and sexuality theoretical frameworks to understand processes of change.

Structural interventions to improve gender equality in sexual relationships are typically designed to empower women materially, to increase their individual agency and to reshape ideals of men’s dominance. An underlying assumption is that economic empowerment – through educational attainment and labor force participation – increases women’s and girls’ bargaining and decision-making power in intimate relationships. This strategy combined with efforts to inform men about how gender equality adds value to their lives should result in more gender-equitable
relationship dynamics. However, few interventions thoroughly conceptualize this process of change. For example, if women’s economic empowerment improves the division of household labor between women and men, how does this inform how couples negotiate expectations around joint decision-making and contributing financially to relationship expenses? If men support equal financial contribution in relationships, how does this impact their views on equality in other domains? In these interventions, it is generally assumed that these various domains of gendered power shift in tandem. Moreover, how does an emphasis on financial contribution constrain the relationship pathways available to women and men in contexts with high rates of unemployment? Employing an intersectional approach, this study elucidates the limitations of viewing the shifting politics of gender in South Africa solely through a gender lens, specifically a clash between women exercising new rights and men attempting to maintain privilege and dominance. Instead, this research emphasizes variation and contradictions in women’s and men’s gender ideals for relationships across three domains of gender power. I also argue that gendered desirability in the relationship market is often shaped by the acquisition of various forms of inherited and acquired capital. Public health research that seeks to address gender-inequitable relationship norms should augment the “empower women” / “transform men” model and examine the inconsistencies in young men’s and women’s gender ideals across these three domains. Researchers should also explore how changes in women’s increased access to economic opportunities and men’s exposure to gender equality messages shape how gendered desirability is constituted in the relationship market for both men and women.

HIV and gender-based violence structural interventions are also limited in that most intervene on only one aspect of the context of risk – women’s economic empowerment, gender inequitable social norms, or men’s gender ideals. To date, these studies have not adequately
explored interplay among a variety of contextual factors that shape peoples’ gender ideals for and negotiations of gendered power in sexual relationships. In several contemporary African contexts, people are exposed to human rights and gender equality discourses that are incompatible with neoliberal economic policies and rhetoric that value personal responsibility and agency. How do people make sense of these contradictory ideologies along with competing cultural scripts for gender and sexuality? How do people feel about transformations in social and economic rights, or lack thereof, and how do their perceptions inform the discursive use of rights in intimate relationships and negotiations of gendered power? Building on critical studies of gender and modernity, this study examined the pathways through which normative, material and discursive dimensions of South Africa’s post-apartheid context shape young adults’ life aspirations and gender ideals for and experiences in sexual relationships. Future intervention research should pay greater attention to the mechanisms by which these contextual factors are inscribed in men’s and women’s lives and sexual relationships.

Lastly, this study employed an intersectional lens to attend to the processes and discourses through which gender, race, and class interact and are expressed in the opportunities available to, the social expectations of, and the ideals and aspirations formed by young women and men. Few HIV and gender-based violence structural interventions explicitly capture multiple axes of power in study designs and implementation strategies or fully engage with how the social theories upon which they draw conceptualize multiply-constituted disadvantage and privilege. This area of research could benefit from more rigorous theorizing on how social and economic power along multiple axes is organized within and across social institutions. Also needed is greater attention to how social location shapes women’s and men’s expressions and experiences of power within these institutions that likely resurface in their masculine and feminine ideals for sexual relationships.
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Research Assistant Job Advertisement

This study will explore the social, cultural, economic and political factors shaping young men and women’s sexual relationships in Cape Town. The study will include 18 focus group discussions and 24 in-depth interviews with young adults from racially and economically diverse backgrounds. Approximately 96 young men and women (20 – 30 years) will be recruited for this study.

Men and women who agree to take part in the study will participate in single-sex focus group discussions in which they will share their perspectives on young-adult sexual relationships and the factors influencing these relationships in the post-apartheid era. Some young adults in this sample will be invited to participate in co-ed focus group discussions to discuss their views and opinions in greater detail. Additionally, the study will include 24 in-depth interviews with a separate sample of young men and women to explore young adults’ personal experiences in sexual relationships and the factors that shape these experiences and their everyday lives.

Specific Responsibilities:

- Attend a mandatory training
- Successfully complete an online human subjects certification program
- Recruit young adult study participants
- Submit completed contact information forms
- Assist in securing sites to conduct focus group discussions
- Facilitate focus group discussions
- Implement a brief demographic survey with research participants
- Provide timely, accurate feedback to the Study Director
- Document all activity and interaction with respondents as required
- Maintain confidentiality and a professional attitude at all times

Qualifications/Requirements:

- Available for mandatory training and data collection between Nov 2013 – May 2014
- Some research experience (study participant recruitment, focus group facilitation, conducting interviews, transcribing audio files)
- Familiarity working with young adults (20 – 30 years old)
- Access to and ability to use public transportation for travel to conduct data collection activities
- Strong communication skills English and Xhosa or English and Afrikaans fluency required
- Responsible with a proven track record of accountability
- Knowledge of qualitative research methodology preferred
- Experience working in ethnically, culturally, racially, and economically diverse environments preferred

