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**THE DISCURSIVE PRODUCTION  
OF  
ROMANTIC REALITIES**

Volume I of II

**Sophia Ledingham**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in  
Psychology

City, University of London  
United Kingdom

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*For my mother Dale*

# Abstract

This research furthers our understanding of romantic love and coupledness: it flags taken-for-granted assumptions in the psychological literature; and provides insights into the sense-making of romantic experience for those in established relationships.

This dual focus study integrates two separate inquiries with working-class participants in committed relationships: interviews with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to capture their lived experience of romance; and focus groups with Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) to identify discursive resources. Embracing IPA within social constructionism, this *enlivens* the FDA and sheds light on the process whereby individuals in established relationships position themselves within available discourses and thus experience their relationships as romantic (or otherwise).

The research suggests that what is experienced as romantic—whether heartfelt conversations, expensive gifts or sexual intimacy—is a product of discursive location. The thesis demonstrates that moving discourses can significantly impact how people experience and make sense of romance. For example, small daily acts of thoughtfulness are experienced as romantic by those who are located in the ‘intimacy’ discourse, while gifts, special occasions and grand chivalric gestures are felt to be romantic to those located in the ‘romantic love’ discourse.

Furthermore, the thesis presents the *enlivening* of the FDA with IPA as a theoretical offering called Discursive Emotional Dynamics. It theorises a relationship between discourses, subject positions and the emotional meaning making constructed by that experience which then implicates future positioning. The thesis therefore offers insights into why and how we mobilise some positions and not others, how we position—and are positioned.

The results reinforce that romantic love is important to the psychology of relationships. By attending to discourses and positioning in an *enlivened* discursive terrain, this gives us a handle on a range of relationship dilemmas—from casting light on scholarly debates to reigniting a dimming romantic spark.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This introductory chapter opens with a rationale for studying romantic love and then presents the theoretical foundations and aims of the research project. It also offers a contextualising account of myself as author and researcher in the field of romantic love. Finally, it provides a chapter-by-chapter outline of the thesis and the insights that it offers.

### 1.1 Rationale for the Topic

This section provides a rationale for returning to the study of heterosexual romantic love when the subject piqued the interest of psychologists and sociologists back in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

#### 1.1.1 Why Study Romantic Love in Established Relationships?

Romantic love and romance are terms that still resonate in our current culture. As a society we continue to believe in finding the 'one' and the ritual of the white wedding in hope of living happily-ever-after. In keeping with our parents' generation, today's popular songs carry romantic lyrics and blockbuster movies ensure a love interest. There are newer manifestations too, like the abundance of love related emojis from which we can express our heartfelt affection via text or other virtual means. While social media is transporting romantic love between loved ones, it is also humming with posts, tweets and blogs on the subject too. It appears that women and men are compelled towards romantic love, whether its classic conventions or modern means.

There has been a plethora of research on coupledness and romantic love since the 1960s. Much of it has been focused on attempting to define and measure romantic love and correlate it with other relational constructs. Typically, these studies produce romance in terms of passionate love and the early stages of relationships (e.g. Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Fisher, 2006), and recycle well-rehearsed social scripts which present romance as naturally declining in maturing relationships; to be replaced with, or compensated by, a friendship type of love – companionate love (e.g. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1989; Sternberg, 1988, 2006).

Research on the subject of romantic love in *established* relationships is less common. The literature is more focused on love, in general<sup>1</sup> in the enduring couple dyad. Where it features, romance has been constructed as a phenomenon that ‘can exist’ in longer-term relationships (e.g. Acevedo & Aron, 2009; Hatfield *et al.*, 2008). For example, Acevedo and Aron (2009) construct romantic love in long-term relationships as different from passionate love. They present romantic love in terms of intensity, engagement and sexual interest. This production represents a repositioning of romantic love as different to passionate love, by separating out the notion of obsession that is heavily associated with romance in new relationships.

More typical are papers that incorporate the term romantic love expecting it to be understood by the reader. This can be confusing when romantic love is sometimes used interchangeably with general love in the relationship (e.g. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1989; Marston *et al.*, 1987); and also as a subset of love, thereby ascribing a certain quality to the love (e.g. Greenfield, 1965; Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Fisher, 2006; Jackson, 1993; Sternberg, 2006). Most authors reporting research on the established couple do not offer a definition of romantic love but slip it in as a shared and taken-for-granted construct (e.g. Burns, 2002; Duncombe & Marsden, 1993, 1995; Langford, 1999). At times, it can be gleaned that these authors are referring to intimacy and emotional connectivity, while it is not evident that their participants share the same view.

