

Affection in male-male friendships: Constructions of masculinity

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## **Abstract**

The study of men and masculinity has predominantly focused on the interrelation between dominance, violence and power and how these contribute to acts of human right violations against women, children and subordinate masculinities. Literature proposes a multiplicity of masculinities and exercises of hierarchical power over women and other men; portraying men as perpetrators and accelerants to the problem. Any behaviours contrary to these dominant ideals of doing gender carry the risk of men being classified as ‘soft’ and feminine. This research seeks to change this narrative, shifting the topic to discussions of affection and how men relate to one another within their same-sex friendships. By drawing on online qualitative interviews, this paper explores the diverse experiences of young South African men in expressing and receiving affection in friendships. The research investigated how these conceptualisations of affection assist in men defining their masculine identity in contemporary South Africa. Results showed that the young men acknowledge the need for affection in friendships as a precursor for deeper relational bonds; with many participating in open expressions of affection. This indicates that young men in the study are negotiating and rejecting hegemonic ideals of doing gender and embracing more emotionally expressive behaviour. This highlights the necessity to involve men in constructive engagements on issues relating to men that can necessitate more help-seeking behaviour and educate them on the benefits of being expressive, communicative and affectionate within friendships.

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## Introduction

Masculinity and femininity are social constructs that prescribe normative behaviours and characteristics of men and women as natural, appropriate or desirable (Everitt-Penhale & Ratele, 2015). Masculine identities constructed on the basis of social normative ideals, limit the ways men can express themselves (Cancian, 1986). Young men consolidating their identity can position themselves to mirror hegemonic ideals of being a man; ideals aligned with their culture, race and age (Morrell et al., 2013). Thus, these ideals maximise their power, desirability, success or marginalisation (Levy, 2005). Moreover, when young men engage in behaviours associated with gendered social norms such as dominance, self-reliance, yielding physical strength and aggression, emotional suppression and heteronormativity, they are regarded as 'successfully masculine' (Joseph & Lindegger 2007; Levy, 2005; Mfecane, 2008; Morell et al., 2013). The portrayal of these social normative behaviours determines the level and access to social benefits men receive (Levy, 2005). These social benefits can limit men's expressions of affection towards one another (Lewis, 1978). In effect, men are consciously made aware of behaviours to refrain from to avoid classification within a group of subordinate masculinities (Bosson et al., 2005). Moreover, affectionate behaviour can be viewed as a violation of men's social role within the specific social context. However, studies conducted in the contexts of South Africa, as well as Canada, found practices of hegemony by men costly to their health and well-being (Minerson et al., 2011; Seedat et al., 2009). Research showed that men's health was affected, with implications of risk-taking behaviours as victims and perpetrators of violence (Seedat et al., 2009). Other health risks include shorter lifespans, higher rates of suicide, addictions, stress-related illnesses and likelihood of imprisonment (Minerson et al., 2011). Emotionally these men conformed to traditional stereotypes of stoicism and suffered from mental health issues. Furthermore, pressures to provide and succeed accompanied high crime rates, violence and fear of other men (Minerson et al., 2011).

Expressions of affection amongst men have been frowned upon in North America and other Western nations, while negative affect is received easily (Lewis, 1978). In South Africa, masculinity is closely linked to violence (Cooper, 2009). A study by Cooper (2009) of 25 Afrikaans-speaking boys from the Cape Flats impending trial for various crimes illustrated that for these young men, acceptance as a man meant using violence as a vehicle of expression and dominance. Failure to use violence raised the risk of being associated with a subordinate masculine identity (Cooper, 2009). Thus, societal behaviours stemming from strong traditional

roles of masculinities are limiting towards expressions of affection. Affection ‘undoes’ negative emotions such as anger, which plays an important role in various forms of violence against women, children and ‘subordinate’ men. Men are deprived of the psychological and social benefits associated with developing close friendships (Lewis, 1978; Floyd, 1997).

Thus, the portrayal of affection by men towards other men could facilitate communication of internal conflicts, which could aid in curbing the rising gender-based violence statistics as well as men engaging in more help-seeking behaviours (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Ratele, 2015). Research on friendships formed during early adolescence found that friendships were characterised with a greater level of intimacy and responsiveness amongst young children; however same-sex friendships formed in late adolescence experienced higher levels of intimacy (Berndt, 1982). Therefore, an exploration of the ways men subjectively express themselves affectionately in friendships and the influences on the constructions of their masculine identity may highlight the need for engagement in positive behaviours. Previous studies conducted on affection and friendships often placed gender differentiation in same-sex friendships at the forefront (Migliaccio, 2009; Floyd, 2000). Findings commonly supported the view that women were more affectionate in their friendships in contrast to men. This study intended to shift the focus to friendships between men and explore the experiences, views and diverse ways men might express their affection in friendships. Furthermore, the research investigated how these conceptualisations of affection define men’s masculine identity in a South African context.

### **Literature Review**

Men’s constructions of their masculine identity dominantly shape their understandings and expressions of affection. These constructions regarding affection are often shaped in early childhood with their familial relationships (Floyd, 2001; Mandara et al., 2010). Furthermore, behaviours associated with certain gendered norms in these relationships reinforce the construction of a masculine identity (Morrell et al., 2012). Hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant ideals of what it means to be a man in a particular society (Morrell, 1998). Hegemonic masculinities are constructions and performances of gendered norms and social structures (Harris III, 2010; Migliaccio, 2009). Characteristics associated with these forms of manhood are usually problematic behaviours and attitudes, which include and are not limited to misogyny, homophobia, heteronormativity and violence (Morrell, 1998; Morrell et al., 2012). In contrast, characteristics such as empathy, expressiveness and affection are rarely

associated with manhood. A study by Levy (2005), on white middle-class men in the United States, found that men who adhere to hegemonic ideologies have greater access to societal privileges, thus perpetuating gender expectations. This complicit behaviour amongst men in the study reinforced a social hierarchy and influenced the types of relationships these men pursued (Levy, 2005). Thus, hegemonic masculinity also refers to men's patterned behaviour that enables power over women and other subordinate masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Morrell et al., 2012). Therefore, some men's reinforced gendered norms shape their views on affection and masculinity (Floyd, 2001). This transcends into their relationships and thus, friendships.

### *Masculinity and male-male affection*

Men have been known to steer away from intimacy in their friendships, largely influenced by affection being predominantly constructed as feminine (Cancian, 1986). Cancian's (1986) work on the feminisation of love in the United States, identifies women as more expressive than men. However, this is the work of feminising affection, which argues that affective intimacy is strongly perceived as feminine. This feminisation consequently disregards the physical aspects of affection men prefer, such as bonding over shared activities or acts of service (Cancian, 1986). These findings are informative of that era; however, it would be beneficial to expand on this theory with new research to suit current social realities of affection. Researchers have questioned whether the restricted expressions of affection between men has been limited in part by society, which has comparatively accepted the open expression of affection by women in same-sex friendships (Floyd & Mormon, 1997; Floyd, 2000). The analysis of male interactions through gender differentiation further feminises intimacy and perpetuates gender dichotomies surrounding friendship (Migliaccio, 2009). Furthermore, complicit hegemonic behaviours continue to be reproduced in society (Morrell, 1998). This dominant set of beliefs becomes a standard most men are judged for and judge themselves against. Thus, an exploration of men's constructions and expressions of affection towards other men could help understand the social dynamics influencing these expressions and its relation to the construction of masculinities.



