“Injuries are Beyond Love”: Physical Violence in Young South Africans’ Sexual Relationships

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Online Publication Date: 01 January 2008

To cite this Article: Wood, Kate, Lambert, Helen and Jewkes, Rachel (2008) “Injuries are Beyond Love”: Physical Violence in Young South Africans’ Sexual Relationships, Medical Anthropology, 27:1, 43 — 69

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/01459740701831427

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01459740701831427

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“Injuries are Beyond Love”: Physical Violence in Young South Africans’ Sexual Relationships

Kate Wood, Helen Lambert, and Rachel Jewkes

South Africa’s complex social and political history has produced conditions for interpersonal violence of multiple kinds to flourish. Violence experienced by girls and young women, including within their sexual relationships, has become an area of intense research and policy interest since the end of apartheid. Drawing on a long-term ethnographic study of young people in an urban township, this article explores how violent practices are variously construed, differentiated, and legitimated, in particular through the assignment of blame and the significance accorded to bodily marking. Pointing to the cultural embeddedness of disciplining techniques in this setting, the article examines local understandings of gender hierarchy and power, young men’s vulnerabilities in relation to their partners’ actions, and the links between disciplining action and notions of anger, love, and shame. Violence is shown to configure lives and subjectivities and to be productive of relationships, in particular playing a part in the organization of inequality within sexual relationships.

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South Africa’s complex history of colonialism, industrialization, and militarization has produced the conditions for interpersonal and criminal violence of multiple kinds to flourish (Beinart 1992). In some popular and media discourse there is a tendency to construct young working-class African men as central protagonists in the epidemics of interpersonal violence and crime that affect everyday life. The social context of these epidemics is complex and includes high school dropout rates and the continuing failure of the education system to provide clear connections between school and the world of work for the poorest, leaving many with a debilitating dual poverty of income and opportunity. Regional ethnographies point to the reality that urban-living African youth (and young men in particular) have long been “problematicized” and “othered” by members of their communities (Hellmann 1948; Pauw 1962). In recent years, the seriousness of the HIV epidemic in their midst and a growing interest in masculinities (e.g., Hunter 2005; Morrell 2001), has encouraged a research focus on youth sexuality (e.g., Wood and Jewkes 2001). This focus has included violence experienced by many South African girls and women within their sexual relationships (e.g., Jewkes et al. 2001; Sideris 2004; Wood and Jewkes 2001). In a large random sample survey in South Africa, 26.8 percent of women aged between 18 and 49 in the Eastern Cape (the setting for this article) reported having been physically abused by a current or ex-partner, 10.9 percent within the last year (Jewkes et al. 2001), and a third of this latter group reported having been injured.

Ethnographic research is well positioned to contribute to contextualized understandings of everyday violence within communities. A general aim of the doctoral research on which this article is based was to explore the place and intersection of different kinds of violence in personal and communal lives, and their embeddedness in everyday social hierarchies (notably those related to gender). The article, based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in an urban township in the former Transkei region, focuses on young people’s experiences and understandings of physical violence (*ukubetha*: Xhosa for “beating” or “hitting”) taking place within their sexual relationships. It explores how violent practices are differentiated through prevailing notions of legitimacy and limit, particularly as expressed through the assignation of blame and the significance accorded to bodily marking. The article first describes the contexts out of which “beatings” occur within young people’s sexual relationships and the ways in which violent practice is differentiated. Going on to explore the cultural embeddedness of disciplining techniques in this setting, it explicates local understandings of gender
hierarchy and power, young men’s vulnerabilities in relation to their partners’ actions, and the links between disciplining action and love. A pervasive theme in this article, in line with other ethnographies of violence (e.g., Harvey and Gow 1994; Nordstrom and Robben 1995), is that rather than being indicative of social breakdown, violence can be conceptualized as a dimension of everyday living, a form of communication that configures lives and subjectivities and that is productive of relationships, especially in relation to gender. In particular, violence assists in the organization of inequality within sexual relationships. Controlling women sometimes through violence may be used as a means to live out certain gender positionings that privilege some men by associating them with particular forms of power and agency.

BACKGROUND: THE POLITICIZATION OF GENDERED VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

In the years since democratization in South Africa, violence of various types has become a particular area of individual and collective anxiety, political interest, and media coverage in the country. This happened partly as a result of increasing popular awareness of human rights issues associated with the women’s movement, the advent of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (beginning in 1995), and the ratification in 1996 of what is often described as the most progressive constitution in the world. Sexual violence in particular has become a highly politicized issue (Posel 2005).

Until quite recently, the set of global issues analyzed by (mostly feminist) researchers as “violence against women” and domestic violence was generally located exclusively as social welfare and judicial matters. In the past decade, however, these issues have also increasingly been framed internationally as public health problems, taken up and defined by United Nations’ agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) as “gender-based violence” or “intimate partner violence.” There is a substantial body of evidence that physical and sexual assault are connected to sexual and reproductive ill-health in multiple and significant ways (e.g., Heise et al. 1994; WHO 2002). In South Africa, as well as in other parts of the world, the myriad forms of violence experienced by girls and women took on renewed meaning and importance in the mid-nineties as a result of the increasing severity of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This growing crisis made more urgent both the quantification of the problem through surveys (e.g., Jewkes et al. 2001) and its explication by means of qualitative social research on the dynamics of sexual relationships. While some might argue that this increasing medical/health gaze has led to a medicalization of violence, it is fair to say that the re-framing has been successful in bringing new levels
of attention and resources to work on interpersonal violence. By bringing their methodologies and insights into the study of the body to these debates, medical anthropologists can contribute in important ways.

ETHICAL ISSUES IN THE REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE

In the introduction to his ethnography of crack dealers in Harlem, Bourgois (1995) commented that ethnographers have historically avoided exploring areas of enquiry considered socially marginal such as violence, sexual abuse, addiction, alienation, and self-destruction. He ascribes this first, to the functionalist roots of traditional ethnography that tend to place an emphasis on order and social cohesion; second, to the methodological logistics of participant-observation as encouraging “unconscious self-censorship” (1995: 14); third, to the fear of succumbing to a “pornography of violence that reinforces popular racist stereotypes” (1995: 15); and finally, to the personal and psychological challenges of living in settings full of tragedy.