There also appears to be a shortage of phenomenological research on romance. So whilst it is referred to in taken-for-granted terms, there is a lack of research exploring how people understand and make sense of romance. Instead, the mainstream literature is endemic with research on love, which records participants’ attitudes and behaviours at a single point in time, through surveys and self-report measures (e.g. Hecht *et al.*, 1994; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986, 1989, 1995, 2006; Sternberg, 1988, 1997). Such research treats love as a discrete intrapersonal phenomenon and projects a static characterisation onto a subject that is fluid and complicated, as well as likely contingent on others (including one’s partner). Notably the various papers and studies which present a range of behaviours—from emotional relatedness to sexual attraction and saying thank you—as characteristic or expressive of love in a relationship, fail to distinguish whether any of these feelings or behaviours are experienced as romantic.

The feminist movement of the 1970s is recognised as significantly contributing to the study of love. Their concern with female subjugation, which brought marriage under the spotlight, viewed romantic love as a social construct that protected male privilege. Sociologists have

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<sup>1</sup> While my research is directed towards romantic love, the literature often equates it with love in the couple dyad, or subsumes it within this category.

since deconstructed romance in movies, fiction and text, to reveal the gendered nature of romantic scripts (e.g. Crawford, 2004; Jackson, 1993; Radway, 1984/1991; Shumway, 2003). Challenging the feminist premise that male power resides at the heart of the romantic love narrative, Illouz (2012) points out that romantic love has flourished when there has been a corresponding decline, not an increase, in patriarchal power. She also suggests that feminists often fail to realise that romantic love is equally captivating to both women and men alike.

It would seem that the romantic love narrative and its representations in movies and fiction have been given attention by sociologists, and that passionate love is recognised as romantic by mainstream psychologists. Beyond the experience of love in new relationships, which is presented as romantic, there is little effort made by researchers to distinguish the discourse and experience of love in general, from that of romance in the established relationship.

It is disquieting that across the literature the terms 'romantic partners' or 'romantic couples' are being used as demographic labels to describe members of an established dyad, yet there is no attempt to qualify whether these relationships are romantic or not. Given that there are 15.8 million heterosexual couples in Britain, according to the Families and Households in the UK report (Office for National Statistics, 2016), it would be insightful to understand the elusive process by which people in established relationships experience their relationships as romantic (or not).

### **1.1.2 Why Study Heterosexual Relationships?**

It can be seen that the literature on heterosexual romantic love and coupledness predominately stems from the latter half of the twentieth century. Contemporary scholars seem to consider the romantic love experiences of the typical established heterosexual couple as passé; it assumes that this front has been covered and already 'understood'. There's a sense that researchers should engage with more current, thought provoking or politically motivated issues; and rightfully, give voice to marginalised communities. As such, recent articles are more likely to feature 'deviance' in relationships or focus on alternatives to the traditional couple dyad and explore love in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community for example. However, Gough (2001) asserts 'whilst it is important that efforts should be made to 'give voice' to marginalised groups, this does not imply that other, more dominant, milieux should be neglected' (p.173).

Indeed, it is heterosexual love that brings romantic issues into sharp relief; Jackson (1995) points out: 'it is in heterosexual relationships that romantic love has been institutionalised as the basis of marriage, and it is this heterosexual love which dominates cultural representations of romance' (p.49). Accordingly, this study explores romantic love as constructed and experienced by women and men in heterosexual established relationships.

This study does however benefit from the significant body of work that recognises minority issues, for example, I adopt concepts that queer heterosexual behaviour, like the heteronormative hierarchy<sup>2</sup>, which provides a lens to performance of hegemonic masculinity and femininity.

### **1.1.3 Why Study the Working Class?**

The working class represented a particularly interesting and relevant community from which to base this research in heterosexual romantic love. However, it was not evident at the outset of the PhD that this socio-economic group would be the focus of my study. It was while exploring the history of romantic love that I came across information from Shumway (2003) and subsequently Thompson (1995), which flagged that romantic love narratives were more important to the working class. Shumway (2003) suggested that this is in part to do with the separate gender spheres that continue to define working-class relationships. Meanwhile, Thompson (1995) raised concerns that working-class teenage girls may not encounter other choices besides marriage and thus were more vulnerable to the discourse of romantic love.