Affection is defined as an emotional state of warmth held in conjunction with positive regard by an organism and often expressed in the form of outward action towards another (Floyd, 2014). This enactment is described as affectionate communication (Floyd, 2014). Various studies on affectionate communication in adults within a North American college setting had similar findings regarding ‘appropriate’ gendered expressions of affection (Floyd & Morman, 1997; Morman & Floyd, 1998; Floyd, 2000). Results highlighted the extent to which expressions of affection were considered appropriate within women-only interactions, whilst the opposite held for men. Moreover, affectionate behaviour between men was considered homoerotic (Floyd, 2000). Similar perceptions regarding appropriate behaviour were held towards fathers and sons, despite their biological relation (Floyd, 2001). In response, fathers and sons interacted through encouraging engagements rather than direct verbal or nonverbal expressions (Floyd, 2001). This is further supported by earlier work which highlighted that men found it more appropriate to be affectionate in same-sex interactions when situations were highly emotive such as weddings or funerals (Morman & Floyd, 1998).

Despite studies showing signs of psychological, social and physical benefits linked to affection, views on affectionate behaviour in men have not changed (Floyd, 1997, 2001, 2002, 2014). In their work on influences of contextual factors that impact perceptions of appropriate affectionate behaviour, Morman and Floyd (1997) recognised that people expressed affection in diverse ways within relationships. These expressions could be categorised into three operational behaviours: verbal, direct non-verbal and indirect non-verbal behaviours. Examples range from a direct, verbal proclamation of love, hugs and kisses and acts of involuntary service (Floyd, 2014). However, would this resonate with and between young men?

Studies on men engaging in physical contact, for example, extending a handshake was previously conceptualised as an exercise of power, with no regard towards affection (Floyd, 2000). These conceptualisations of physical contact among men have changed over time to ritualistic behaviour, which connotes equality and admiration amongst peers (Floyd, 2000). This can be observed in social events when men engage in congratulatory pats on the back or ‘shoulder bumps’. These expressions of affection are regulated by context and are constructed according to a male perspective of intimacy. Another aspect of affectionate communication is listening (Migliaccio, 2009). Empathetic listening is practised consciously and is “the active and emotional involvement of a listener during a given interaction ... but is also perceived by the speaker” (Bodie, 2011, p. 278). Thus, recipients feel better understood and validated (Floyd,

2014). The use of empathetic listening can encourage beyond surface-level interactions and the development of close bonds among men. However, these studies have a limited global context.

### *Masculinity and identity formation*

Masculinities have been conceptualised into broader social categories such as complicit, subordinated and marginalised; whereby each category occupies a particular position of power, comparative to hegemonic forms of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). For example, men who do not exert strong masculine dominance but continue to benefit from patriarchy, are seen as practising complicit masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Psychologists have been interested in how young men authenticate their masculine identity in relation to other men and women (Morrell et al., 2012). An investigation into occupations held by men previously perceived as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, found that men in perceived feminine roles tended to strongly perform hypermasculinity outside of their occupation (Migliaccio, 2009). This occurred in order to solidify their friendships with other men. These results are indicative of how men construct their masculinity in relation to other men.

Masculine identity and identification shift according to context, such as interpersonal or cultural contexts (Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2008). Qualitative research interviews conducted on male undergraduate students in the United States found certain key concepts ascribed with masculinities, such as confidence and physical power (Harris III, 2010). Interestingly, these men attributed confidence to the ability to reject stereotypical or expected performances of masculinities. However, socio-cultural factors also influenced the construction of these men’s masculine identities, predominantly by their peers and desires for social acceptance, status and popularity (Harris III, 2010). Performances of masculinities are also influenced by race, class, religion and culture (Morrell et al., 2012). These factors, alongside culturally-bound practices of tradition, inform particular standards and norms of masculinities (Morrell et al., 2012). To maintain social desirability, male students also engaged in certain behaviours among their male peers that they would not usually perform (Harris III, 2010). Male students replicated these behaviours to avoid being perceived as feminine. Thus, the campus environment shapes which expressions of masculinities are reproduced or possibly challenged (Harris III, 2010; Morrell, 1998).

Therefore, masculinity and identity formation fit together in understanding affection as these constructs as well as practices of affection are socially bound and culturally informed (Ratele, 2008). Thus, however, a man understands his masculine identity, will present itself in his expressions and understandings of affection. Post-apartheid interventions with men in a community-based program in Alexandra found that educating men on gender socialisation created an environment in which they were open to change (Walker, 2005). These men's ideals were centred around becoming financially stable, providing for and building strong relationships with their family (Walker, 2005). Thus, their gendered understanding of what it meant to be a man shifted and the desire to be a 'new modern man' emerged; with an outcome of affectionate and communicative men (Walker, 2005).

### *Masculinity in South Africa*

Masculinities in South African are primarily defined by the socio-political histories of colonialism and apartheid (Morrell, 1998). These masculinities were previously conceptualised under three broad groups, namely a "white", "African" and "black" masculinity (Morrell, 1998). Each of these masculinities was conceptualised under different social-environmental contexts and defined different ways masculine power was upheld. Thus, culture and practices of tradition distinguish various performances of masculinity in a South African context (Mfecane, 2016). For example, masculinity for amaXhosa is centred on the rite of passage into manhood, marked by *ulwaluko*, which includes circumcision, among other practices (Mfecane, 2016). New cultural ways of performing masculinity within specific population groups, also follow this transition to manhood. Mfecane (2016) argues that Western theories on masculinity such as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) should not be viewed as universally transferable in contexts such as Africa. Instead, he argues that various knowledge systems should rather coexist with each other. Thus, enabling fluidity in masculinities, which are constantly renegotiated (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Research on hegemonic masculinities in South Africa has typically been studied under the discourse of violence, thus reinforcing knowledge on dominant masculinities (Jewkes et al., 2015; Langa & Kiguwa, 2013; Morrell et al., 2012). Some research has now started to explore the development of more progressive masculinities. However, there is little research on alternative and subordinate masculinities, particularly among young men in South Africa (Ratele, 2015). South Africa is a diverse country grounded in different ethnicities, races and classes and thus possess varying masculinities (Morrell et al., 2013). In his work on gender

relations, Hunter (2005) found that men residing in the informal settlements of Zululand, had access to alternative currencies in constructing their masculinities. These currencies included multiple sexual partners as a sign of virility through which men maintained their dominance as 'men' – with reference to their location and society (Hunter, 2005). Representation of masculinity was through expressions of power; thus, engagements with other men had little regard for affection. In addition, scholars in the United States have explored the relationship between affectionate communication and masculinities (Floyd, 1997). However, there is little research exploring the interpersonal relationships men hold as friends (Floyd, 1997).