Until the advent of HIV/AIDS, key research areas relating to sexuality (including violence) and sexual decision making had also been neglected by social scientists, not least because of a fear of voyeurism. Schoepf (1991) argued that many anthropologists of sub-Saharan Africa had avoided mentioning sexuality out of a wish to avoid reinforcing stereotyped popular and historical colonial/medical discourse about “African” sexuality and its notions of “promiscuity” and difference. The advent of HIV in the early 1980s brought a renewed interest in sexuality, as well as an urgency that helped to overcome some of the anxieties about representational politics. Many have argued since that as long as anthropologists are explicit about their theoretical models and are self-conscious about their practice, they can generate valuable ethnography on sexuality that can impact real lives through its effects on applied HIV/AIDS preventative work, sexual politics, and the debate about violence programming (e.g., Vance 1991; Scheper-Hughes 1994; Leclerc-Madlala 1997). The threats posed by research attention to particular “at risk” or marginalized people do, however, remain. Posel (2005), for example, argued that race has become a subtext in the public and media debates in South Africa, with President Mbeki refusing to acknowledge the scale of rape in South Africa on the grounds that the problem is being exaggerated due to racist stereotyping.

For many ethnographers of violence (e.g., Daniel 1996), the real challenge is how to write about the subject in a manner that makes sense of it while acknowledging its horrors while striking a balance between detailed empirical representation that may seem voyeuristic and adequate theorizing—which if taken “too far” may distance the actual experience
of violence. For many anthropologists who write about myriad forms of violence, conflict, and “social suffering” (e.g., Farmer 1997; Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997), the responsible answer is not to avoid representation but to focus on people’s lived experience. As Kleinman et al. (1997) point out, ethnography, autobiographical narratives, and social history are uniquely positioned to provide a critical understanding of these concerns. Das (1996) has advocated a shift toward listening to “voice” and thus being open to the fragmented and multiplicitous nature of experience, rather than adopting the anthropological “gaze” that can reify, objectify, and silence. For sense to be made of violence in an ethical and informative manner, then, different actors’ voices need to be heard and represented.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Anthropological work demonstrates that violence occurring within sexual relationships, whether marital or non-marital, is primarily related to the organization of gender inequality within sexual relationships (Harvey and Gow 1994). In most settings, gender hierarchy is so deeply ingrained as to be taken for granted by both women and men. In his ethnographic analysis of gender in Kabyle society in Algeria, Bourdieu (2001) described this hierarchy as a form of “symbolic violence” pervasive in everyday life but made “extraordinarily ordinary”—“imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition or even feeling” (2001:1–2). In many settings, cultural assumptions following on from this premise—for example, that men should control and protect “their” women and be the main decision makers within households—create everyday points of tension that may, and often do, lead to violence (Sideris 2004).

In South Africa, ideas about the naturalness of gender inequality that are based in innate gender difference are pervasive, as this article describes. Certain types of violence have long been used as part of a disciplining repertoire in communities as a method of controlling women, punishing their everyday acts of insubordination, and resolving (or at least finalizing) conflict (Mager 1999; Wood and Jewkes 2001). It has been argued that high levels of violence in post-apartheid South Africa can be seen in the context of the redefinition of gender and the liberalization of sexuality entailed by the democratic transition, which have posed serious challenges to orthodox, mainly authoritarian notions of masculinity, leaving many men with a disempowering sense of irrelevance in the domestic sphere (Walker 2005;
Morrell 2001). In fact, however, there is a long history to this reconfiguring of the “traditional” gender order and to men’s deployment of violence as a response to it (Campbell 1992). In many urban spaces, as well as rural areas underpinned by histories of male labor migration (such as the region whose main township provides the setting for this article), women have been running households with financial autonomy for decades (Bonner 1990; Moodie 1994; Redding 1987). In his analysis of precolonial gender relations in Southern Africa, Guy (1990) argued that the control and appropriation of the productive and reproductive capacity of women were defining features of these societies, and inherently entailed their social subordination to men. Women’s agricultural labor in particular provided the subsistence base of communities, and, as Guy suggested, their capacity to “create more labor power through reproduction placed central importance on fertility and the control of fertility” (1990: 34). Women’s capacity to create value in marriage was linked to cattle through *lobola* or bridewealth (Guy 1990). Disobedience or infertility on the part of a wife was grounds for the husband’s family demanding the return of their cattle. With the advent of labor migrancy under colonial rule, the deterioration or loss of agricultural land, and the development of a cash economy, the assumption of male authority became distorted and in many cases reinforced (Guy 1990; Moodie 1994).

In this context, male disciplinary rights over women, in particular their wives and sisters, have long historical precedent in this region, as does the condoning of corporal punishment (within limits) within civil society in general (Beinart 1992; Mager 1999). Sanctioned violence in a range of settings has historically been framed in terms of imparting discipline and learning. This includes beatings of children by parents, and of young women by their brothers; community *sjambokkings* (whippings), which are still occasionally doled out to suspected “criminals” in the township; police beatings of certain kinds of criminal suspect; school canings (now illegal); and the routine beating of *abakhwetha* (male initiates) when they fail to follow due procedure. The choice of weapon—in particular the *sjambok* (a cowhide whip) and stick—carries with it the disciplinary intention behind the beating. Traditionally, among Xhosa families as described by Hunter (1936) in the Transkei of the 1930s, mild or moderate beatings of married women were deemed to be an acceptable means of chastisement or discipline if they failed to carry out their duties and after talking had failed. Wives were expected to be attentive to their husbands, work hard on domestic chores, cooperate with their in-laws, follow traditional *inthlonipho* (a patriarchal code of respect encompassing language and behavior avoidances), and “be quiet and submissive to the point of helplessness” (Hammond-Tooke 1962: 116). Historical work on urbanization reveals that many women who ended up in towns were seeking economic independence and living as
inkazana ("free" women), and included those who had "deserted" (ukutshipa) their husbands due to ill treatment (or, relatedly, their inability to tolerate the hardships and drudgery of rural wifehood; Redding 1987; Mager 1999).

With respect to unmarried youth, historiographical work suggests traditional boundaries that limit violence, including in the beating of female partners and male-to-male fighting, may have become less respected over time. For many young men, as has been discussed by Glaser (2000) in relation to the Johannesburg area from the 1940s onwards, participation in violent lifestyles and instrumental use of aggression against women and girls (as well as other men) became one way of wielding power in a racist, capitalist society from which they were excluded. It also reflected the decline of elder patriarchs’ influence over young men, especially in urban spaces (Mager 1999; Glaser 2000). In rural areas of the Ciskei region of the Eastern Cape, for example, boys’ practices, such as in relation to traditional stick-fighting, began to move away from accepted codes: "boys disregarded gaming rules, replaced sticks with axes, and pushed aside adults who intervened" (Mager 1999: 133). Colonial court records from the 1940s onwards attest to the increasing inability of rural communities to contain male youth’s aggression. This lack of discipline and “respect” is still a major preoccupation for contemporary township elders, for whom it is inextricably linked to the moral "corruptions" of an urbanized modernity in which “anything goes” and in which sticks have been replaced by knives and guns. Historical analysis suggests that urban spaces became associated with more aggressive courtship styles, and with increasing secrecy in the practice of premarital sexual relationships. Former social controls and established sanctions in relation to sexuality began to fall away, leaving girls more vulnerable to violence (Mager 1999).