Compensation:

- Will be determined based on skill level and prior experience
- Compensated for each study deliverable
- Public transport for research-related activities will be covered
Appendix 2. Recruitment Script

Introduction
- introduce yourself and your role in the study
- study to learn about the lives and relationships of young adults in Cape Town

Key Points of the Study
- What we want to know
  A. views and opinions of young adults in their 20s
  B. what are the things in society that influence young adult sexual relationships
- Who is coordinating this study: study director – doctoral student in sociology
- Where will it take place: Convenient location in one of the neighborhoods (library, community center)
- When: February and March
- Why: Information to improve the lives of young adults in Cape Town

Participation
- group discussion with 4-8 other adults in their 20s
- single sex, option to participate in a group discussion with men and women
- The group discussion will take 2 hours
- Will take place in the next few months
- You will receive R200 for participating

Privacy Protections
- Never asking or using your real name, choosing a nickname/ made up name for the study, never required to sign anything for the study
- I am only recruiting people in their 20s for the study, I will not know if you are chosen to participate in the study. The people leading the discussion will not know your name, mobile number or any information about you shared in the study
- The study director is the only person who will have your mobile number, the name you use for the study and all the information you provide

Contact Info Sheet
- name they choose
- mobile number
- date of contact
- availability, notes about availability
- some details (age, neighborhood they live, working, matric)

Next Steps
- within one week, the study director will call you to introduce herself and ask you have few questions about yourself, 15 minutes
- answer any questions
- scheduling for group discussion
Appendix 3. Contact Information Form

Study on young-adult sexual relationships in Cape Town

Name (pseudonym): ____________________________

Mobile Number: ____________________________

Date of Contact: ____________________________

Study Id Number: ____________________________

Availability:

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Appendix 4. Screening Questionnaire

Study Identification Number ____________________________________________

1. How old are you?

_________________________ years
☐ Refused to Answer..............................................................................88

2. Would you describe yourself as male, female or transgender?
☐ Male .................................................................................................1
☐ Female .............................................................................................2
☐ Transgender ....................................................................................3
☐ Other ...............................................................................................77
☐ Refused to Answer..............................................................................88

3. How would you describe your Population Group (race)?
☐ African/Black ...................................................................................1
☐ Coloured ...........................................................................................2
☐ White .................................................................................................3
☐ Asian .................................................................................................4
☐ Other ...............................................................................................77
☐ Refused to Answer..............................................................................88

4. How would you describe your ethnicity?

☐ Refused to Answer..............................................................................88

5. What languages do you prefer to speak?

☐ Refused to Answer..............................................................................88

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
☐ Less than primary ...............................................................................1
☐ Some primary ...................................................................................2
☐ Completed primary (Grade 7/Standard 5) .............................................3
☐ Some secondary ..................................................................................4
☐ Completed secondary/matric (Grade 12/Standard 10, passed exams) ......5
☐ Some post-secondary training college/university ..................................6
☐ Undergraduate Degree/Certificate (Technikon/University) ..................7
☐ Some postgraduate ............................................................................8
☐ Postgraduate Degree/Diploma ..........................................................9
☐ Other ...............................................................................................77
☐ Refused to Answer..............................................................................88
7. Are you currently working? By work I mean anything that you are doing for money or for payment in kind (such as food, housing) or if you are helping unpaid in a household business of any kind. Please tell me even if your work was not a proper job. Work also includes self-employment or working in your own business, casual or part-time work and even occasional work you might do.

- Yes.................................................................1
- No .......................................................................2
- Refused to Answer ..............................................88

8. What kind of work do you do?

- Refused to Answer ............................................... 88

9. Referring to these income ranges, how much money did you make from all sources last month? This includes all earnings, grants and other money you received.

- Less than R1000 ..................................................1
- R1000 – R5000 .......................................................2
- R5000 – R10,000 ...................................................3
- R10,000 – R25,000 ................................................4
- More than R25,000 ...............................................5
- Refused to Answer .................................................88

10. How would you describe your sexual orientation?

- Heterosexual/straight .............................................1
- Gay/lesbian/homosexual .......................................2
- Bisexual ..............................................................3
- Not sure .............................................................4
- Other ..................................................................77
- Refused to Answer .................................................88

11. Have you ever had sex? By sex, I mean penetration.

- Yes .......................................................................1
- No .......................................................................2
- Refused to Answer .................................................88

12. Which of the following best describes your relationship status at this time

- Single and not in a relationship .............................1
- Not married, but in a relationship and not living with a partner .........2
- Not married, but in a relationship and living with a partner .............3
- Married ..................................................................4
- Other ..................................................................77
- Refused to Answer .................................................88
Appendix 5. English Language Focus Group Consent Form

FOCUS GROUP INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Research Study: A qualitative study to explore young-adult sexual relationships in Cape Town, South Africa

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Hirsch, PhD  
Phone Number: 001-212-305-1185

Co-Investigator: Althea Anderson, MPH  
Phone Number: 001-510-290-9937 (U.S.)  
072-556-1458 (RSA)

Introduction
The purpose of this project is to learn about factors that influence young-adult sexual relationships in Cape Town, South Africa. You have been invited to participate in a focus group with other young adults in Cape Town to share your views and opinions on this topic. About 96 young men and women will be enrolled in this study in Cape Town.