Research on affection and masculinities predominantly used a quantitative research approach and testing observational hypotheses (Floyd, 2014; Migliaccio, 2009). Data analysis within these studies often consisted of gender differentiation. The studies, however, provide foundational areas that can be developed further to investigate intrapersonal ideologies around masculinity and affection among young men, and how these may be actively negotiated in various contexts. Furthermore, exploration of contexts beyond a Western framework can help develop more socially relevant affection and masculinity theory in a South African context.

### **Research aims**

The study aimed to explore young male students' experiences and expressions of affection in male-male friendships and how these views could influence the construction of their masculinity. The research further sought to explore male students' understandings of affection in relation to the building of friendships with other men and if there was perhaps a shift in narrative, such as more male students engaged in progressive forms of masculinity. Furthermore, had students' views indicated resistance or opposition to affectionate expressions, investigation of possible factors influencing these ideals was also an area of interest in the study. This was because opposing ideals on affection also impact the possible renegotiation of gender performance in friendships between men. This study was important as it explored an area of interest within masculinity studies and in a South African context that is yet to be investigated and analysed. An enquiry into the affections of men in the context of friendships possessed the potential to start conversations centred around positive engagements between men and positive narratives related to masculinity. Furthermore, the study objectives included: to explore the way young men experience affection in male-male friendships. Objectives also

included exploring how men's constructions of masculinities are shaped by and shape how they experienced and performed affection in these friendships.

### **Research question**

How do young male students experience affection in their friendships with other men, and how do these experiences and expressions influence constructions of masculinities?

### ***Sub-questions***

What are the different forms in which men express their affection in their friendships?

How do men define and present their masculinity to their peers?

## **Theoretical Framework**

The research study draws on Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity. This theory was used in analysing dominant narratives of masculinities as well as the social, gendered and power relations that shape not only the construction of men's masculine identity but how men might relate and interact with each other. The theory acknowledges the plurality of masculinities and the various positions of social power different men occupy under patriarchy (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) outline how heteronormative conceptualisations of gender have essentialised particular characteristics, thus informing gendered behaviours. These power relations would influence the type of behaviours men engaged in, particularly related to expressions of affection. Some men who access hegemonic masculinity can also decide when they want to associate with hegemonic masculinities or when to move away from it, which can create "patterns of internal division and emotional conflict" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 852). These conflictual states can also be determined by the social context in which men find themselves (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The project also drew on some South African scholars such as Morell et al. (2012), Jewkes et al. (2015), Shefer et al. (2015) and Ratele (2008) who have written on masculinity. These scholars were used to better contextualise the study to the particular social realities of men in South Africa. Furthermore, the use of masculinity theory as a theoretical framework is beneficial in exploring the subjectivities of participants and the discourse of masculinity.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach within a constructionist paradigm. Qualitative research explores meaning, experiences, subjectivities and larger discourses as attached to specific topics (Wilson & MacLean, 2011). These explorations are tied to particular social, historical and contextual backgrounds. Thus, data gathered from such research is rich in detail, complex and the use of language also plays an important role in the analysis of data (Wilson & MacLean, 2011). This is because language shapes how realities are constructed and depicted. Therefore, this approach was best suited to the research study as it aided in the exploration of rich data on male students' subjective experiences regarding affection and their construction of masculinity.

### **Sampling and Participants**

The sample for this study consisted of young male university students between the ages of 20-25. Friendships in this age group encounter a myriad of relatable challenges which likely influence affection (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982). Twelve participants were recruited for this study. Recruitment was carried out through advertisements (see Appendix A) on online social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These arrays of social media platforms for recruitment could provide diversity for our study, and thus allowed for a heterogeneous sample. Furthermore, other people shared the post and created greater awareness for the study. Purposive sampling was used alongside snowball sampling for recruiting further participants. Purposive sampling occurs when participants are selected based on distinct characteristics related to a study's aims (Ritchie et al., 2003). Men who wanted to participate in the study after viewing the advert, contacted the researchers through email or messaging platforms. Participants were then sent a Google form link which contained the informed consent form (see Appendix B). The addition of snowball sampling, occurred when existing participants referred other men who fit the selection criteria of the study to participate (Naderifar et al., 2017). Referrals worked in that the study reached targeted participants who were readily available to share their experiences. Snowballed participants' level of trust to engage was induced by the primary participant (Naderifar et al., 2017). This allowed for rapport between the researcher and the intended participants.

## **Procedure**

Data was collected through the use of semi-structured online interviews. An interview schedule can be found in Appendix C. The online interviews took place through Twitter or Instagram direct messages as well as WhatsApp messaging or voice notes. The interviews were scheduled according to a time that suited participants and lasted between 45-90 minutes. Interviews consisted of back and forth messages between the researchers and the participants. Prospective participants were sent an informed consent form through an online Google form link, which they were able to read thoroughly and address any questions and concerns to the researchers. If the prospective participant was satisfied and was happy to continue with the study, they signed the consent form online. After the interview, the researchers removed any identifying participant information from the interview transcript and data was then stored in a password-protected folder for later coding and analysis. Messages were also deleted from the direct messaging platforms.

## **Data Analysis**

Data was analysed using a thematic analysis and informed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines. Thematic analysis is interested in various patterns of themes found in the data through identification and reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis includes an active engagement on the part of the researchers and whether the researchers believe that the decided themes have overall importance to the broader research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, fitting with the researchers' overall interests in men's experiences of affection and how this might shape or influence their construction of masculinity, a latent approach to analysis was best suited to the data. A latent approach to thematic analysis is interested in identifying and examining "the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations - and ideologies" that inform the data and give it meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13). Thus, latent analysis is often intrinsically tied to a constructionist paradigm whereby data is socially produced within a particular context and structures (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, this method of analysis was appropriate for the study as the research was interested in exploring the subjective experiences and expressions of affection in male-male friendships and how this could shape a man's masculine identity. The research was also interested in individual constructions of meaning within a particular social context and how these constructions are also shaped by power systems such as hegemonic masculinities. Furthermore, the research sought to explore possible socially accepted and gendered

behaviours associated with being a man. However, the exploration also allowed for the emergence of possible counter-narratives, such as more progressive forms of masculinities.

In following the guidelines by Braun and Clarke (2006), the researchers first immersed themselves in the data. This included continually re-reading transcripts, engaging in active reading as well as highlighting and note-taking on transcripts. Due to most of the interviews taking place over direct messages, the researchers' transcription process was straightforward. However, the researchers also incurred audio transcriptions based on voice note replies from some participants. The transcripts were then coded for initial codes - this refers to ideas that speak to and are relevant to the focus of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial coding occurred through digitally highlighting aspects of the transcripts as well as digital notes alongside the text. The researchers were constantly engaged in discussions during this process in order to later search for themes; which were based on patterns of codes fitting together (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thereafter, the researchers refined their themes and examined how themes could possibly coincide or whether the data was fitting of a particular theme. Lastly, the researchers defined and named the themes and ensured that they could identify the 'essence' of the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The representation of two voices in the analysis process helped in thoroughly discussing possible codes and the development of themes.