**SETTING AND BACKGROUND**

The setting for this study is an urban township in the former Transkei region of the Eastern Cape, a predominantly Xhosa-speaking area classified by the apartheid state as a “black homeland.” It remains one of the most impoverished and economically marginalized areas of South Africa: rural, agriculturally unproductive, and lacking in industry. These conditions are the culmination of decades of interventionist state policies, and a reflection of Transkei’s historical processes of engagement with the onset of industrial capitalism sparked by the mining of diamonds and gold (Stadler 1987). Urbanization, particularly in the form of migration to local towns (as well as out-migration to cities nationwide), has long been a feature of the region.

While virtually all families have strong connections to their rural villages, many young people who participated in this study were born and brought
up in town. Poorer families participated in diverse income-generating activities, additionally surviving on remittances from family members living elsewhere, social grants, and pensions. Many families are female-headed—a decades-old feature of family life—and there is a notable absence of fathers, for several reasons including the fluidity of relationships, the need to work elsewhere, lack of commitment to parenting, and death. Education is highly valued, and most in their mid-teens or younger attend school. The attrition rate was significant, however, among informants in their late-teens and early-twenties from impoverished backgrounds. Some had completed their secondary schooling, but because of crippling levels of unemployment in the school-leaving population and lack of access to grants for further study, were “just sitting, doing nothing”—a source of real frustration to many.

Sexual relationships begin early in this setting, and the importance of sexual relationships to township youth, the intensity of their focus on and investment in them are obvious (Wood and Jewkes 2001). While on one level, sexual relationships evidently offered a much-needed source of daily entertainment for township youth, they are also an important arena in which selfhood is practiced and negotiated in relation to others. For young men, the importance of women to their sense of masculinity, both in terms of their own self-respect and esteem and in the eyes of others, was evident in the energy they expended on acquiring and maintaining desirable girlfriends, gaining sexual access to them (and seeking to establish exclusive sexual access), and attempting to control their behavior. It was common for young people to have more than one partnership at a time (whether casual or more serious), and an entire slang terminology was used to describe sexual partners positioned differentially in the hierarchy of an individual’s relationships. Young people often represented their more serious relationships as positive and supportive in their daily lives, involving problem sharing and companionship. As everywhere, there were also more exploitative relationships; for example, the idea of a “gold-digging” woman who expected commodities and money from sexual partners was a stereotype men talked about, while women sometimes felt sexually exploited by their sexual partners. Control and discipline by young men of their main sexual partners was an aspect of relationships that was of concern to them, and it was primarily out of this that violent practice arose.

METHODS

The material on which this article is based is derived from an ethnographic field diary kept by the first author during 18 months of living and working in the township in 1999–2001, as well as on transcripts of tape-recorded individual interviews with 76 young people (46 female, 30 male) aged between
14 and 25, and of group dialogues with elders and young people. Interviews were conducted by the first author and by two research assistants (one male, one female), local young people who also acted as key informants. Interviewees were recruited either directly by virtue of prior contact (during participant observation) or by means of snowballing. Semistructured interviews were tape recorded and anonymized, transcribed, and translated from Xhosa.

Township residents understood the ethnographer to be interested in “how young people live,” and to be “writing a book” about local youth. Those who participated more immediately in the research were also aware of her interest in a range of issues relating to young people’s sexual relationships and sexual health, including HIV/AIDS, by then an issue of concern to many in the community, given the rising rates of illness. Partly because the first author was perceived to be close in age to many of her informants (in her mid-20s at the time), and because sexual relationships were an important feature of young people’s lives and conversations, it was not difficult to gather relevant research material. Many elders constructed young people’s sexuality and indeed the behavior of contemporary youth more generally as “problematic,” and so welcomed investigation into it. Young people also apparently enjoyed the engagement with the world outside the township (and the country) that the researcher’s presence afforded them.

Participant observation carried out over 18 months involved time spent with young people in their households or in shebeens (taverns), accompanying them to football matches, on prison visits to see friends and relatives, to house parties, street “bashes” and imisebenzi (rituals of libation to the ancestors), to their rural homes, and other occasions. During the first six months, the research strategy consisted largely of “classical” participant observation with no specific questions being asked on topics of particular research interest, the aim being to participate in young people’s lives generally and to get to know them while watching how and when these topics naturally emerged. Research on sensitive issues such as partner violence and sexual health was necessarily often indirect, taking the form of studying conversation about these matters while observing and documenting visible elements of interplay in people’s sexual relationships over time. Thus, it was necessary later in fieldwork to engage in more direct questioning to collect relevant narratives.

By this time, the first author had spent several months developing trust and rapport with young people and engaging dialogue about a range of issues, and she found that they were willing to describe their experiences to her in tape-recorded narratives. The first author’s male assistant was a widely known and respected young man within his peer group, having grown up in the township, and this undoubtedly helped to encourage young men to participate...
in the research. The fact that young men often seemed keen to explicate their own involvement in violence, perhaps because they wanted to justify some of it as a valid response to a girlfriend’s behavior, may partly explain the richness of the narratives. This kind of debate and explication was also visible in group discussion with young women, while in one-to-one interviews, their narratives about their own experiences of partner violence were often more factual and subdued. Because of the nature of the research, the researcher intervened on four occasions to arrange referrals of girls who had experienced sexual or physical violence to local medical services.

VIOLENCE IN YOUNG PEOPLE’S SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Young man [in Xhosa]: I gave a girl take-fives (slaps)...because she was silly. She called me by a name I didn’t like. I first explained to her, saying that look I don’t like this name, I’ll kick you. She kept on using the name and then I gave her a take-five. To beat a cherry (girl) isn’t good, but that girl was silly towards me. Any girl who upsets me can get a punishment, no matter whether she is beautiful or what. When we punish them, we don’t use knives, take-fives and kicks are enough. When I’m beating my girlfriend my friend can stop me. He first lets me punish her and stops me later when he sees that it’s enough now.