The focus group is considered research and we must ask for your permission to take part in it. This consent form tells you what will happen during the focus group so you can decide whether or not you want to participate. If you decide to take part in this research, we will ask you to provide oral consent. If you want to keep a copy of this paper, we will give it to you. Please ask us to explain anything you do not understand.

General information about the study
This research project is taking place in Cape Town, South Africa. Approximately 4-8 young men and women (20 – 30 years old) will participate in each focus group. We will conduct up to 12 focus groups with young men and women separately and 6 focus groups with young men and women together. We will use information from the focus group to learn more about the lives of young adults in Cape Town, their experiences in and thoughts on young-adult sexual relationships, and their views on the types of things that influence these relationships.

What will happen during the study?
The focus group will be led by members of the research team. The questions will cover a broad range of issues relating to the lives of young adults in Cape Town and their views on sexual relationships. The focus group discussion will be facilitated by a focus group leader. The focus group discussion will be recorded so we can make an exact written record of what was said. After this research project is finished, the digital recording will be permanently destroyed.

- The focus group will take approximately 2 hours to complete.
- There will be no cost to you to participate in the focus group.
- You will receive R200 for your time and effort for each group discussion in which you participate.
- Drinks will be provided before and during the focus group session.
If you agree to participate in this study, you will take part in a group discussion with other young men or young women. You will be asked to describe your views on what it means to be a young adult in South Africa, the different ways in which manhood and womanhood are expressed, your thoughts on young-adult sexual relationships, and the types of things that influence these relationships. You will not be asked to describe your own sexual behaviors and experiences. We would like to know your views on the experiences and behaviors of young adults your age.

Before the group discussion, each participant will meet privately with a member of the study team and we will ask you some information about yourself, like your age, population group, income, and education. You have the right to refuse to answer these questions.

The study team may want to contact you in the coming months to participate in another focus group or to obtain additional information from you about the topics discussed during the group discussion. You may be contacted to take part in a second group discussion, which will include both young men and women. If you are invited to participate in another focus group discussion you can decide at that time if you are interested in participating. You are not required to participate in a group discussion with both men and women.

**Your participation is voluntary**
You are not required to participate in this focus group. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**What are the potential benefits?**
There may be no direct benefits to you for participating in this focus group. We hope that the benefit from this focus group will come in the form of information about the lives of young adults in Cape Town and the factors that influence their sexual relationships. You may feel a benefit from sharing your experiences with others who are interested in your opinions. You may also benefit from information on community health resources provided at the end of the focus group session.

**What are the possible risks or discomforts?**
A possible risk to you in participating in this focus group is that some of the questions may make you feel embarrassed or worried. If you should feel uncomfortable providing a response or become distressed at any time, you can skip any questions asked by the focus group facilitator.

Another risk may involve your privacy and potential loss of confidentiality. This is because confidentiality is limited in a focus group setting, since other participants are present during the discussion. Additional steps that the study team has taken to protect your privacy are described below.

**How will my confidentiality and privacy be protected?**
We will protect information about you and your taking part in the research to the best of our ability.
In the focus group, we will ask everyone in the group to keep the conversation confidential; however, we cannot promise that people will not share what has been discussed with others.

Every effort will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We will not say your name on the digital voice recording. Each focus group participant will be assigned a number for the group discussion voice recordings and written transcripts. The recordings and transcripts will include your voice and assigned number, but will not include your name.

The recordings and transcripts will be stored separately from any other information that could identify you. All audio recordings will be saved in locked electronic files and we will destroy the recordings when the research is completed. We will not write your name in our notes about the focus group discussion or in any report or publication about this research.

The following individuals and/or agencies will be able to look at and copy your research records:
- The investigators and study staff who may be evaluating the study
- Authorities from Columbia University and New York Presbyterian Hospital, including the Institutional Review Board ('IRB')
- The Office of Human Research Protections ('OHRP')
- The University of South Africa College of Graduate Studies’ Research Ethics Committee

**If you have any questions about the research, you can contact:**
- Althea Anderson, co-Investigator, SA Mobile 072-556-1458, email: ada2131@columbia.edu
- Jennifer Hirsch, Principal Investigator, 001-212-305-1185, email: jsh2124@mail.cumc.columbia.edu

**What are my rights as a participant?**
This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of South Africa College of Graduate Studies’ Research Ethics Committee and Columbia University’s Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about this research study, your rights as a research participant, or if you have a complaint about the research, you may contact:

Columbia University Medical Center Institutional Review Board
154 Haven Ave, 1st Floor
New York, NY 10032
Telephone: 001-212-305-5883
Email: irboffice@columbia.edu

University of South Africa College of Graduate Studies’ Research Ethics Committee
Chairperson: Prof MK Havenga
College of Graduate Studies
PO Box 392
UNISA 0003
Telephone +27-12-429-8457
Email: havenmk@unisa.ac.za
Research Ethics Committees and Institutional Review Boards are organized to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in research.