### **1.1.4 My Usage of Terms and Formulations**

In this thesis I use the term 'working class' in its broadest sense as those who are not financially or educationally privileged. To identify working-class participants for this study, I included those people who matched grades C1, C2 and D from the Ipsos Social Grading classification system and excluded university graduates.

As I have referred to confusion in the literature as to how authors make use of the term 'romantic love', I need to clarify my own usage. In this research, I deploy the terms 'romantic love', 'romantic' and 'romance' in related ways. In the interviews for example, I might ask: how do you experience romance? Or, how do you experience romantic love? And explore a response by querying: how is that romantic? In doing so, I make an assumption that romantic love is a form of love that is characterised by romance.

On a similar point, this thesis is infused with numerous psychological, theoretical or discursive terms from 'hot cognition' and 'subject positions' to those of my own making like 'Discursive Emotional Dynamics'. For the reader's ease of reference, these terms are organised in a glossary, see Appendix 32: Glossary.

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of the heteronormative hierarchy, derived from the work of Cameron and Kulick (2003, cited in Coates, 2013), suggests that people aligning themselves with heterosexual norms – adopting traditional gender roles, prizing monogamy, and raising children, are privileged and enjoy a higher status than others.

It should also be noted that the reader will see passages of text repeated verbatim throughout the thesis. This occurs for several reasons: firstly, some of the concepts and ideas shared are difficult to articulate and once having formulated them to my satisfaction I felt that to replace them with altered formulations risks losing meaning. Secondly, in order to elucidate on the discursive production of realities, I needed to articulate the readings from each of the analyses (as seen in Chapters 6 and 7) and then show the relationship between that content (Chapters 8 and 9); this was made more visible by redeploying the already communicated material. Relatedly, given the complicated nature of what is being presented in this thesis, from enlivened social constructionism to the intricacies of positioning theory, it is thought that repeating formulations might assist the reader and go some way to compensate for this complexity.

### **1.1.5 Summary of Rationale**

To recap, heterosexual romantic love is considered known and understood in the field of psychology. It frequently appears as a taken-for-granted construct that does not even warrant a definition. Yet, the research reported in the literature does not appreciate how people actually make sense of their relationships as romantic (or not). This is especially relevant, for we live in a society where romantic love is privileged as a normal and healthy way of being: we should fall in love, commit with marriage, exchange affections and celebrate the passing of anniversaries. It is the palpable taken-for-grantedness of this subject, which impacts so many, that makes romantic love worthy and necessary of contemporary research.

## **1.2 Theoretical Foundations**

This section touches on the methodology of the research and outlines the philosophical and theoretical position that informs this thesis. It also introduces the aims of the study as well as the key concepts and terms that feature in the research.

### **1.2.1 Foucault and Social Constructionism**

The thesis is inspired by Michel Foucault, a philosopher and social theorist, who earned a reputation for challenging taken-for-granted ways of being. Concerned for human suffering, he looked at the historicity of madness, sexuality and prisoners. By historicising, or exploring the 'histories of the present' as Foucault referred to them, he was able to call into question common sense ways of being and thinking. Foucault's concepts are widely employed in politics, social policy, and feminist studies amongst others, as they challenge held certainties and open ways for new forms of thinking. His ideas are dominant within a branch of social constructionism that is sometimes called macro social constructionism. Social constructionism is a broad theoretical framework, which denies the idea of a single universal 'truth' and proposes that knowledge is constructed between people through everyday

practices and language. Meanwhile, macro social constructionism looks at the constructive force of culturally available discourses and the power relations embedded within their use (e.g. Burr, 2015).

The word 'discourse', mentioned above, refers to systems of meaning and talk that provide readily accessible ways of understanding an object or interpreting an experience (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2013). The marital discourse, for example, involves concepts like commitment, trust and fidelity, whereas the romantic discourse brings together ideas of love and monogamy and has marriage as its goal (Willig, 2013). Discourses operate as the medium through which we come to understand our environment and ourselves.