Young woman [in Xhosa]: I was with my first boyfriend [the father of her first child] then the second boyfriend, my secret boyfriend, came and he wanted me to go to his room, I told him I can’t because my boyfriend was inside. After that, I told him I couldn’t come to him because he was a secret boyfriend. He forced me to go, after that my boyfriend was also pulling, then the secret boyfriend beat me, then the first boyfriend left me. By then, I was already pregnant with this child. After three days, my first boyfriend came, he told me that he knew that I was pregnant with the other man’s child. Then he stabbed me, he wanted us to go to his room but I refused, and then he stabbed me.

Assault (usually described as ukubetha: to hit or beat in Xhosa) in young peoples’ sexual relationships did not tend to happen in the public domain. In the first weeks of fieldwork, violence within the context of sexual relationships was rarely directly observed or explicitly mentioned, but remained a subtext—hinted at in scars on young women’s bodies that with time were often confirmed as the outcome of assaults. Later in fieldwork, violence emerged spontaneously as an area of anxiety in group discussions with teenage girls about their relationships, their concern framed in terms of their frustration at their boyfriends’ attempts to control their behavior.

Many sexual relationships did not involve violence and those that did mainly entailed slapping, which was perceived as significantly less serious by young women than other violent practices. Nevertheless, the ethnographer
was struck by the fact that many young women she met had experienced being hit to the point of bruising or more serious injury at some point in their sexual histories. The assault described by young women and men lay on a continuum: most of it involved slapping but there were some narratives that involved kicking and hitting with sticks, shoes, and belts. In a small number of cases, women described having been stabbed or threatened with a knife or firearm. The English terms control and discipline, integrated into local slang, were often used to refer to assault. Female behavior considered disrespectful (often described as making fools of men) particularly needed disciplining. Being hit was overwhelmingly associated with girls’ actual or suspected infidelities, their nonacquiescence to sexual demands, their acts of resistance by both explicit and indirect means to their boyfriends’ attempts to control their behavior, their resistance to their partners’ attempts to dictate the terms of the relationship (such as the frequency of their meetings), and their attempts to undermine their boyfriends’ sexual success with other girls (referred to as ukuperforma: “performing,” implying being jealous). A principal girlfriend (queen or 5–60, after the Mercedes-Benz model of car) in whom the most time and feeling was invested was apparently more likely to be beaten.

“INJURIES ARE BEYOND LOVE”: MARKING BODIES, DEFINING ABUSE

The kind of violence deployed in sexual relationships was significant to young people, with differentiations being made within the generic category of ukubetha. Slapping was the most common form, and did not tend to be regarded with great seriousness by many young men and women. Young men said that a slap made a girl liable to adopting a slightly insolent or “cheeky” demeanor, and perceived this to reflect the fact that it never entailed “real” pain. Slapping was often joked about, as in the popular song tshisa mpama (“a hot take-five”). Some young women said that they did not mind being slapped, as long as their boyfriends engaged in the formulaic apologies or “begging,” which they expected after the event. Some female informants also admitted to deliberate provocation on occasion to “test” a male partner’s love, the love being “proved” by the amount and quality of attention the boyfriend gave them after a violent incident. Girls distinguished between hitting and caring, and hitting and not caring, the former entailing male partners explaining their actions and displaying tenderness after the event. A lack of care, conversely, was indicated by not taking the girl to the clinic himself if she was damaged, or not attempting to reconcile with her. Slapping might escalate, however, if the young man’s anger or disciplinary intention needed more serious assuaging.
Young man [in Xhosa]: Firstly, I slap her, and you find it seems that she's not feeling the slap, because it's that [not feeling it] which is making her cheeky. Then I see that I should even take a cane because I used to like giving her the cane, and she'll cry and cry, and then when she says "yhu!"—they have that cry of theirs that's loud—and then I stop; because I don't want noise. But I don't leave her alone until I feel that I have beaten her.

Some forms of assault were clearly defined by young women and men as more abusive (and less acceptable) than others. These were actions deemed to be disproportionate to a girlfriend’s wrongdoing. As one young man explained, “When you smack her, you give her a punishment which is equivalent to her sin.” Ideas about abuse hinged on harm, although this was never cast in absolute terms, being partially dependent on the young woman’s own interpretation of the event. The violence that really mattered was that which resulted in injury, and this was often associated with male drunkenness. The consensus was that injuries in general, but especially ones that disrupted everyday life, were “beyond love.” In the few cases in which male friends intervened to place a limit on a young man’s actions, this was when they considered the violence to be losing its moral authority because the woman was being injured. Young men might also intervene where the young woman concerned was a friend of the group (and her boyfriend outside it) and was constructed as innocent, although this was rare. In these cases, the concern for the woman was often mediated by other considerations, such as a young man’s interest in propositioning her or kinship ties.

The disruption and spoiling of bodily integrity in bodily markings, scars, and the spilling of blood was culturally significant. As a privileged site for the inscription of power, the body spoke what was often literally unspeakable. Bodily marking insinuated shame for both parties, since it implied that the man had gone too far and indicated wrongdoing on the part of the woman (hence her need for “discipline”). For many young women, injuries and their lingering scars represented *ihlazo* (disgrace) and suggested their guilt, regardless of the circumstances: “they [others] will think you were beaten up because you don’t know how to behave.” Thus, girls commonly concealed the source of their injuries, tending to say that they came from walking into doors or falling over. However, damaged bodies—bruised faces, (stab) “holes” and so on—brought private violence into public domains, enabling it to be read and ascribed meaning. Scars also configured their subjectivity, telling stories about their sexual histories that many would rather have kept hidden.

Marking female bodies left young men open to social censure, accusations of “boastfulness” and “disrespect,” and the acquisition of enduring violent reputations, which might work against them in the community.
and jeopardize their sexual chances with other girls. Thus, if a young man was going to hit a girl on the face, slapping was said to be preferable since fists entailed bruising and “once she’s swollen, her father comes to you.” Hitting quickly to minimize the chance of intervention and avoiding the face altogether, such as by using a belt on the body, were common strategies.

[In Xhosa] Interviewer: What do you use to hit her, how do you do it?
Young man: Either you use your hand or your shoe or your belt. The belt is the best because it doesn’t make her as ugly. When you use a belt she will just feel the pains, which won’t spoil her body and give her scars. She is also your pot of gold, so you wouldn’t want to destroy it
But you are panel-beating (a slang term implying violence) her?
You are fixing it [the problem]—you mustn’t hit her to such an extent that she is not able to go out of the house. But there are people who beat up women and you can see them the following day that hey, it’s bad. He can even use a steel rod.