**Statement of Consent**

I understand my rights regarding this research and have talked about this research study, including the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits with the research staff. Any questions I had were answered to my satisfaction. I am aware that I am agreeing to take part in this research study and that I can stop being in the study at any time. I am not waiving (giving up) any of my legal rights by participating in this study. Upon request, I will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for my records.

Study Participant’s Identification Number: ________________________________

Signature of Person Obtaining Oral Consent: ________________________________

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Oral Consent: ________________________________

Date Oral Consent was Obtained: ________________________________
Appendix 6. English Language Focus Group Guide

THE LIVES AND RELATIONSHIPS OF YOUNG ADULTS IN CAPE TOWN STUDY
GUIDE FOR YOUNG WOMEN’S GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Before the focus group starts:

☐ Provide two (2) copies of the consent forms to all participants; allow them time to read the form completely. Ask them if they have any questions. Read the last section of the form and sign as the person obtaining consent. Give the participant one copy and keep on copy in the study folder.

☐ After obtaining consent, give everyone a number tag and ask them to display it on their shirt somewhere visible.

☐ Allow participants time to get drinks/snacks and settle in.

Turn on the Audio Recorder: Read focus group ID, date, and the moderator and note taker’s names into the recorder

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this group discussion today. The purpose of the discussion is to understand your thoughts on the lives and relationships of young adults and your opinions on the things in society that influence young adult relationships. We would like to hear you views on these topics; you do not have to share your personal experiences unless you feel comfortable doing so. This information will be useful in developing policies and programs to improve the lives of young adults in Cape Town.

As a reminder, your participation in this group discussion is voluntary. If there is a question you do not feel comfortable answering, you do not need to answer it. Your responses in this group discussion will be kept confidential. We will not use your name during the discussion, and we ask when referring to each other, you please use the number on each other’s tags rather than names.

The group discussion is being audio recorded. Before we begin, I’d like to confirm that you have given your voluntary consent for this group discussion to be recorded. Please say or
indicate that you have given your consent for this. [Moderator: Confirm verbally that everyone in the room has given consent]

Also, we ask that everyone put your phones on silent and avoid answering or looking at your phones during the discussion. Please remember to speak loud and clear so the recorder can pick up your voice. Please avoid speaking over another person. As facilitators, our role is to listen and learn from your conversation with each other.

Does anyone have any questions before we get started?

[Section 1: Views on South African society]

We’d like to start by talking about your personal views on South African society today.

1. How would you describe South African society today?
   a. What are some of the things about South Africa that make you proud?
   b. What are some of the major problems in South Africa today?

[Section 2: Views and beliefs about young adults’ lives – comparisons across gender, race and class]

2. We want to know about the lives of young adults in Cape Town. If we were to travel throughout the city and take photos of young adults, what types of images would we see?
   a. How do young adults you know spend their time?
   b. Where do they hang out?
   c. What types of work do they do?
   d. Where are they in school?

3. What types of “lifestyles” do young adults want?
   a. What are other “lifestyles” that young adults want?
   b. Why do they want these lifestyles?
   c. Why are these particular things important?
   d. Thinking about your parent’s generation, have young adults always wanted these things?
   e. Why do they want these things now?

4. In your opinion, how do the problems facing South Africa [give examples that they mentioned previously] affect young adults in Cape Town?

5. What other challenges do young adults experience?

6. How are the lives of young adults in Cape Town different than the lives of young adults in other parts of the country?
   a. How are their lives similar?
7. So, you are a group of women in their 20s, tell us about the lives of young women in Cape Town
   a. What challenges do young women face?
   b. How are the lives of young women different from young men’s lives?
   c. How are the lives of young women and men similar?

8. Most of you live/study in and around this area, how are the lives of young women in this area different from young women who live in other areas of Cape Town? [Give examples of other areas]
   a. Why do these differences exist?
   b. Why do young women from different areas want different things out of life?
   c. What is similar about the lives of young women in your area and other areas of the city? [Give examples of 2 other areas]

9. What does society expect of young women?
   a. What do young women’s families expect of them?
   b. What do young women’s friends expect of them?
   c. Are these expectations realistic?
   d. How are these expectations different for women who live in different parts of Cape Town?
   e. What happens when young women do not meet these expectations?

10. Do you know of any programs working to improve the lives of young adults?
    a. What do you like about these programs?
    b. What do you dislike?

Now let’s talk about young adults’ social lives

11. Tell us about the places where young adults you know hang out.
    a. Do young adults from other areas of the city hang out in these places?
    b. Where do they hang out?
    c. How do young adults from different parts of the city interact in these places?

[Section 3: Views and beliefs about young adults’ sexual relationships]

Now, we would like for you to tell us about young adult dating in Cape Town

12. What are the types of relationships young adults have?
    a. How are these types of relationships different?

13. What do young adults want out of these relationships?
    a. Why do they want these things?
    b. What are other things that are important in different types of relationships?
    c. Probe motivations (examples: faithfulness, pleasure, intimacy)
    d. What is the role of… (money, gifts) in relationships?
14. Describe the best type of partner
   a. Why are these qualities important?
   b. How easy is it to find a partner with these qualities?
   c. How are these qualities similar to what your parent’s generation wanted in their relationships?
   d. How are these qualities different for young women who live in different parts of the city?