In his landmark volume of works on the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault contrasted the explosion of views and talk of sex from the seventeenth to the twentieth century in his initial volume (1976/1990), with the discourse and systems of the ancient Greeks (1984/1990) and also with the first centuries AD (1984/1988). His comprehensive analysis of discourse exposes sexuality as a variable social construct, which now has the power to define who we are. Sexual intercourse in pagan society was just something that people did, like sleeping. It was not something to dwell upon or morally review. Foucault demonstrated that sexuality, in its contemporary form, has an inflated significance that is produced by practices in psychiatry, health, law and family structure. The idea of looking at our behaviours through the concept of discourse is voiced as being very effective for considering how unlikely categorisations sometimes get accepted as real and ahistorical (Burns, 2000). In Chapter 3, I borrow from Foucault and chart how romantic love has been conceived from the tenth century to modern day. This history of romance affirms that romantic notions are culturally and historically contingent.

### **1.2.2 Theorising Subjectivity**

My aim is to maintain a Foucauldian inspired, social constructionist approach in this research on the topic of romance in established relationships. A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) is undertaken to map out the discursive resources available for people to talk about romance. This accessible discourse, I have termed the participants' or group's discursive terrain. It is an understanding of the romantic discursive terrain that I want to attain with the FDA.

The FDA seeks to explore how participants in established relationships construct romance and are positioned by ready-made and historically situated discourses. The specific research questions are:

- What discursive resources are available and drawn on?
- How does available discourse and relational context construct the ways in which people can experience themselves in their relationships?

Foucault proposed (1966/1994) that understanding subjectivity—ways of being, thinking and feeling—does not require an examination of an individual's thoughts but a consideration of the wider conditions that make it possible to think in a certain way (and not in other ways). This view holds that individuals are constrained in their speaking positions by available discourse, as they pre-exist the individual (Willig, 1999). Therefore, within the romantic discursive terrain, it is theorised that individuals take up various subject positions which provide the basis for their identity and romantic experience (e.g. Burr, 2015).

As such, the FDA can deduce, from within various subject positions, what can be felt, thought and experienced. However, the reality of what people actually feel, think or experience cannot be answered by this approach alone (Willig, 2013). Consequently, with reference to hermeneutic phenomenology in the form of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), I am choosing to *enliven* my research, to voice the lived consequences of romantic discourses.

Broadly speaking, phenomenologists explore the experience of being human. Phenomenology originated in the early twentieth century with philosopher Edmund Husserl, who proposed people return 'to the things themselves' which can be read as encouraging people to return to their immediate experience of things. He suggested that we isolate preconceptions and taken-for-granted assumptions in order to attend closely to perceptions of experiential content. In this way Husserl offered, we could get to the essence of a phenomenon. However, this view was challenged by many including Husserl's student, Martin Heidegger, who explicated that access to people's lived world is always through interpretation. 'Heidegger...points out that our interpretations of experience are always shaped, limited and enabled by, language' (Smith *et al.*, 2009, p.194). IPA owes much to Heidegger, who articulated a hermeneutic phenomenology; hermeneutics being defined as the theory of the rules that preside over interpretation (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2013; Stewart, 1989).

Therefore, IPA is primarily concerned with accessing the meaning and texture of subjective experience, whether that be affective or embodied. It is an articulation of a phenomenological approach to psychology that involves the meticulous examination of human lived experience, in an attempt to provide an 'insider's perspective'. Of key importance to IPA is giving voice to the experiential claims and concerns of people. In this research, an IPA is undertaken to gain an insider perspective of participants' experiential and emotional romantic realities. The specific research questions are:

- What does romance mean to people in established relationships?
- How do people in established relationships experience romance?

While IPA attends to individual meaning it has relatively little to say about the origins of the concepts used by participants to construct their experience. Thus, the complementary use of FDA, alongside IPA, provides us with a more cohesive view. Indeed, each of these inquiries has individual merit in the study of romance. However, their combination sheds light on the *process* whereby individuals in established relationships position themselves within available discourses and thus experience their relationships as romantic (or otherwise).