Bodily marking has long been taken as an indication of excess. Regional ethnographic texts indicate that historically, an injured wife had the right, in cases where her in-laws had shown themselves unable to mediate, to return to her consanguineal kin in protest at her husband’s maltreatment (Hunter 1936). This remains the case in rural areas, where the procedure for getting the wife to return to her marital home can involve uswazi (a fine in the form of a head of cattle to her kin) should the husband’s actions be deemed out of proportion to his wife’s “disrespect.” This raises the question of when a beating was deemed justifiable. In traditional discourse, marriage is understood as a contract with obligations and responsibilities, the work and position of a makoti (new wife) being particularly, indeed, notoriously, difficult. Hunter recorded that as long as they were not “severe,” beatings were considered acceptable in certain circumstances, such as if the wife had failed to prepare food properly, if she arrived home late or drunk, or if she gave her husband “cause for jealousy” (1936: 41). However, there is a well-known Xhosa proverb that states inxuku ayinamzi (“a stick has no home”). If the woman returned to her father’s home in protest, sometimes the man would get away with a reprimand from his in-laws, and sometimes if the justifiability of his actions were disputed or the beating was severe, the case would go to the chief’s court (to which women could, and did, bring cases in their own names). The marking of bodies and spilling of blood carries weight in other arenas in which violence is performed, in particular in fighting between men, with payment for damages expected in certain circumstances.

In this contemporary township, even injuries were not, however, incontestable. Young women’s pain and injuries were liable to being belittled, questioned, and trivialized, sometimes both by health professionals and
family members. When one young woman experienced pain and vaginal bleeding after being kicked by her boyfriend, her boyfriend’s mother implied that she was evil and had in fact taken something to abort her pregnancy, using the beating as an excuse. “Someone can’t kick you there so that you bleed,” they told her. When she told her boyfriend’s uncle about the assault, he told her that her boyfriend’s sister-in-law had been hit by her husband with a bush knife, saying “she even fractured her bones, so you see you are not being beaten much. Your problems are still small, my child.” She went to an aunt, who also told her to “persevere” (nyamezela). She told herself to follow this advice.

DIFFERENTIATING AND LEGITIMIZING VIOLENCE: PRIVACY, LIMITS, AND MORAL AUTHORITY

Young man [in Xhosa]: It comes unexpectedly when you are going to hit a girl, it’s just a slap and that’s it on the face. You just slap her and leave her alone. You see, I’m that kind of person who becomes shy because that scene automatically calls for eye from people around, just like that. It’s that thing which causes you to stop beating the person, because it causes me to be looked at, but at the same time I feel so angry. Yho! Indoors that’s where I can kick her and kick her, but I am able to feel for her and I can also control myself. I can hold my anger.

Young man [in Xhosa]: It happens that when you’re drunk—you see yourself having beaten her up and you realize later when you’re sober. Just like the cherry (girl) I’m going out with now, I once kicked her and hit her so badly that the next morning she couldn’t even walk because her ankles were swollen. I realized then: what if she could go to the police? I would go to prison, or if her father could arrive with her looking like that I’d be in quite deep shit, you see. I realized what bad things come out of the influence of alcohol. She was swollen even in the eyes, everything was wrong, you see things like that are caused by alcohol. You see sometimes, some people, you realize that they kill their wives. It’s the people who can’t control their anger.

Given the rarity of public beatings of women, the only witness tended to be the young woman herself. Violent incidents generally involved some narrative reworking, however, as few were kept completely private between the two individuals concerned. Competing narrative accounts of these incidents by the two parties were the primary means by which the event was subsequently given a particular shape in the public domain, assigned meaning and legitimacy contested. In this sense “performance” was located less in the violent incident itself, than in the involved parties’ subsequent public (re)presentations of it. This concords with Riches’ (1986) argument that perceptions of (il)legitimacy of a violent act are struggled over in the
political relations between the performer of violence and (dissenting) witnesses (in the case of violence in private spaces, the woman herself).

Significant energy was expended by young men in legitimizing and reframing their violent actions. Male complaints about unwarranted disclosure about violence on the part of their partners, who were said to be easy in their telling of “things they’re not supposed to talk about,” reflected their concern to avoid public knowledge and evaluation of their acts. Their complaints were also connected to the prevailing idea that quarrels between partners, indeed domesticities in general, ought to be resolved in private. Many young women concurred with this view, which derived not only from ideas about the nature of intimate relationships and the importance of women “persevering” uncomplainingly through hardship, but also from the widespread view that maintaining a happy front was important in a context where others were perceived to take pleasure in other’s suffering or to take advantage of one’s relationship difficulties. Women’s loose tongues were said (by men) to endanger their boyfriends, encouraging intervention by others, such as police and male kin. In reality, women practiced selective telling, out of fear of others taking it more seriously than they might themselves wish. One young woman, for example, explained, “I hide it from my brothers but I sometimes whisper it to my mother”; her brothers, she said, would “take it with muddy feet, take it up like it’s their own thing. They will go wanting to fight in that house.” Other young women chose not to tell others who might contest their reading of the violence: one, for example, who was regularly beaten up and on one occasion stabbed by her child’s father, disclosed only to female friends who agreed with her that she should avoid confrontation and not take any action against the man. In these ways, women assumed responsibility for limiting violence within their own sexual relationships, since disclosure that involved other males might lead to escalation.

In general, young men seemed unwilling to broach personal subjects with friends unless the latter brought up the topic first, and there was substantial solidarity among young men when it came to talk about the treacherous and disrespectful behavior of girlfriends. That they tried broadly to reconfigure their violence in their own favor was evident. The manner in which narrative accounts were given were gendered in this respect: young men often spoke articulately and colorfully about their experiences, involving justification and sometimes impassioned description of their partners’ wrong-doings; while women’s narratives tended to be flat and relatively inexpressive descriptive accounts of events, presumably in consequence of their felt need to contain such assaults.