15. What do you find challenging about young adult relationships?
   a. How do the challenges in society [give 3 examples mentioned previously] affect young adult relationships?
   b. Are there things that are happening in society that have a positive effect on young adult relationships?

16. What types of relationships are seen as bad?
   a. What types of relationships are seen as “coercive”?
   b. Why does “coercion” happen in relationships?
   c. Under what conditions does a partner have the right to refuse sex?

17. What are some reasons why young adults choose to end relationships?
   a. [Probe for different types of relationships]
   b. What are the consequences of ending a relationship?

**Now let’s talk about society’s image of young adult relationships**

18. In general, what does society think about young adult relationships?
   a. What is acceptable for a young woman as far as sexual relationships?
   b. What is acceptable for a young man?
   c. Are society’s expectations realistic?
   d. Under what conditions do young adults go against these expectations?
   e. What are the consequences of going against society’s expectations?

19. How do society’s expectations influence what you think about young adult sexual relationships?

**We would like to end on a positive note. Let’s discuss the benefits of relationships**

20. What are the benefits of being in a relationship?
21. How do young adults negotiate what they want in a relationship?
22. What can young adults do to build good relationships?
23. What can society do to help young adults build good relationships?
24. Do you know if any programs in Cape Town that work to improve young adult relationships?
   a. What do you like about these programs?
   b. What do you dislike about these programs?
[Section 4: Closing]

Do you have any additional thoughts about the lives and relationships of young adults that you would like to share?

That concludes our discussion. Thank you again for coming here today to share your thoughts and opinions with us. As you know, you will receive 200 rand for participating in the discussion. Althea will give you the stipend over there at the table.
Appendix 7. Individual Interview Guide

THE LIVES AND RELATIONSHIPS OF YOUNG ADULTS IN CAPE TOWN STUDY
GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Administrative Questions:

PARTICIPANT ID: ___________  Moderator: __________________
Date: ______________________  Informed Consent:  Y / N
Start Time of IDI: ________  End Time of IDI: ________

Before the focus group starts:

☐ Provide two (2) copies of the consent form participant; allow them time to read the form completely. Ask them if they have any questions. Read the last section of the form and sign as the person obtaining consent. Give the participant one copy and keep on copy in the study folder.

☐ After obtaining consent, allow participant time to get drinks and settle in.

Turn on the Audio Recorder: Read Participant ID, date, and the Interviewer’s name into the recorder

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of the interview is to hear you views on the lives and relationships of young adults in Cape Town. I am very interested in learning more about your personal experiences in life and relationships if you feel comfortable sharing.

As a reminder, your participation in this interview is voluntary. If there is a question you do not feel comfortable answering, you do not need to answer it. Your responses in this interview will be kept confidential. We will not use your name during the interview.

The interview is being audio recorded. I’d like to confirm that you have given your voluntary consent for this interview to be recorded. Please indicate that you have given your consent to participate.

Please put your phone on silent and avoid answering or looking at your phone during the discussion. Please remember to speak loud and clear so the recorder can pick up your voice.

I’ll be sharing several findings from the men’s, women’s and mixed sex group discussions. A wide range of opinions was shared in these discussions; you might not agree with everything and that’s fine. I’m most interested in learning about your views and experiences.
Do you have any questions before we get started?

Section 1: Views on rights and gender equality

I’d like to start by talking about your personal views on South African society. In the group discussions one of the major themes discussed by women and men was the importance of rights and freedoms South Africa. Both men and women from all walks of life had very complicated views on the relationship between rights and responsibilities in South Africa today. Some men and women felt strongly that in the post-apartheid period people in their 20s have more rights and freedoms than previous generations and this is a good thing. Others shared that people have too many rights today and young adults are irresponsible compared to previous generations.

25. What are your thoughts on these viewpoints?
   c. What are your thoughts on rights?
   d. What are your thoughts on personal responsibility?
   e. What do you think about rights and freedoms for previous disadvantaged groups?
   f. What do you think about rights for women?
   g. Why was gender equality part of the post-apartheid struggle?
   h. What are the benefits of gender equality in society?
   i. What are the negative effects of gender equality?
   j. Who promotes gender equality in society?

Another important topic discussed in the groups was access to education and jobs. I want to hear your views on how easy it for people in their 20s to access quality education and good jobs in South Africa. Let’s start with education.

26. What was your experience in secondary school?
   a. What types of education or training did you seek after matric?
   b. What was your education experience in college or university?
   c. Has your education and training prepared you for the type of job want?
   d. What type of education or training would be helpful at this point in your life to prepare you for the type of job you want?

One of the most important topics discussed was gaining employment in South Africa.

27. What are some of the reasons that people in their 20s have difficulty getting employment?
28. So you received training in …. Please describe your work experience
   a. What has helped you get the type of jobs you want?
   b. What have been the challenges in getting the jobs you want?
29. What type of work would you like to do if you weren’t working in …. 