## **Ethics**

Ethical guidelines are put in place to avoid the harm caused by a discussion of sensitive topics and to protect both participants and researchers within a study (Wilson & MacLean, 2011). These considerations will be discussed below. Ethical clearance was sought from and granted by the University of Cape Town's Department of Psychology research ethics committee.

### **Informed consent and voluntary participation**

Autonomy in qualitative research is recognised through informed consent (Orb et al., 2000). Prospective participants were sent an informed consent form informing them of the purpose of the research, the research process, as well as how their data would be protected. The informed consent form found in Appendix B was transferred to a Google form due to participants stating that they could not sign the consent form adequately. A Google form also allowed for easier retrieval of consent. Participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw



from the study at any time, without negative implications. Once prospective participants had thoroughly read the informed consent form, understood its contents and had no further queries about the research, informed consent was obtained. This form was then submitted to the researchers. Prior to any interview taking place, the researchers went through the informed consent form to ensure that participants fully understand its contents.

### **Privacy and confidentiality**

Data collection through a public platform such as the Internet, meant that specific security measures were necessary to ensure privacy and confidentiality of participants (Wilson & MacLean, 2011). Confidentiality refers to keeping individual participants' data private (Wilson & MacLean, 2011). Therefore, all identifying information such as Twitter and Instagram account handles and personal names were removed from all data collected. Furthermore, once an interview had been completed, researchers copied the data into a password-protected folder, and message history was erased from all media platforms. Any data that was published or analysed had all identifying information of participants removed. Anonymity refers to the fact that the individual identity of participants is not known to the public (Wilson & MacLean, 2011). Anonymity was ensured by separating the storage of participants' informed consent form from the interview information.

### **Risk**

Engaging in discussions on sensitive topics can be harmful to participants, and thus the researcher is obligated to recognise the participants' vulnerability (Orb et al., 2000). The study posed a low risk to participants. However subject matter arising from the interview such as views on expressions of affection in friendships, masculine identity as well as peer influences could be a possible source of discomfort or vulnerability - depending on the answers shared. In order to respond to any discomfort or distress that emerged, the researchers responded with sensitivity. Researchers also provided referral resources (see Appendix D) and support to participants. Participants could also choose not to answer a particular question posed by the researchers.

### **Benefit**

Participants did not receive any compensation nor any other direct benefit from participating in the study.

## **Debriefing**

Participants were debriefed directly after an interview had taken place. Debriefing allowed the researcher to deal with any harm that may have occurred to the participants during the research process (Wilson & MacLean, 2011). Debriefing included additional referral support, if needed. Moreover, debriefing allows the researcher to obtain further insight and reflections from the participants about their experiences in the research process (Wilson & MacLean, 2011).

## **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is an essential part of the qualitative research process for the researchers to think through their experiences during the research and the role they played in shaping the data (Broom et al., 2009). Throughout the research process, particularly during the interviews, the researchers' identity as women could have influenced both participants' censorship or disclosure. Some men might feel more comfortable sharing emotionally vulnerable experiences and thoughts with women (Broom et al., 2009). However, the researchers' identity and the general research interests of the study could have been viewed as a threat to participants' masculine identity. Thus, participants may have presented their realities strategically to maintain a particular social image (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001).

The researchers are also mindful that their dispositions and approach to their individual interviews can shape data obtained, depth of narratives and a participant's overall comfortability. As online researchers, access to participants' tone, emphasis, body language and facial expressions was lost. Thus, creating rapport was dependent on the participant's perspective on non-traditional interviews. However, the online platforms could have provided more 'anonymity' for some participants as they could not be seen, nor had they physically met the researchers before. Therefore, this could have possibly served as a protective mechanism to invite participants into deeper engagement with the researchers.

The researchers' initial concerns about their gender creating a space where men could enforce their dominance, did not prove true in their engagements with participants. Interviewees came across as very genuine, and reflected honestly. However, one researcher felt that some participants provided surface-level responses. Additionally, the second researcher felt that a participant had difficulty expressing himself. The participant acknowledged this.

Most of the participants expressed enthusiasm during the interview process. Participants reflected on how they appreciated the platform to air views on masculinity and their friendship dynamics that have been distressing for them. Additionally, they stated that their participation also created an opportunity for them to learn more about themselves. Lastly, the researchers' subjectivities may have influenced how they analysed and interpreted the data obtained.

## **Results and Discussion**

The present study sought to explore how young male university students experience affection in their friendships with other men and how these experiences and expressions could influence constructions of masculinities. Our analysis of the data saw the emergence of certain discourses surrounding affection and masculinity among men. These discourses construct subjective and multiple realities through ways of being and are informed by social contexts (Willig, 2001). Furthermore, the discourses that emerged from the participants reproduced as well as countered dominant socially accepted and gendered behaviours associated with being a man. The themes that emerged in the data were: *Experiences of affection, Barriers limiting access to affection, Female friendships as a site of authenticity, Redefining masculinity.*

The participants in this study consisted of twelve young men between the ages of 20-25, who were either current South African university students (undergraduate and postgraduate) or who recently graduated from university and were now working. Participants were from various areas such as Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and the Eastern Cape.

### **Experiences of affection**

Participants in the study shared various narratives about what they believed affection to be in their friendships with other men. It was often this understanding that would underpin their chosen expressions of affection. Affection was often constructed by deep connection amongst friends as well as acts of service. Expressions of affection also made participants feel seen and cared for. This is illustrated below:

*Affection for me is anything ranging from a deep emotional connection with another individual, which usually comes with reaching the point where you can be vulnerable with them, to simply spending some time with another individual and making a connection over something like a coffee. (A.J., 22)<sup>1</sup>*

*Affection, is that deep personal love that wants to touch you to make you feel better, make you feel that someone is there. Tell you that you are something to them. Without it being sexual. That would be my classifier. (Leano, 20)*

*Affection for me is the acts of service from my house, it could be a phone call to check on me most of the time the conversations go longer than planned (Hloni, 25)*

*... expressing it, is me doing something for them and telling them "this lunch" is for what you did the other day (Khaya, 22)*

*Physical gestures when laughing, a casual "you're an idiot, but I love you bro", the bravado arm-around the shoulder gesture (Frank, 22)*

Verbal declarations of love, openly hugging and touching your friends are accepted overt behaviours; often referred to as public displays of affection (Floyd & Morman, 1998). However, gender roles often associate these behaviours with women. Studies have shown that value derived from deep emotional connections are often solidified by sharing one's feelings and disclosing secrets (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Floyd & Morman, 1997; Mansson & Myers, 2011). In the first two extracts by A.J. and Leano, affection is understood differently than Frank. Frank uses the word 'bravado' to describe his physical gestures towards his male friends; this can be interpreted as a mechanism that contextualises a modelling of masculinity.