Positioning is therefore an important feature of this dual focus research. Positioning theory helps us conceptualise how different forms of subjective experience are produced. It endeavours to theorise subjectivity, via the concept of the subject position, by proposing that the individual is constructed by the take up of various subject positions in discourse. Davies and Harré (1999) assert that in speaking from a particular position, the conversant is bringing their history as they see it; that is the discourses and positions they have occupied in the past. The choices between different subject positions will be mediated by the emotional meaning they associate with those positions based on ones own or other people's experiences. In this way, the IPA with its attention on affective and experiential sense-making, in conjunction with the FDA, helps us understand why we mobilise some positions and not others, how we position and are positioned. (For a detailed account of the relationship between emotions and positioning see Chapter 8: Discursive Emotional Dynamics.)

### **1.2.3 The *Enlivened* Discursive Terrain**

I envisage the combination of FDA and IPA as providing an *enlivened* view of romance in today's established relationships. FDA creates an outline of the discursive terrain; it identifies the discourses and the subject positions they contain. The same person can be seen speaking from different subject positions and the FDA registers this movement. However, the IPA with its attention on emotion and experiential claims, can be seen as fully *enlivening* the terrain. We can now appreciate someone's joy and hope, or their hurt and frustration. Also, we can observe the entrenchment or pace and gait that comes with taking up subject positions; some may be emphatically rejected while others may be swiftly adopted.

I argue that this *enlivened* view of romance enables awareness of the experiential actuality of taking up specific subject positions. We can additionally grasp the effort it might take to shift from one subject position to another; which may assist in counselling those who understand themselves as suffering from some form of romantic distress.

### **1.2.4 Theoretical Alignment**

There is wariness among researchers to combine FDA and IPA, which largely stems from epistemological tensions. This wariness manifests in a marked absence of research deployed

that combines the two; the exception being Colahan's (2014) research on relationship satisfaction.

Phenomenology, as originally conceived by Husserl, strived to identify the essence of the experience—to expose the invariant properties that lie beneath subjective perception (Smith *et al.*, 2009), which has led to claims of IPA being essentialist. Yet IPA is an articulation of hermeneutic phenomenology and Heidegger's position on reality is that things exist, and would have existed even if humans had not, but nothing is revealed except when it is encountered and brought meaningfully into the context of human life (Larkin *et al.*, 2006). If people make meaning, then for something to be encountered as meaningful is a product of our interaction with others. This is similar to Edwards' (1997, cited in Edley, 2001) epistemic view of social constructionism, whereby the rules of discourse govern any attempt to describe the world. In this way, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology is sympathetic to social constructionism and enables the realisation of theoretical cohesion.

Indeed, Smith (2012) the health psychologist who pioneered the development of IPA in the 1990s, asserts that IPA is social constructionist. In conversation with Willig (2012), Smith refutes projections that “for example IPA is essentialist and individualist, it's not, it's social constructionist. There are entities, discourses pre-existing... that strongly influences the person and it's the symbiosis between the individual trying to make sense of what's happening to them and the resources they have to do that” (Smith & Willig, p. 213).

FDA offers the IPA researcher access to the wider context of the phenomenon—its cultural and historical location and the constructions that are privileged. In this way, the IPA researcher can be more cognisant and sensitive to the person-in-context, and more understanding of their experiential claims. Colahan's (2014) pioneering research that employed both IPA and FDA recognised the potency of this combination. However, he theorised their relationship differently and adopted a critical realist stance. In positioning this research as social constructionist, I conceptualise the relationship between discourse and experience as language-dominant which proposes that discourse constructs experience—with discursive resources producing particular experiential realities (Willig, 2017). This conceptualisation shapes the way my interpretations from the IPA are integrated with the FDA and how the reading unfolds. It theorises that experience is the product of taking up positions in discourse. For the subject of romance, the theorising of methodology as outlined above, acknowledges that the lived experience of romantic love is produced by language and society. As such, what is experienced as romantic love is not owned by an individual but is produced by positions held within the romantic discursive terrain. Accordingly, this thesis attempts to elucidate the *process* of discursive production of romantic realities.

Moreover, this theoretical cohesion offers an interactive reading of the sets of data, which is inaccessible to researchers who might adopt pragmatic positions. Indeed, my theorising of the research as social constructionist and conceptualising the relationship between discourse and experience as language-dominant, paves the way for a dialogue between FDA and IPA. In this way, the thesis builds on the work of Colahan (2014) and makes a contribution to our understanding of how these two methodologies connect.