Most men and women agreed that there’s a lot of work opportunities available to people in their 20s now compared to the previous generation. Some said that the ability to find good jobs in South Africa is based on class differences now and the gap between the rich and poor is getting wider. Others thought that color, race, and gender is still an advantage.
30. What do you think about gender differences in the ability to get a job?
31. What do you think about gender differences in the ability to get a good salary?
32. What do you think about hiring policies that’s based on race? Based on gender? Based on class?
33. If ‘who you know’ is important to securing employment, what things can be done to improve access to employment opportunities for people in their 20s?

[Section 2: Views and beliefs about what young adults want in life]

In the discussion groups, women and men talked a lot about what young adults want in life. Some discussed the importance of being independent, but many people they know are just hanging out and not doing much. Other men and women shared that many people in their 20s are seeking the ‘good life’ which could mean partying and buying expensive things, for others it means settling down, getting married and starting a family.

34. What are your thoughts about the different things women and men shared about what they want out of life?

35. How would you describe your desired lifestyle?
   a. Have you been able to achieve that lifestyle? Why or Why not?
   b. How has the family/ethnicity influenced your desire lifestyle?
   c. How has education and work influenced your desired lifestyle?
   d. How has religion influenced your desired lifestyle?
   e. How has the media influenced your desired lifestyle?
   f. What other things have influenced what your desired lifestyles?
   g. Do you view these influences as positive or negative?

36. Do you feel that people who are less advantaged than you want the same things? Why?
   a. Do you feel that people who are more advantaged than you want the same things? Why?

[Section 3: Views and beliefs about young adults’ sexual relationships]

Now, we’ll move onto relationships. There was quite a bit of overlap in how men and women described the ideal partnership – issues around love, trust, respect, communication, support, and working towards similar goals.

37. How would you describe your ideal partner?

Men and women in group discussions felt that these characteristics are hard to find in a partner. Several mentioned that relationships where better in your parents and grandparents’ generations.

38. What are the challenges in finding the ideal partner for young men and women in their 20s?
   a. Have you ever been able to achieve your ideals in a relationship? Why or why not?
   b. What type of partner do you think you will settle down with?
39. Why do you think relationships are problematic for some people their 20s?
   a. How do the challenges in society affect young adult relationships?
   b. Are there things that are happening in society that have a positive effect on young adult relationships?
40. Give me some examples of relationships that you know that are working between men and women in their 20s?
   a. How are they making it work?

One of the main topics about relationships is what motivates men and women in their 20s to get into relationships. The motivations discussed the most were love and money.

41. What motivated you to be in your most recent relationship?
   a. How did your motivations change during the relationship?
42. What are your views on the role of money in relationships between men and women?
   a. To what extent is men’s role as providers in relationships still relevant for young adults in their 20s?
   b. How has money played a role in your relationships?

Related to relationship motivations, we also talked a lot about what is expected of men and women in relationships. Both men and women shared that men are often expected to provide for their partners and children and women are expected to take care of their partners and children.

43. In your relationships, what do you expect of your partner?
   a. What do you contribute as a woman/man?
   b. Why are different things expected of men and women?
   c. Are your relationship expectations common among men/women you know?
   d. What other things are expected of men and women?

Men and women talked a lot about gender equality and 50/50 relationships. Some men and women mentioned that male dominance is important in relationships, others thought that there should be more equality in relationships.

44. How do you feel about 50/50 relationships?
   a. What are the benefits of 50/50 relationships?
   b. What are the challenges of 50/50 relationships?
   c. What type of man is interested in a 50/50 relationship?
   d. What type of woman is interested in a 50/50 relationship?

45. Do you want a 50/50 relationship? Why or why not?
   a. Do you have a 50/50 relationship?
   b. What influences your decision on 50/50 relationships?
I’d also like to discuss abusive relationships.

46. What types of relationships are seen as abusive?
   a. Have you experienced an abusive relationship? Can you tell me about your experience?
   b. Why do you think the abuse happened in your relationship?
   c. What could have been done to prevent the abuse?
   d. How does the family/ethnicity affect abusive relationships?
   e. How does religion affect abusive relationships?
   f. How does the media affect abusive relationships?
   g. How does the promotion of gender equality in South Africa affect abusive relationships?

I would like to end on a positive note. Let’s discuss what you think should be done to improve the lives and relationships of men and women in their 20s.

47. What do you think women could do to improve relationships?
48. What do you think men could do to improve relationships?

Beyond relationships, I’d also like to discuss the steps that can be taken to improve the lives of people in their 20s.

49. What are some steps that can be taken to improve the lives of people in their 20s?
   a. By the government
   b. By the family/ethnic communities
   c. Religious communities
   d. The media

50. What are your thoughts on community campaigns to improve gender relations?
   a. What are the strengths of these campaigns?
   b. What are the weaknesses of these campaigns?

51. Last question, let’s look forward to the next stage, if we looked at South Africa 5 years from now what do you want to see politically and economically?
   a. What do you want to see socially and culturally in Cape Town?
   b. What do you want for your life as you transition to your 30s?
   c. What do you want for your relationships as you transition to your 30s?

[Section 4: Closing]

Do you have any additional thoughts about the lives and relationships of young adults that you would like to share?