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<sup>1</sup> All participants' names have been changed to pseudonyms

In line with dominant constructions of masculinity, his response is to separate himself from particular affectionate behaviours (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Leano's experience of affection challenges the idea that men do not seek depth and vulnerability in their interactions with each other. His descriptions of being seen, supported and valued create the subjectivity of emotionally driven interactions, often labelled as appropriate for female friendships (Floyd, 2000; Migliaccio, 2009). However, towards the end, he says "*without it being sexual*". This disclaimer serves as himself realigning with societal norms. This need to emphasise the platonic nature of the interaction is explicit and avoidant of being associated with homoerotic behaviour; an ideal that poses threats to his masculinity (Floyd, 2000). Frank and Leano's reflections highlight the influence affection has on masculinity; the necessity to emphasise the chaste nature of their interactions (Migliaccio, 2009).

Leano and A.J. expressed similar sentiments, however, A.J further elaborates his subjectivity. The instrument of meeting up for coffee meets his need for emotional connection. Sharing in an activity together as a means of experiencing affection proved to be popular amongst the cohort. Many referred to lunches (much like Khaya), impromptu calls or physical gatherings as a means to check-in on each other's well-being. This supports studies on differences within same-sex friendships, whereby higher value is placed in shared interests and activities amongst men (Harris III, 2010; Robinson et al., 2018). The reflections above indicate that men's chosen ways of expression are instrumental and of service. Thus, disbanding ideas that men cannot be expressive within their friendships; so long as the means of affection is characterised as masculine. Moreover, acts of service vary and may be valued differently, providing men with room to express themselves on a valence. In any given situation men will mediate their expressiveness by either decreasing it to fit the environment or overemphasising their instrumentality (Migliaccio, 2008).

Participants' expressions and understandings of affection were also shaped and influenced by factors such as their background, family life, culture, religion and traits of their friends. This reflects previous research which states that constructions of affection are often shaped in early childhood with familial relationships (Floyd, 2001; Mandara et al., 2010). Arguably, these factors could inform affectionate ideals foundationally, however there is the capacity to redefine and reconstruct these belief and behaviour systems. For example, James,

who had vocalised that he was the most emotionally expressive person out of his male friends, used his upbringing at home to instead subvert his understanding and expression of affection:

*I just think it was influenced by growing up in a non-affectionate home. The love is there but you have to guess it, and how much of it. I really wanted affection, so the best thing I thought was to give affection and teach those around me. (23)*

James' "teaching" and influence of affection also infiltrated into his male friendship group, wherein he states:

*As you know how men are, I am not afraid to tell them I love them, I am not afraid to tell them I am anxious or just feeling sad. But for them they are still scared to say all of these things. But they are better now compared to when we all met*

The phrase "As you know how men are" speaks to James' awareness of social normative understandings of what 'being a man' entails and 'doing gender' in a particular way (Connell, 2005). The restrictions and barriers some men place on themselves in 'doing affection' is another discourse that emerges in the extract above. These restrictions could stem from fear, as alluded by James but also in some men's hyper-vigilance to how others perceive them.

### **Barriers limiting access to affection**

Barriers that limited the expression and reception of affection centred around discourses such as the strength of the relations men had with their circle of friends and the perceptions of their friends and others within their normative group. These perceptions of others also related to men's emphasis of platonic intentions in their affectionate or lack of affectionate expression. Moreover, male friends who were less receptive of affection, often policed their friend's affectionate behaviour towards them by stating that it was "inappropriate". Thus, how

confident they were in their identity, influenced their access to affection. These discourses are imbued in structures of power relating to gendered structures within social relations and performances of masculinity (Connell, 2005). Extracts below demonstrate some issues men found in needing to ‘regulate’ their affectionate behaviour:

*I remember last year one of my male friends denied a hug from me, when I asked why not he said it's not appropriate (Khaya, 22)*

*So if you show affection it's like you are weak, but if you don't then jha you are behaving like a strong man. So you want to behave like how the people around you see a man. Another thing is sometimes people, even friends can misinterpret your affection as you are wanting something more than just friendship (Ben, 24)*

*I would wish that us as a group would show a lot more affection towards one another, even if it was a simple hug, even for small problems. Another major limitation is that maybe I am scared to show a sense of vulnerability towards them. Personally I am not afraid to show my vulnerable side to anybody that I am close to, but I feel that if I show my vulnerability to my best friends, maybe I would receive a joky response to something very serious (Dean, 22)*

*I am a person who enjoys physical affection - like in a platonic sense. Like I enjoy, hugging my friends and things like that. I think some guys don't resonate with that as much, or maybe it feels a bit more awkward, even though it's in a completely platonic sense. Uhm, whereas it's more normal to kind of just like hug like a female friend, which is I suppose is just like a societal norm (Grant, 21)*

In these extracts, Grant and Ben emphasise that their intentions of affectionate behaviour have to be communicated to their male friends as platonic, to avoid perceptions or

misunderstandings of homoeroticism. Furthermore, Grant and Ben find value in affection and would like to express themselves freely. Instead, responses from their male friends are the barrier. In contrast, Dean is fearful of possible negative appraisal from his friends and often avoids vulnerability completely in his friendship circle. Grant also compares his experience of the normative social acceptance of men expressing physical affection to women, such as in the form of hugs. Such circumstances were also present for Khaya, who was chastised for his “inappropriate” behaviour. Chu (2005) argues that gender socialisation in male peer groups serves as a site to reinforce conforming behaviours. These conforming behaviours can often be likened to the performance of hegemonic masculinities. Thus, the silencing of other masculinities or gendered behaviours which are considered non-conformal. Other participants felt that their need for more affection could be viewed as excessive and thus ‘burdensome’. This is shown by the following extracts:

*... it feels like the affection that I would receive from them [his male best friends] is not to the scale that I would receive from maybe other friends, for example one of my female friends. It makes me feel alone and confused, almost like I'm trying too hard to show affection. Like maybe I am looking for too much affection when the affection I receive from them is good enough already. (Dean, 22)*

*I do, I do, receive affection in return. Perhaps maybe not as much as I would like sometimes. Uhm, it depends on the friend as well, you know but mmm agh yeah, every now and then (Grant, 21)*

Both Dean and Grant’s responses illustrate that they feel ‘denied’ of affection by their male friends. They are made to feel that this need for affection is unwarranted simply because they are men. For Dean, this makes him feel alone and confused. Moreover, it is important to note that these extracts demonstrate men openly acknowledging their need for affection. This open acknowledgement subverts dominant expectations of hegemonic masculinity, which usually posits men as non-affectionate. However, should men be affectionate, expectation is placed for it not to be public. In contrast, one participant, although acknowledging the



importance of affection in his friendships, did not want vulnerability and affection to be shown by his male friends at all.