### **1.2.5 The Dual Focus *Enlivened* Approach**

The IPA explores in detail participants' personal lived romantic experience and how participants make sense of the experience that they label as 'romance'. It naturally *enlivenes* as it encompasses affective and embodied experience. FDA informs an approach which considers how broader social, historical and political discursive practices shape what can be said about romance and thereby outlines a discursive frame for romance. Neither approach on its own is able to theorise the lived consequences of discursive constructions.

To identify accessible discourses and available subject positions, a Foucauldian inspired analysis was taken to discussions of romance. In order to achieve this, I conducted five focus groups, each with six to eight members, to see how they talk about romantic love and then analysed their talk using FDA (Willig, 2008, 2013). I chose to look at group talk rather than analyse individual interviews because focus groups provide an opportunity to witness the actual process of collective sense-making. After all, the social constructionist view is that human experience is produced within social settings (e.g. Wilkinson, 1999). Whereas for the IPA, twelve participants were individually interviewed about their personal experience of romantic love. In this case, a group setting may have inhibited intimate disclosures. The resultant transcripts from the interviews were then subjected to a line-by-line analysis in order to grasp an insider perspective of the participants' lived romantic reality (IPA; Smith *et al.*, 2009).

This approach that combined FDA with IPA mirrors the move of other qualitative researchers (e.g. Chamberlain *et al.*, 2011; Frost, 2009; Sheridan, 2014) who apply multiple methods to enrich their interpretation of a phenomenon. It reflected the integrity with which I hoped to understand the subjective experience of romance in established relationships; the FDA precedes the IPA with the wider-context of the phenomenon, in this way I endeavoured to be more sensitive to the person-in-context and more understanding of their experiential claims. Each of these inquiries has merit in the study of romance, however the integration of them enables us to explore the *process* of how people position themselves within available discourse and therefore experience their relationship as romantic (or otherwise).

### 1.2.6 My Discursive Terrain

Aware that my interpretation of the transcripts reflects the person that I am—it is a product of my discursive terrain—I need to give the reader some context. To this end, here is an introduction to myself as researcher and an explanation as to why I chose to study romantic love.

I come to this research having a business career and more than ten years' experience as a Chartered Organisational Psychologist. I have always harboured an academic interest in the relationship sphere, for example my conversion diploma dissertation was on adult attachment style. Even working in-house managing global talent for a major corporation, I was frequently navigating relationship issues. Whether it was the devastated senior female executive whose husband filed for divorce just weeks before their twenty fifth anniversary, or the ex-lovers who sulked at having to work on the same team to the detriment of group morale. Frequently an employee's tangible drop in performance could be traced back to relationship problems at home. In this corporate setting, I became increasingly sensitive to the fragility of relationships and also concerned for people who blindly take for granted a partner or spouse.

Faced with the vulnerability of love and relationships, I was spurred on to invest in my own and when my partner was assigned a role in a different country, romantically I took a career break and followed him. During that period, I researched and published a book *The Date Night Manifesto*; a self-help book designed to bring about romance on a date night and bolster relationship strength. While written in a light-hearted style, the book's principles are based on psychological principles. *The Date Night Manifesto* encourages savouring, gratitude and kindness as endorsed by those in the realm of positive psychology. It also deploys concepts from behavioural psychology, to help the reader establish new ways of being romantic.

An assumption underlying the book is that there is an interconnected relationship between emotional and physical connection that for example having a rewarding, deep and meaningful conversation can be seductive. This can be identified now, having become aware of discourses, as my privileging of the 'intimacy' discourse, which values a best friend style of relationship. The book also promotes courtship rituals, getting dressed up or choosing a candle-lit restaurant to signpost a romantic agenda. In this way, I am also drawing on the chivalric 'romantic love' discourse. Given that my speaking positions in the book are constrained by available discourse as they pre-exist the individual, then I am not alone in mobilising the 'intimacy' and 'romantic love' discourses. Indeed, Shumway (2003) posits that because these two discourses both influence people, most individuals remain unaware of their difference.

It was from this discursive terrain that I began the PhD. Writing now, at the end of the research journey, I observe that I still locate myself in these same discourses but I am aware and

observant of their differing requirements. I also find myself more cognisant and therefore respectful of my partner's discursive location.