That concludes our discussion. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and opinions with me.
Appendix 8. Gender Power in Relationships Instrument - Adapted Gem Scale

GENDER NORMS

Male Norms (Things people say about men, your opinion, do you agree or disagree)
A man should always be the major provider in his relationship
Men should make the final decision involving money in a relationship
Men should always want to have sex if the opportunity is available
Men should always like having sex

Female Norms (Things people say about women, your opinion, do you agree or disagree)
A woman's natural role should be the caregiver in a relationship
A woman should not make more money than her partner
A woman should try to look pretty to attract a man
Women should avoid having more than one sexual partner at the same time
Women should avoid having too many sexual partners before getting married

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

Decision Making
Who decides how you and your partner spend money?
Who does most of the housework?

Conflict Resolution
When you disagree about how you and your partner spend money, who usually gets their way?
When you disagree with your partner about having sex, who usually gets their way?
If I refused to have sex with my partner, they would get angry (do you agree or disagree)
I am concerned that conflicts and tensions will seriously damage my relationship with my main partner (do you agree or disagree)
If I were to break up with my main partner, it would be easy to find another person who is willing to commit to a relationship with me
It’s really hard to find a good woman/man these days.

Relationship Control (do you agree or disagree)
My partner has more say than I do about important decisions that affect us.
My partner won’t let me do certain things
My partner won’t let me wear certain things.
Who usually has more say about how often you see one another?
My partner does what they want, even if I do not want them to.
My partner always wants to know where I am.
I feel trapped or stuck in our relationship.

Relationship Control - Sex (do you agree or disagree)
Who usually has more say about whether you have sex?
If I really wanted to I could refuse to have sex with my partner because I wasn’t in the mood.
If I really wanted to I could refuse to engage in sex practices with my partner that I didn’t like.
If I really wanted to I could control my urge to have sex after drinking alcohol.
My partner might be having sex with someone else.

In general, who do you think has more power in your relationship?
Appendix 9. Individual Interview Consent Form

**Interview Informed Consent**

**Title of Research Study:** A qualitative study to explore young-adult sexual relationships in Cape Town, South Africa

**Principal Investigator:** Althea Anderson, MPH

**Telephone Number:** U.S. mobile: 5102909937; South Africa mobile: 0725561458

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**Introduction**

The purpose of this project is to learn about factors that influence young-adult sexual relationships in Cape Town, South Africa. You have been invited to participate in an interview to share your views and opinions on this topic. About 96 young men and women will be enrolled in this study in Cape Town.

The interview is considered research and we must ask for your permission to take part in it. This consent form tells you what will happen during the interview so you can decide whether or not you want to participate. If you decide to participate, we will ask you to provide oral consent. If you want to keep a copy of this paper, we will give it to you. Please ask us to explain anything you do not understand.

**General information about the study**

This research project is taking place in Cape Town, South Africa. Young men and women, 20–30 years old, will be interviewed individually. We will use information from these interviews to learn more about the lives of young adults in Cape Town, their experiences in and thoughts on young-adult sexual relationships, and their views on the types of things that influence these relationships.

**What will happen during the study?**

During the interview, someone from the research team will ask you questions covering a broad range of issues relating to the lives of young adults in Cape Town, as well as your views on and experiences in sexual relationships. The interview will take place in a private area so you can speak comfortably without being overheard. The interview will be recorded, so we can make an exact written record of what was said. After this research project is finished, the digital recording will be permanently destroyed.

- The interview will take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours to complete.
- There will be no cost to you to participate in the interview.
- You will receive R200 for your time and effort.
- Drinks will be provided before and during the interview.
After the interview, we will ask you some information about yourself, like your age, population group, income, and education. You have the right to refuse to answer these questions.

**Your participation is voluntary**
You are not required to participate in this interview. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**What are the potential benefits?**
There may be no direct benefits to you for participating in the interview. The benefit from these interviews may come in the form of information about the lives of young adults in Cape Town and the factors that influence their sexual relationships. You may feel a benefit from sharing your experiences with someone who is interested in hearing your opinions. You may also benefit from information on community health resources provided at the end of the interview.

**What are the possible risks or discomforts?**
A possible risk to you in participating in this interview is that some of the questions may make you feel embarrassed or worried. If you should feel uncomfortable providing a response or become distressed at any time, you can skip any questions and discontinue the discussion.

Another risk may involve your privacy and confidentiality. The steps that the study team has taken to protect your privacy are described below.

**How will my confidentiality and privacy be protected?**
We will protect information about you and your taking part in the research to the best of our ability.

Every effort will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We will not say your name on the digital voice recording. The study investigator will assign you a code for voice recordings and written transcripts. The recordings and transcripts will include your voice and assigned number, but will not include your name.

The recordings and transcripts will be stored separately from any information that could identify you. All audio recordings will be saved in locked electronic files and we will destroy the recordings when the research is completed. We will not write your name in our notes about the interview or in any report or publication about this research.