*I don't want them to be affectionate to me, because it feels unnecessary. Perhaps that's because I've been a loner type for a long time, and I'm very unused to it. I do show affection for them. I talk to them, I ask if they're alright. I care. But, I feel powerless to assist them emotionally. And the same is that way, for them to me. Affection is hard, because it demands I be vulnerable. And I don't want to see my male friends vulnerable either. (Leano, 20)*

Leano stated that he characterised and valued “strength” in his friendships with his male friends. He also later asserted that it does not come “naturally” to experience nor express affection towards his male friends, even if he does try. He also attributed distinct characteristics towards his female friends and that characteristics like sympathy were more ‘naturally’ occurring in these friendships. Thus, Leano might not want to experience vulnerability from his male friends because he has preconceived gendered notions of how these friendships should be.

Some participants drew a link between a man’s understanding and comfortability with themselves and their expressions and understanding of affection. This has relation to research by Chu (2005, p. 12) who states that men who are “selective in their self-expression and guarded in their interactions” can have impediments in their relationship building and deep connection to others. This would imply that men are consciously aware of what limits their expressions of affection when they are comfortable with their masculine identity and have a clear idea of who they are as a man. Thus, emotionally revealing themselves to their friends and seeking affection is easier as they were not guarded in their expressions of themselves. This is evident in the extracts below:

*I think men make shallower connections with each other based on shared interests and the like until it reaches a point where they either feel comfortable with themselves*

*or the person they're speaking to before they make those deeper connections . . .*

(A.J., 22)

*I think the way we understand ourselves influences how we express ourselves. So however a male understands their male-ness is likely to show in their expression of things like affection. (Frank, 22)*

Frank's views touch on Chu's (2005) findings, in that how young men understand being a man reflects in their performance of gender. It will also extend to how he perceives peer performances of being a man. In this case, understandings of "male-ness" directly intertwine with men's experiences and expressions of affection. This perception, according to A.J., carries into the male-male friendships formed and the depth of connections.

The views expressed by the young men in this study demonstrate that this generation of men represented (between the ages of 20-25) are aware of discourses that act as barriers and that limit expression and reception of affection amongst same-sex friendships. Some men challenge these discourses, acknowledging their need for affection whilst others abide by them. These preferences are evident in the circle of friends they find themselves in.

### **Female friendships as a site for authenticity**

Female friendships appeared to play a functional role in how the young men in this study experienced affection with their male friends. These friendships with women provided many of the men in the study with a platform to be their "authentic self", anchoring the men towards expressing and receiving affection in return. Interviews highlighted the differences between male and female interactions and emphasised how female friendships enabled vulnerability. The nature of these relationships was non-judgemental. For example, when asked to characterise his relationship with his female friends, Khaya refers to the ease of discussions around facets of life. These discussions make him feel understood, a sentiment he feels lacks in his male friendships.

*It goes the same but most of the time it doesn't match the emotional levels from female friends because 'you're a guy and you supposed to figure out your stuff' is always on the table even before you could see their advice or perspective. (Khaya, 22)*

The inability to freely express oneself has limited Khaya's interactions with his friends. Societal and cultural norms such as “ - *you are supposed to figure it out*” shackle men from openly discussing their difficulties and deprive them of the opportunity to establish deeper connections within their close friendships. Furthermore, men's gender socialisation ideals of 'self-reliance' inform their reluctance in help-seeking behaviours (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Men are less likely to seek help over women, and this reluctance also spans into fields of mental and physical well-being (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). However, seeking help can better men's lives - physically, mentally or emotionally.

Khaya, like many of his male counterparts, seeks refuge within female friendships; where value is derived from a myriad of disclosures ranging from personal experiences, conflicts and triumphs (Cancian, 1986; Caldwell & Peplau, 1982). These interactions enable authentic, less guarded identities to emerge, and create more intimate friendships. This is illustrated by Khaya when he says “*that emotional aspect allows me to fully be free when I feel that it's there.*”

Many of the men characterised their female friendships as safe spaces to discuss emotional and personal issues. Thus, drawing upon the discourse of female friendships as sites for authenticity. The nature of the relationship created a haven; allowing the men to position themselves to receive support, comfort and express affection without fear of judgement:

*If I was to talk about personal issues like emotional issues I would usually go to my female friends. I do speak about personal things with them [his male friends] like our relationships and places where we struggle but it's not easy. I'm not sure why it's not easy (Hloni, 25)*

*With my woman friends, I would characterise them as loving and caring. They fix up my wounds, and they kick me in the but. Haha. I'm grossly over simplifying.*

(Leano, 20)

*We don't chat much [referring to his male friends] but the love is there. I'm very close to one, but I don't think I'm as comfortable as with the females.* (Ben, 24)

Evident in the extracts above, the men acquired emotional support, with the availability of their female friends to 'fix up wounds'. Hloni noted that the ability to "talk about personal issues" was therapeutic and provided the required affection for these young men (Aukett et al., 1988). The support received was emotionally charged and different than that of men. For example, Ben, who was mostly friends with women and had a handful of male friends, was most comfortable around his female friends. This could reiterate the depth of connection men experience in their friendships with women. Furthermore, the conversations men engaged in within these interactions were more personal and intimate. These men's social dynamics with women also address the fact that men have to perform a particular type of masculinity in the presence of other men (Migliaccio, 2009). These men have to be tough; which is not a requirement in their friendships with women.

Thus, by tracking these young men's accounts of closeness with their female friends it becomes evident that these friendships are a fundamental source of affection. The strength of these friendships may have been derived from the mixed nature of a man and a woman interacting to form the relationship (Floyd & Mormon, 1997), as this influenced expected affectionate behaviours from the male and female composite. However, there were instances where intimate and vulnerable male friendships occurred:

*...I have one male friend who I'm very close with. I can easily open up to.* (Hloni, 25)

Hloni was one of few who shared that although his relationships with women developed with ease, he shared a similar bond with one of his male friends. In his reflections, he characterised the friendship similarly to those held with women. Hloni elaborates in the extract below:

*Intimate in a sense that when we talk about certain topics we go into a deeper level. There have been times where I learn more about myself from intimate session. I call them intimate because I've had moments where one of us have cried or opened up about something for the first time. (Hloni, 25)*

When two men engage in emotionally vulnerable friendships, it creates a new subjective reality. It challenges the narratives that argue against the presence of expressive, affectionate behaviour in men's friendships with each other. Thus, the possibility of redefinitions surrounding masculinities, particularly hegemonic masculinities. For Hloni, these intimate sessions changed him, whereby he learnt more about himself and redefined his ideals. He later says he learnt not to “*bottle up [his] emotions like the men from generations before*”. His use of language emphasises acting differently from previous generations, introducing change and redefining how he ‘does gender’. This highlights the importance of understanding fluidity in masculinities, that are neither fixed nor stable over time (Morrell et al., 2013). Walker (2005) argues that through democracy in South Africa, orthodox conceptions of masculinity were disrupted by a new modern society. Thus, disruption of dominant ideals of masculinity in the 21st century resulted in young men renegotiating their masculine identity. Hence, the emergence of a ‘new man’ seeking to be “different from what they were in the past, ... from their fathers, [and] different from many of their peers” (Walker, 2005, p. 236). For many of the young men in this study, this presented itself as the desire to be more affectionate and emotionally expressive.