Loss of control was a dominant theme in young men’s explanations of a violent incident, as indicated in the previous quotes. However, their narratives exhibited an uncomfortable and unresolved tension between being in total control and losing it entirely. On one hand, calculated strategizing
featured prominently in their accounts, including saving the beating for private spaces, minimizing injury on public parts of the body, deciding to drink alcohol to build up anger and *isibindi* (courage), and engaging in deliberate manipulation after the event by *sweet-talking*. On the other hand, their accounts conveyed an impression of intense anger and humiliation that compelled them to behave as they did. In this aspect of their talk, they represented themselves as victims of their passions, in particular of anger and of caring “too much” about their relationship. Loss of agency was a prevailing theme in young men’s talk about their daily lives. When it came to seeking redress in a relationship through physical “discipline,” alcoholic intoxication facilitated this loss of control, easing the momentary expression of masculine power and numbing the senses. With the return of sobriety, young men more often than not negotiated with their girlfriends to impose legitimacy on their actions. They reconfigured the episode by referring to the woman’s stubbornness or wrongdoing, admitting having hit “more than was required,” and apologizing through enticement. The ability to juggle apparently opposing views by using normalizing or trivializing language to refer to the beating (such as the slang term *touch-touch*) while acknowledging the moral wrongness of their actions was a feature of this self-justification. Nevertheless, regret and shame were often genuine, especially if the girl was bruised or injured or the beating had brought about a noticeable deterioration in her commitment to the relationship. Shame emerged particularly in cases in which there were repercussions, such as chastisement by elders and the involvement of kin. One young man feared by schoolmates as a *tsotsi* (a local term used to describe an antisocial “drop-out,” usually male, who is armed and involved in crime) described how.

I felt sorry for [my girlfriend] and I asked myself: Why did you do this wrong? I didn’t think I would grab her like that … Here were the parents and neighbors and I feel for that, I feel guilty. I don’t think it’s right to beat a girl, that’s why I feel guilty, and even grabbing her … [trails off] … if she’s doing wrong I must sit and talk to her. The words of her grandmother are affecting my heart. She said I’m a rascal, and I’ve got no discipline, that I could kill somebody if I see it as important to kill somebody … and those words make me sad.

Some girls came to accept the justifications of violence that their partners offered. One young woman who was stabbed on her arm and neck did not pursue her initial report to the police. She explained that although her partner was “wrong” for stabbing her, he did it for a “good reason”—her parallel sexual involvement with another man. Reporting cases to the police was rare and when it did happen, the likelihood of young women changing their minds about taking the case further (“the scars fade and the anger
cools,” said one) was great. Despite attempts to implement legislation aimed at making the process of reporting domestic violence easier for women, local police often encouraged the woman merely to “report” the incident rather than formally “open a case”—a distinction that is not recognized in law or police codes of practice. Local township police, aware of the cultural pragmatics of male persuasion (whereby men reframed their actions to their partners), were far more likely to slap the accused around or force him to do push-ups as a warning than to arrest him, or else often advised the woman concerned to return the next day should her determination to open a case still be solid. Young women tended to describe their reluctance to pursue intervention in terms of their feelings for their partners: “this thing of love fools you most of the time.”

Female reputation was also at stake in how they handled their partners’ violence. Sending a lover to prison for a beating was likely to reflect badly on the woman, being liable to be perceived as a step underpinned by spite. Young women often said that they did not wish to cause pain to their boyfriends’ families and destroy his future by sending him to prison, especially if he was someone with humanity (ubuntu) who regretted his actions. They said that they could see that their boyfriends had their own struggles and that they did not need to contribute to them. Although going to prison was so common as to be almost a rite of passage among young working-class men in this township, it was nevertheless “marking” of a person. Young women’s reluctance to report reflected other submerged discourses, such as the importance of Christian forgiveness, and the unacceptability of expressing certain kinds of affect such as anger. The discourse of women as strong and suffering also helped to privilege male concerns.

“’I’M NOT FIGHTING WITH HER, I’M JUST TEACHING HER RESPECT’: GENDER, HIERARCHY AND POWER STRUGGLES

Young man [in Xhosa]: Most of the time it’s guys who lead in a relationship. You find that when you go to a meid (girl) you don’t get there and keep quiet. It will be you who will say why you have come to her—like “I missed you”—and she’ll listen, and contribute, but you find that it’s you, the guy, who plays a big role. Yes, cherries (girls) are alright, clever but, as it happens, you find that as a guy you have the upper hand.

Interviewer: How do you get the upper hand?
It’s natural. It happens on its own. Even from creation it was known who the head is, that the first person was Adam and he was a man and then the woman came after him. And as we were growing up it was known that the last word is the man’s. The wife can’t have the last word when her husband is there.
In young men’s thinking, their female peers were unequivocally inferior to them, something that women largely disputed. While the above speaker acknowledges that girls may be “clever,” young women were generally considered to need frequent advice, control, and discipline. Having the upper hand—a local idiom for power—was conceptualized as natural and God-given. Young men’s talk was replete with comments like “a woman is someone who is left behind,” “a woman is weak by nature,” and “it is the way it was created.” Hierarchical sexual difference was also something that many young men described as cultural, both explicitly using the words “it’s our culture” and implicitly describing it as an aspect of life in which they grew up simply “knowing.” There was, however, a clear sense that hierarchy had to be both manufactured—most obviously through the making of “men” in the process of circumcision, which is usually done between the mid-teens and early 20s and enforced in everyday practice. Manhood was an unfinished process, to be copied and practiced: “manhood is in your doings.”

In their sexual relationships, young men exploited these notions of masculine superiority. Hierarchy was encapsulated in expectations relating to sexual practice and reinforced through the culturally embedded notion of *ukuhlonipha* (respect), which was a defining feature of any social relationship defined by hierarchy: between children and adults, men of different age sets, married individuals, and youth and elders. *Ukuhlonipha* is so embedded in traditional understandings of society that it has been described by Kuckertz (1997) as a cultural idiom of “moral reasoning.” Ways of speaking symbolized and entrenched “respect.” “You won’t talk any way you like to a man,” as one young woman said, “if he rises, you must be low.” In proper marital relationships, wives are expected to show their husbands *hlonipha* (respect) in quiet voices that reflect submission. Continuities with premarital youth relations were striking. Speech was gendered: he questions, she *uyathula* (“keeps quiet”); he tells, she *locks* (resists).

Young men’s violence against partners was specifically concerned with countering women’s attempts to challenge or reverse this expected hierarchy by behaving in “disrespectful” ways. This was explicit in young men’s colloquialisms: thus girls who exhibited insolence were said to be *uyaspeeda* (speeding), *unepowers* (having power), and *umoya wakhe useshezulu* (having a high spirit). They were also said to think they were *better* or *clever*, the latter when used in a nonderogatory sense being a slang term referring to streetwise know-how (known as *timing*), which is primarily considered to be a masculine accomplishment. Young women were said to need to be “put in place” by having this “timing” taken out of them. However, in young people’s narratives, violent action was not positively linked to *ubudoda* (masculinity) per se, and was risky in that it was liable to jeopardize individual men’s reputations. Beating girlfriends as if “fighting” with them
was considered unmasculine, cowardly even, because the objective was not to fight but rather to “punish” or “teach respect” in proportion to their wrongdoing, and because (women being “weaker” than men) the terms of the battle were uneven. Nevertheless, violence (within limits) constituted one tactic among several to achieve characteristics that were directly associated with manliness, in particular success in maintaining control over women and enforcing respectful relationships deemed to underlie the proper (hegemonic) gender order.