**If you have any questions about the research, you can contact:**
- Althea Anderson, Principal Investigator, SA Mobile 0725561458, email: ada2131@columbia.edu
- Jennifer Hirsch, Principal Investigator’s Academic Sponsor, 001-2123051185, email: jsh2124@mail.cumc.columbia.edu

**What are my rights as a participant?**
This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of South Africa College of Graduate Studies’ Research Ethics Committee and Columbia University’s Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about this research study, your rights as a research participant, or if you have a complaint about the research, you may contact:

Institutional Review Board
Columbia University Medical Center
722 West 168th Street, 4th Floor
New York, NY 10032
Telephone: 001-2123055883
Email: irboffice@columbia.edu

University of South Africa College of Graduate Studies’ Research Ethics Committee
Chairperson: Prof MK Havenga
College of Graduate Studies
PO Box 392
UNISA 0003
Telephone +27-12-429-8457
Email: havenmk@unisa.ac.za

Research Ethics Committees and Institutional Review Boards are organized to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in research.

**Statement of Consent**

I understand my rights regarding this research and have talked about this research study, including the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits with the research staff. Any questions I had were answered to my satisfaction. I am aware that I am agreeing to take part in this research study and that I can stop being in the study at any time. I am not waiving (giving up) any of my legal rights by participating in this study. Upon request, I will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for my records.

Study Participant’s Identification Number: ________________________________

Signature of Person Obtaining Oral Consent: ______________________________

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Oral Consent: _________________________

Date Oral Consent was Obtained: ________________________________
Appendix 10. University of South Africa (UNISA) College of Graduate Studies’ Research Ethics Committee Approval

**COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**  
**CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL CLEARANCE IN RESPECT OF A RESEARCH PROJECT**

(Ethical clearance in terms of the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and Policy for Conducting Research Involving Unisa Staff, Students or Data is given subject to the applicant abiding by the principles and parameters set out in his or her application and proposal in the actual execution of the research. The approval does not imply that the researcher is relieved of any accountability in terms of Unisa’s research and ethics policies if action is taken beyond the research proposal)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of research project:</th>
<th>Promise and Peril: Young-Adult Sexual Relationships in South Africa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>Ms Althea Anderson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor/Project leader:</td>
<td>Prof Kopano Retele</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(if applicable)</td>
<td>(Separate ethical clearance given by Columbia University Medical Center in respect of the PhD study for which Ms Anderson is registered at that Institution)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of ethical clearance granted:</td>
<td>2013-2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions, if any:</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Signed on behalf of CGS Research Ethics Committee:  
2013/CGS/010

Prof MK Havenga  
Date: 2013:11:30
Appendix 11. Columbia University Institutional Review Board Approval

November 25, 2013

Jennifer Hirsch
SMS Sociomedical Science - 821300X
722 W 168 st, 5th floor
Department of Sociomedical Sciences

Protocol Number: IRB-AAAAM5203
Title: Promise and Peril: Young-Adult Sexual Relationships in South Africa
Approval Date: 11/17/2013
Expiration Date: 11/16/2014

Dear Dr. Hirsch,

On November 17, 2013, the above-mentioned study was reviewed and approved by the Chair or Designee of Columbia University Medical Center Institutional Review Board (IRB) Exp. It met the regulatory guidelines for expedited review, categories 6 and 7. You may now begin human research for this study.

Important:
1) As communicated with IRB staff outside of RASCAL, please update the Confidentiality of Study Data section of the Study Description to confirm that personal identifying information on study participants will not be brought back to the United States from South Africa.
2) Please be reminded that approval from the University of South Africa-Medical Research Council Research Ethics Committee must be obtained and submitted to the CUMC IRB prior to the initiation of procedures in Cape Town. Please include documentation of University of South Africa-Medical Research Council Research Ethics Committee approval with your next submission to the IRB or email it to Susie Kim (ojk2142@columbia.edu) so that it can be attached to the RASCAL submission on your behalf.
3) As the enrollment of non-English speaking participants is anticipated, before non-English speaking participants can be enrolled you will need to provide a translation of the IRB approved study documents in accordance with the CUMC IRB Enrollment of Non-English Speaking Subjects policy, http://www.cumc.columbia.edu/dept/irb/policies/Nonenglish_Speaking_Subjects.pdf. Translations should be submitted in RASCAL as a Modification.
4) Several documents have been inactivated by IRB staff. Please delete/archive all inactivated and study-related documents that are no longer necessary for the conduct of this study prior to next submission. If you need assistance removing the documents please contact the RASCAL help team at (212) 851-0213.

During the approval period, all subjects enrolled must provide voluntary informed consent to participate in the study. The requirement to obtain written informed consent has been waived in accordance with 45 CFR 46.117(c).

The following study related materials were approved:
- Consent Forms: CF-AAAN9070 and CF-AAAN9072
- HIPAA Form G: HIP-AAAJ4200
- Contact Information Form, attached 10/31/2013
- Screening Questionnaire, attached 10/31/2013
- Demographic Questionnaire, attached 10/31/2013
- Study Focus Group and Interview Guide FINAL, attached 10/31/2013

Any proposed changes in the protocol must be immediately submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to implementation, unless such a change is necessary to avoid immediate harm to the participants. Additionally, any unanticipated problems that involve risks to subjects must be reported to the IRB in accordance with the CUMC Unanticipated Problems Reporting to the IRB of Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks policy, dated January 24, 2008. All submissions for modifications and unanticipated problems must be submitted through RASCAL.