### **1.2.7 Theoretical Summary**

This section started with an introduction to Foucault and the spirit from which I approached the research. It then outlined the rationale for the dual focus methodology that has produced this *enlivened* study of romance in established relationships. Importantly it acknowledges cohesion and theorises the research as social constructionist. It shows that IPA and FDA while distinctive, can also be understood as complementary in allowing for psychological research that values the phenomenological, and locates subjective experience within a particular social and discursive context. Concerned for the person-in-context I concluded this section by providing the reader with a view of my own discursive terrain.

Having presented the rationale for the topic as well as the theoretical foundations and aims of the research project, I now offer a chapter-by-chapter outline of this thesis.

## **1.3 Outline and Structure of the Thesis**

### **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

Chapter 2 critically evaluates the existing mainstream and social constructionist literature on romantic love. This review starts with the mainstream literature and acknowledges the abundance of research that stems from the latter half of the twentieth century. At that time it was fashionable to study coupledness and heterosexual love as it represented an uncharted area of scientific knowledge. In the pursuit of generalisable laws, researchers produced definitions, theories and taxonomies of love. This quest for a singular 'truth' introduced debate: as to whether romantic love is gendered; and as to whether romantic love dies in a mature relationship or has the potential to exist.

The literature review also presents romantic love as socially constructed; it looks at the deconstruction of romance in fiction and text, which reveals the gendered nature of romantic scripts. This leads to a critical look at romantic love through the feminist lens.

Chapter 2 concludes that beyond the experience of love in new relationships which is presented as romantic, there is little effort made by researchers to distinguish the discourse and experience of love in general, from that of romance in the established relationship.

### **Chapter 3 A History of Romantic Love**

This chapter highlights the discursive context from which the psychological knowledge, as portrayed in Chapter 2, and our current understanding of romantic love has been produced.

It illustrates how our understanding is historically-situated, that meanings constructed around romantic love vary over the centuries, and that depending on our location in time we are positioned by available discourse.

The history of romance presented in this chapter shows that romantic love is a Western construct that evolved from the glorification of courtly love in twelfth century feudal Europe and became the dominant way of conceiving marriage in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It shows that romance in an established relationship is a social practice, with verbal disclosures and sustaining a sexual spark being part of its modern form. Acknowledging romantic love as a social practice facilitated my social constructionist conceptualisation of the relationship between experience and discourse that was needed to theorise the dual focus methodology, as discussed next in Chapter 4: Enlivened Social Constructionism.

#### **Chapter 4 Enlivened Social Constructionism: A Dual Focus Methodology**

This chapter situates the research within current discussions on social constructionism and outlines the philosophical and theoretical position that informs this thesis. It introduces the methodologies that have contributed to the approach taken to the study of romance in established relationships, specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA).

In this chapter I harness Heidegger's view of the person-in-context to enable the realisation of theoretical cohesion. I position the research as social constructionist, and conceptualise the relationship between discourse and experience as language-dominant; which offers that discursive resources produce particular experiential realities. This conceptualisation paves the way for an unprecedented dialogue between FDA and IPA and makes a contribution to our understanding of how these two methodologies connect.

Complementing the social constructionist study with hermeneutic phenomenology *enlivens* the research and voices the felt consequences of discourses. In this way, the synthesis of FDA and IPA provides an input into the development of a social constructionist psychology that provides us with an appreciation and recognition of peoples' lived and felt realities.

This chapter's introduction and rationale for the social constructionist position taken in this thesis, precedes and provides a basis for Chapter 5: Methods, which provides a detailed account of the specific methodological procedures used to operationalise the research.

#### **Chapter 5 Methods**

Chapter 5 provides a detailed description of the methods used for data collection and analysis, and the rationale for their use. The research involved two independent inquiries with people

in established relationships: in-depth interviews with IPA to capture an insider perspective of the lived experience of romance; and focus groups with FDA to map the romantic discursive terrain and establish the means by which people come to understand their romantic reality.

Information concerning the participants, the data collection process and the ethical procedures are also included. Methodological choices are expanded upon, including my decision to draw participants from the working class. The chapter describes the analytical procedures that were undertaken to produce the IPA (Smith *et al.*, 2009) and FDA (Willig, 2008, 2013). It also shares the theoretical and practical challenges encountered and how these were navigated. Concerned with transparency and instilling confidence in the quality of interpretation, this chapter is extensive and supported by numerous appendixes.