Young men’s need to assert their superiority also related to a broader sense of risk which feminine power posed to them, and the necessity of countering this. This seemed to relate to a view of human relations as characterized by struggles for control. One male informant echoed others when he said: “if you didn’t control her, then you would be controlled, the girl would pull you by your nose. That’s why it has to be the man who is controlling.”

A man who was under his woman’s control, as indicated by excessive compliance with her wishes, was likely to become the object of ridicule, especially by other men. Interestingly, feminine power—regarded as sneaky and infinite like women’s supposed capacity for treachery—made men feel vulnerable to victimization. Evil doing, including *ubugqwirha* (witchcraft; usually said to be inherited by a daughter from her mother) and the targeted use of *muti* (indigenous medicine used for sorcery), were overwhelmingly spoken of as feminine domains of agency. Female sexuality was a subtext to both (cf. Niehaus 2002 on the “sexuality of evil”).

Harmful action was not then conceptualized as fixed to a single, masculinized, locus of power. Both masculine and feminine power (of the harmful kind) had real effects, inscribing bodies and reconfiguring lives. But the former, manifested in material explosions of violence and often facilitated by weapons, was more visible and material in its operation than the latter. Femininized power had a panoply of tactics that were mysterious to the uninitiated and had diffuse effects on bodies and lives, including *ilishwa* (misfortune) and (generally according to men) a variety of sexual diseases. The trappings of violence were clearly gendered. Girls did fight physically “for a man and over gossip,” as one elder said, but their relationship to the tools of violence was different. The most prominent incident involving female violence during fieldwork, for instance, involved a 16-year-old girl being burned and scarred with battery acid (rather than injured with a weapon associated with men, such as a knife, gun or stick) by a love-rival. The metonymic association of guns with manhood was overwhelming in township life: one colloquial term for a weapon, for example, was “Rambo.” Gun carrying was specifically spoken of as a “man’s thing,” with women considered to be scared and useless in the face of firearms. Female weaponry of the visible (nonmagical) kind was often unequal to the task
of challenging men’s weapons (guns and knives) on their own terms. When one young woman poured water over her boyfriend’s bed during an argument, for example, he went to get his gun.

LOVE, JEALOUSY, AND DISCIPLINE

In the township, violence in sexual relationships was at times explicitly tied to love. The commonly heard saying, “if he beats you, he loves you,” entailed a view of girls and young women as needing moral supervision and requiring putting on the right track by male partners who cared for them. Men’s talk about valuing their girlfriends and their claims that beating indicated the seriousness of their intentions toward them suggested that beating was seen by many as constitutive of love. Young men’s notions of moral protectionism and paternalistic “knowing better” assisted them in legitimizing their violent practices. They were, they often said, “protecting” the relationship because they valued it, and were looking after her ubuntuombi (girlhood) since girls were unable to think for themselves. Femininity in this context was tied up to the practice of dignity and respectability through appropriate behavior.

This link between discipline and love was qualified by many—the manner in which the beating was carried out counted, for example—although some girls said that after being hit they came to appreciate the “guidance” their boyfriend was trying to impart to them. The logic behind this was that a young man’s failure to correct his girlfriend’s misdemeanors through discipline implied his desire simply for “that thing he wants” (implying sex), and his failure to exhibit jealousy indexed a nonchalance that could well indicate a lack of emotional investment in the relationship. In this sense, male jealousy was viewed positively by some women. Men largely framed jealousy as a gendered (feminine) emotion, preferring to interpret their own surveillance of important girlfriends in objectified terms as attempts to protect what was theirs.

Some girls contested this view linking discipline to love, however, particularly where violence was involved, experiencing it as a controlling dynamic that was coercive and repressive. As one girl said, “it is as if since I met him I don’t have my own brain.” Some used the word ukuncungcuthekisa (torture) to describe their partners’ attempts to control them, and in everyday life feminine submission was rarely complete and required surveillance:

[In Xhosa]: Everywhere you go he must know [about it]. He’s abusing you. You find that you’re trembling, worried that when he comes he won’t find
you. It’s like you can’t be sent anywhere at your home, you can’t go to your village, you can’t do anything. In everything you do, you must start by telling him first. That is torture.

**CONCLUSIONS**

While violence is often experienced and witnessed as chaotic at its moments of enactment, even that committed casually and without immediate apparent logic arises from a network of meanings and practices that more often than not, make sense to the protagonists. This article suggests that violence is a form of communication in everyday life that configures lives and subjectivities: it is productive of relationships, particularly in relation to gender. This concords with other ethnographies of violence that have challenged popular assumptions that it is representative of social breakdown (e.g., Das et al. 2000; Nordstrom and Robben 1995). Riches (1986), for example, has challenged the notion that violence reflects breakdown by focusing on the dynamic performance of violence, describing it as a strategic, consciously employed resource deployed (in part) to achieve two sorts of objectives: practical-instrumental (effecting the transformation of social environments), and symbolic-expressive (dramatizing the importance of key social ideas).

This article has explored the ways in which violence in this South African context can be both instrumental and symbolically meaningful. Most obviously, the physical assault of young women emerges out of young men’s attempts to control and discipline them for real or imagined transgressions, in particular those involving other men. Many beatings centered on controlling and disciplining girls’ imputed or potential sexual misdemeanors, and were explicitly linked to the reputational downgrading, which these were imagined to entail for the man. Controlling (sometimes through violence) the terms of a girlfriend’s sociality, including her friendships with other women, conversations with men, and even her levels of alcohol consumption and the way she danced at parties, were other examples of attempts by men to minimize their vulnerability. This concords with Moore’s argument (1994) that when a man’s sense of masculinity is under threat from the actions of significant others, feelings of “thwarting” may bring the man to use violence against his partner, both as a tactical attempt to maintain his particular invested-in “fantasies of identity” and as an emotional response to a threatened loss of agency. Violence can evidently also be interpreted as a symbolic attempt to assert superiority through the display of physical power. As Jewkes et al. (2005) argued in relation to the rape of children, violence can be seen as a mode of communication with the victim
(or a relative of the victim) and with the man himself, as a means of seeking
to enact fantasies of power (cf. Moore 1994).