This discourse represented the cathartic nature embedded within males having female friends. The intimate sharing contained a degree of inherent therapeutic value, but it was found that some men emulated this experience within their male friendships. The presentation of this emotive nature within their friendships positions the men to have more specialised friendships

where intimacy is reserved for distinct individuals. In contrast, other friendships thrive on shared interests and activities (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982).

### **Redefining Masculinity**

This theme proved to be the most prominent throughout the study. As the young men reflected on their experiences within their male friendships, it became evident that their views on affection transcended into their constructions of masculinity. Reflections gained presupposed that these young men were still developing and reconstructing their masculine identities. When asked to define what masculinity meant to them, men's responses were detailed. However, several of them encountered difficulty when applying and interpreting this definition personally. Their views of themselves regarding masculinity were at odds with the views on masculinity they had observed, practised and possibly reproduced from society. Hegemonic masculinities have predominantly been characterised with dominant behaviours, often associated as negative such as toxic masculinity (Morell, 1998). When some participants described their prior understandings of masculinity, dominant behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinities were reaffirmed. This can be demonstrated by the following extracts:

*being overly aggressive, using violence to overpower people something along those lines (Hloni, 25)*

*I was also influenced by the streets to believe masculinity was what I thought it was then, as being strong emotionally and physically as a man. Now it means nothing really, I think it is just one of the products of patriarchy. ...what I can say is it being enforced on men by our backgrounds and the people we grow around does a lot of damage. Damage to us and to our relationships (James, 23)*

The extracts above illustrate that these two men equate masculinity with stoicism, aggression and physical strength. These expressions of masculinity are seen as detrimental to

them and their relationships. James' responses illustrated his high degree of self-awareness, viewing patriarchy as a social structure and institution of power that takes away from him and his relationships. He positions himself away from toxic ideals of masculinity; thus, choosing not to perpetuate these behaviours. Similarly, Hloni's subjective reality attributes masculinity as a role that is harmful to others. Hloni's extract reaffirms Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) argument of hegemony emphasising masculinity as an act of dominance over women and subordinate men. Many other participants shared James' view and separated themselves from toxic perceptions of masculinities. In doing so, these young men are recognising and challenging practices of masculinity that do not resonate with what they individually stand for:

*The portrayal of masculinity in popular culture (and in actual fact in conservative religious culture) is something I deeply disagree with....This is actually what caused a deep disconnect for me finding my identity in the idea of a male. (A.J., 22)*

*I think how one expresses themselves should have nothing to do with their sex. (James, 23)*

*I think that there's the stereotypical masculinity that's supposed to be stoic and unemotional but personally it's always been more about taking care of my loved ones and lifting others up and keeping in touch with whatever I'm dealing with. (Clive, 22)*

*When I hear of masculinity I think of physical strength. That is all. I do not believe in the term masculinity because it sets a series of stereotypical roles of what men should be based on society. I think that masculinity is an old way of thinking of a man ... (missing text) ... I would like to think of myself as a unique human being who doesn't have to change in order to suit society's views of what I should become in the future. I think of myself as a young man, but not one that would fit in the term of "masculinity". (Dean, 22)*

The refusal to remain complicit by these young men establishes a new narrative challenging what society currently accepts as “being a man” (Connell, 2005). These redefined ideals of masculinity would lift the gender role expectations. This work of ‘undoing’ ideals of masculinity takes place at a societal level. For James, lifting of expectations would translate into his expressions. Limited expectations or ‘standards’ to which men hold themselves could make it easier for men to express themselves within their male friendships authentically; without the risk of misinterpreted gestures. For Clive, the disintegration of gender roles would enable him to care for loved ones in the absence of judgement.

These discourses challenging upheld notions also relate to Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005, p. 852) argument whereby they state that “hegemonic masculinities are likely to involve specific patterns of internal division and emotional conflict, precisely because of their association with gendered power”. Therefore, challenging harmful and problematic ways of being a man, has larger societal impacts on fights against gender-based violence and other forms of violence experienced by women, children and ‘subordinate’ men (Ratele, 2015). By men negotiating their positions it allows for men to draw from the psychological and social benefits of affection. When men are more engaging with their emotions and practising help-seeking behaviours, they are less likely to resort to violent acts.

However, there were participants whose views of masculinity contrasted those of the above ideals:

*The role of fighting to protect people. Of leading when there is no leader. Of defending with bravery for the sake of those that cannot defend themselves, etc. (Leano, 20)*

*For me it's about protecting and making sure that the people around me are okay. (Ben, 24)*



These young men both understood masculinity to be a construct that prepared them to be of service to others. Thus, equating their understanding of masculinity to the protection and defence of people, leadership and strength. These men have decidedly assumed that those around them need their leadership and protection; which can be best understood as the workings of patriarchy (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Their views were different from Hloni and James, in that the qualities that characterise being a man are perceived positively. These differences in views illustrate the multiplicities of masculinity within any given context (Jewkes et al., 2015).

*I wasn't taught these roles. But, when I landed in them, I was happy with them. And other people say that its masculine. Fair enough, I am a man. I don't think about being masculine. I don't care about it. But, I will lead my friends if they need me to. (Leano, 20)*

*All those traits point out my masculine.....I think it's all due to social norms, because your born and taught certain things (in this case masculine) (Khaya, 22)*

Leano and Khaya further illustrate how the appraisal of certain masculine behaviours by society fuels the replication of these masculine behaviours. Furthermore, solidifying their understanding of masculinity. Leano acknowledges the effect of observed behaviour in moulding his masculinity. His use of words such as “*when they need me to*” reiterates the power he exerts over others when performing gender. Moreover, the satisfaction he attained confirmed these behaviours as appropriate expressions of masculinity. Khaya credits his interpretations of masculinity to social norms that have survived as continued practices amongst young men. Due to these behaviours thriving, he benefited from them, and will likely reproduce them. Therefore, these behaviours that lend themselves to ‘doing gender’ can be reproduced or challenged, as evident in the study.

Other characteristics besides age, such as their background in tertiary education and culture, could have influenced men's views on affection. Many participants attributed their home and social environment to how they practised and learnt about affection and what they understood a man to be. Some participants used this upbringing either as a foundation of what they would like to change or reproduce in their life surrounding affection and masculinity. Based on the narratives shared in the study, some men want to engage in affectionate behaviour and wish that it was widely embraced by their male friends and not only their female friends. Thus, by more men freely participating in emotionally expressive behaviour and stating their need for this, men might find that more of their friends share similar fears and insecurities. Lastly, it is also an important consideration about what 'types of men' perhaps wanted to participate in this study and how the study's research interests could have been a large deterrent for many men's participation. This could further relate to the connotations surrounding the word "affection" itself.