In an important sense, the violence that has been described here mirrors
that reported in other settings (e.g., Harvey and Gow 1994) as being funda-
mentally related to the organization of inequality within sexual relation-
ships, attempting to produce a hierarchy of gender. At the same time, the
ethnographic evidence unsettles simplistic associations between violence,
gender hierarchy, and masculinity. Interestingly, direct links between viol-
ence and manhood were made in young women’s talk, but not in that of
their male peers who, perhaps unsurprisingly, exploited the fracture-lines
between the two concepts in their legitimizing talk about their violence
against women. While male justification of beatings by reference to the
exercise and implementation of patriarchal rights—as if “authorized by an
ideology of supremacy” (Connell 1995: 83)—was one facet of the way young
men talked about their violence, in reality notions circulated that limited the
extent to which beating was considered legitimate. Thus, if manly dignity,
and by extension reputation, was “lowered” by a girlfriend’s behavior,
it might be considered unmasculine not to beat her in order to redress the
diminution. Similarly, at times manhood (in the sense of maturity and the
associated ability to control oneself) was said to be the one thing that pre-
vented violence from occurring, but this was counterbalanced by notions
involving the rightful defense by men of their dignity.

Implicit ideas about good womanhood and the dependency of men on
their sexual partners towing the line were linked to the constitution of desir-
able masculine subjectivity. Masculinity was constructed in dialectic with
femininity, and as such men were dependent on their partners’ “good” beha-
ard. Violence often resulted from sexual partners not behaving as men
expected them to. Indeed, women were sometimes hit for imagined
transgressions, for things they had probably not—in the men’s accounts—
done; or they were hit to prevent them from acting in certain ways in the
future (cf. Wood and Jewkes 2001). These findings concord closely with
the arguments of Moore (1994). Notably too, young men’s complaints
about women’s general “untrustworthiness” and other similar comments
implied male models of perfect femininity by drawing attention to imperfect
versions of it.

Control (power directed in a particular way) was a prevalent notion in
local discourse, and of particular importance to young men. In a context
where traditional controls over premarital female sexuality have lapsed,
control of young women evidently continues to be important to successful
masculinity. Significant too perhaps in this setting is that as Guy has argued
(1990), historically desirable social (including gender) relationships were
predicated on men’s accumulation of cattle, and on their control of women’s
fertility and contribution to agricultural labor. In a contemporary, urban, economically deprived setting where economic power is unattainable or at least problematic, the sheer passion and competitiveness that young men put into acquiring and controlling girlfriends is not difficult to understand. The predicament in which contemporary working-class youth find themselves is acute. Economic concerns and their many ramifications are crucial to them, the quest for money and its lack permeating their everyday lives. In Bourdieu’s terms, young men in particular are stuck in a “misery of position,” which comes from being located in a more or less fixed position in the social order, in a particular “lieu” (the sociospatial situation of an agent relative to others (Bourdieu 1999)). Here, too, as in the case of Kabyle culture (Bourdieu 2001), the acquisition of symbolic and social capital is more or less the only possible form of accumulation, with women being valuable assets requiring protection. In such contexts, violence may be used as a means to live out certain gender positionings that might privilege some men through the exercise of power (cf. Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994).

Finally, this ethnography raises the interesting (and under-researched) question of the links between emotion and violence. Emotions are points of tension, a “primary idiom for defining and negotiating social relations of the self in a moral order” (Lutz and White 1986). In their overview of the anthropology of emotions, Lutz and White note that the set of problems which cultural systems often present in emotional terms includes conflict over the other’s violation of cultural codes or a person’s expectations, responses to inadequacies or a sense of danger, and actual or threatened loss of significant relationships (1986: 427). As such, incorporating indigenous understandings of emotion into ethnography gives a fuller picture of what is at stake for individuals in everyday life. How emotion is understood might help to explain how and why violence (which is always personally risky and socially liable to censure) is deployed over other strategies, and reveal the spaces in which violence is made possible—and justified—in everyday relationships. Post facto, of course, attributing violence to certain emotions can also be used by those enacting violence to attempt to establish nonresponsibility for their acts; thus exploring local understandings of emotion can shed further light on ideas relating to legitimacy and agency.

Anger, shame, and feelings of love are of particular interest in this ethnography. Young men often described drinking alcohol to work up the angry mood needed to physically “punish” a girlfriend. Male talk exhibited tensions between maintaining control while they were hitting a girlfriend (in order not to “fight” with and injure her, but maintain the original disciplinary intent), and losing control through the effects of alcoholic intoxication and overwhelming anger. This implies a disciplined and intentional self that
could be overcome by unrestrained affect. Women, on the other hand, were not supposed to display anger and were liable to incur punishment for revealing such emotions. Violence is also discursively linked to “loving” and caring. Although this is particularly evident in young men’s talk, some women (though a minority) also “read” certain kinds of violence (particularly “mild” forms) in this light. The mediating discourse here is a moral one in which men are in hierarchical corrective relationships to women. While this is structurally analogous to that pertaining between a parent and a child, violence toward a sexual partner was on occasion understood as deriving from a man’s strong affective involvement in a particular relationship (while, conversely, a lack of violent reaction could be read as indicative of indifference). Love and “feeling” for a girl, as well as shame, also entered into ideas about limit, with violence that resulted in injury seen by women and men alike as “beyond love” and hence as unjustifiable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council of the U.K. in the form of doctoral and post-doctoral grants to the first author. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the South African Medical Research Council’s Ethics Committee. Special acknowledgement is due to the young people and their families who participated in the research, and to Nwabisa Jama and Litha Maqoma who made major contributions to data collection. The first author carried out the ethnographic research and drafted the article, and all three authors contributed to data interpretation and revision of drafts. The second author was the first author’s principal doctoral supervisor, and the third author her second, in-country supervisor. Thanks are also due to the first author’s post-doctoral mentor Peter Aggleton.

NOTE

1. As Redding has documented (1987), female migration to the main town in the region gathered pace from the 1930s onwards. Despite the difficulties, urban living undoubtedly provided spaces in which women could obtain some degree of personal autonomy (not least financial) away from the restrictive patriarchal relations of rural societies. Women tended to be excluded from the industrial sector in the big cities. Fortunate women entered into domestic service with white families, their lodgings secured; others scraped together a livelihood or supplemented their income with a variety of entrepreneurial activities, including laundry, needlework and ironing, and hawking of food.
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