### **Conclusion**

This research study provided an opportunity to explore some of the complexities embodied by masculine identities of young men in South Africa. The narratives shared by these young men in their early twenties were informative and insightful. They raised important points around the continued development of a 'new man' that is emotionally expressive. This age group was significant as these young men are negotiating their masculine identities within a coercive and ever-changing environment. These men also expressed that their peers influenced performances of gender and behaviours associated with being a man. Through in-depth interviews, it was evident that for this cohort of men, orthodox notions of masculinity were being questioned, and in doing so, new practices were being formed. Narratives demonstrated that affection is important to men; it facilitates a safe space for them with their friends and encourages them to share intimate details about themselves. These safe spaces of sharing and expressing affection strengthen friendship bonds that make them feel heard and understood. Thus, these practices of expressing and receiving affection can positively affect the psychological well-being of the men. At the level of society, when more men engage in these behaviours, it forms new manners or standards of 'doing gender'. It possibly reduces the perception of men as stoic, aggressive and violent. Therefore, the study also has important implications in highlighting the need for more men to actively practice help-seeking behaviours

and be more open in engaging in ‘uncomfortable’ conversations with their male friends. Male friends who are unreceptive to affection would benefit the most from these uncomfortable conversations, promoting healthy forms of emotional expression.

### **Limitations**

As the study was conducted only using a small group of men, it lacks generalizability to larger populations of men in South Africa. Furthermore, the study was conducted through online platforms – limiting researchers’ access to non-verbal behaviours usually present in face-to-face interviews.

### **Recommendations**

A larger and more representative study is recommended, with either a focus on a particular demographic or cultural sample. Insights gained could be used to contribute to studies that explore methods of affection by men and lending itself to deconstructing the feminisation of affection. Research in this area of affection and masculinity could also explore interventions that encourage health-seeking behaviour in men as well as further studies on how to promote better reception of affection across the various cultures rooted in traditional practices in S.A.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A: Advertisement for participant recruitment



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN -  
HONOURS RESEARCH PROJECT

*Masculinity in  
male friendships*

CALLING ALL MALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS:  
*Are you age 18-25 years old?  
Interested in engaging in discussions  
on how men experience affection in  
their friendships?*

**WE INVITE YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN  
OUR ONLINE STUDY**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT US ON**  
Leigh Hendricks - [hndlei005@myuct.ac.za](mailto:hndlei005@myuct.ac.za) ;  
[@leigh\\_hendrickss](https://www.instagram.com/leigh_hendrickss)   
Lesege Letsoalo - [Itsles009@myuct.ac.za](mailto:Itsles009@myuct.ac.za) ;  
[@LSG\\_Letsoalo](https://twitter.com/LSG_Letsoalo) 

## Appendix B: Informed consent form

### Department of Psychology



#### Consent to participate in a research study

**Dear Participant,**

Affection in male-male friendships: Constructions of masculinity

#### **Study Purpose**

We are Honours students in the Department of Psychology at the University of Cape Town, and we invite you to participate in a study interested in understanding male friendship building and masculinity. The purpose of the study is to explore male students' views on their expressions of affection within their friendships with other males and how this might influence their masculinity.

#### **Study Procedure**

Should you decide to participate in the study, you will be interviewed online through the use of Twitter or Instagram direct messages. The interview will last for approximately 30-45 minutes. Questions will be about your friendships with other men. There are no right or wrong answers, we are interested in your views. All information about you will be kept strictly confidential, and any documentation identifying you will be kept separate from the interview information. Data will be securely stored in a password-protected folder.

#### **Possible Risks and Benefits**

Participation in the study has a low risk to you. Possible subject matter addressed in the interview could involve thoughts, emotions or feelings of vulnerability or possible

embarrassment. There are no other known risks in this study. There are no direct benefits to your participation in the study; however, we hope that our study is able to contribute to an under-researched area of study, especially within the South African context.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer any particular question in the interview. You are free to change your decision at any time about participating in the study, and any data stored up to that point will be safely discarded.

### **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Information obtained about you from this study will be kept confidential. Any documentation identifying you will be kept separately from the interview information. Interview information will be stored safely digitally, in a password-protected folder. Any reports or subsequent information obtained as a result of the study will not identify you or any of the study participants.

### **Questions**

Any questions related to the study or problems can be directed to the following individuals:

Leigh Hendricks (researcher): [hndlei005@myuct.ac.za](mailto:hndlei005@myuct.ac.za)

Lesego Letsoalo (researcher): [ltsles009@myuct.ac.za](mailto:ltsles009@myuct.ac.za)

Questions about your rights as a study participant, comments or complaints about the study also may be presented to Ros Adams ([Rosalind.adams@uct.ac.za](mailto:Rosalind.adams@uct.ac.za)).

I have read the above and am satisfied with my understanding of the study, its possible benefits, risks and alternatives. My questions about the study have been answered. I hereby voluntarily consent to participation in the research study as described.

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Signature of participant

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Date

---

Name of participant (printed)

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Researcher

**Appendix C: Interview schedule**

- 1) Tell me more about yourself?
  - a) Where are you from?
  - b) How old are you?
- 2) Tell me about your friendships, are you mostly friends with men or women?
- 3) Tell me about your friendships with your male friends.
  - a) Tell me about your friendships with male friends, what are they like? How would you characterise them?
- 4) What does affection in your friendships mean to you?
  - a) Do you express affection, and if so, how?
  - b) Do you receive any affection from your friends?
  - c) Do you find any value in affection in friendships?
  - d) What informs your expression and understanding of affection?
- 5) What does masculinity mean to you? Elaborate
  - a) Do you think the way in which you understand masculinity influences or is influenced by your understanding of affection?
- 6) Any influences that might shape your masculine identity

**Appendix D: Referral list**

Please find a list of organisations which could provide assistance should you feel that you are in need of counselling or support post the interview session.

**UCT Student wellness counselling services**

UCT provides students with free consultations with a team of psychologists. Their services offer short-term counselling and psychotherapy ensuring that problems experienced by students do not impact their academic studies.

They can be contacted on: 021 650 1017

For appointments a student online booking system is available with the following URL:

<https://outlook.office365.com/owa/calendar/STUDENTWELLNESSSERVICEPSYCHOLOGICALSERVICES@mscloudtest.uct.ac.za/bookings/>

**SADAG**

The South African Depression and Anxiety Group

To contact a counsellor between 8am-8pm Monday to Sunday,

Call: 011 234 4837 / Fax number: 011 234 8182

For a suicidal Emergency contact 0800 567 567

24hr Helpline 0800 456 789

**Appendix E: Ethics approval letter****UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**

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**Department of Psychology**

University of Cape Town Rondebosch 7701 South Africa  
Telephone (021) 650 3417  
Fax No. (021) 650 4104

17 August 2020

Leigh Hendricks and Lesego Letsoala  
Department of Psychology  
University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch 7701

Dear Leigh and Lesego

I am pleased to inform you that ethical clearance has been given by an Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Humanities for the amendments to your study, *Affection in male-male friendships: Constructions of masculinity*. The reference number is PSY2020-028.

I wish you all the best for your study.

Yours sincerely



Catherine Ward  
Professor  
Chair: Ethics Review Committee