### **Chapter 6 Romantic Discursive Terrain**

Chapter 6 presents an FDA interpretative reading of the transcripts from the five focus groups. It attempts to detail the romantic discursive terrain of the working-class participants and demonstrates how women and men in established relationships construct romance and are positioned by ready-made discourses. The chapter starts by describing my reading of the participants' discursive resources and introduces the identified subject positions. It then attends to how available discourse and relational context construct the ways in which people may experience themselves in their relationships. Chapter 6 sets out the context within which each subject position may be mobilised and how they may interact with each other. Numerous extracts from the focus groups are provided to illustrate my interpretations from the FDA.

### **Chapter 7 An Insider Perspective of Romantic Realities**

Chapter 7 explains and illustrates the master experiential themes generated by the IPA of the twelve in-depth interviews—and attempts to offer an inside perspective of participants' romantic realities. In accounting for participants' experiences of romance in their relationships we need to consider their discursive resources, to establish the means by which they come to understand romance (or lack of). Hence, I conclude Chapter 7 with reference to the FDA and try to demonstrate how the take up of available subject positions might produce romantic understandings and realities. Therefore, this final section presents the *enlivened* research that integrates the IPA reading with the FDA and provides a view to the discursive production of romantic realities. Uniquely, in combining the IPA with the FDA, we are able to articulate the romantic experiential and emotional reality that might be produced from location within the discursive terrain.

### **Chapter 8 Discursive Emotional Dynamics**

Chapter 8 presents the *enlivening* of my FDA with IPA as a theoretical offering called Discursive Emotional Dynamics. It builds on *Discourse Dynamics* as introduced by Parker (1992) and

theorises the relationship between discourse, subjectivity and experience by translating Willig's (2000) recommended discourse-dynamic approach for health care, to the social practice of romance. The theoretical offering of Discursive Emotional Dynamics attempts to illustrate how available discourse and relationship contexts construct the ways in which we may experience ourselves in our romantic relationships. It enables us to explore the relationship between discourses, accordant subject positions and the emotional meaning making constructed within that context which then implicates future positioning. Importantly, Discursive Emotional Dynamics gives us some understanding as to why we mobilise some subject positions and not others.

### **Chapter 9 Conclusions and Prospects**

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by presenting the key insights as generated from the readings of the FDA and the IPA. This chapter acknowledges the theoretical and methodological contributions that this research might offer to the field of psychology and reflects on opportunities for future research. While there are a number of potential practical applications, those recommendations that could support couples counselling and assist women and men who wish to sustain a romantic relationship are discussed.

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## Chapter 2

# Literature Review

I embark on this chapter acknowledging the challenge of presenting a literature review for a social constructionist thesis, where an appraisal of mainstream perspectives has a tendency to default to a singular epistemological critique<sup>3</sup>. For this reason, I have chosen to take the mainstream literature at face value, recognising its presence and respecting its contribution to the study of romantic love—and additionally critiquing it on its own terms. Thus, a review of the social constructionist literature is presented separately in the second section of this chapter. This first section is not a naïve reading; rather it is one that acknowledges the mainstream accounts of knowledge as some of many ‘truths’ that feature in the discursive terrain.

### 2.1 Introduction

In the 1960s just 24% of females and 65% of males considered romantic love as essential to marriage, today around 80% of college students in the United States believe it to be key (Reis & Aron, 2008). While we can see a multitude of other relationship formulae: couples who do not marry, individuals who choose to remain single, couples who live separately, gay and lesbian marriages; the allure of romantic love and its classic conventions—the white wedding, romantic movies, love songs, Valentine’s day and so on, is as prominent as ever. The hunger for—and requirements of—romantic love are arguably bigger today than in the 1960s (see also Chapter 3 for the genealogy of romantic love, which charts in detail the rise of romantic love in the established relationship). Yet, there appears to be a disparity between the public appetite for heterosexual romantic love and current academic interest in it.

#### **Heterosexual ‘romantic love’ in the academic terrain: an unfashionable conversation**

It can be seen in this literature review, that the study of romantic love was in vogue from the 1970s and the 1980s and continued to be of interest to the postmodern feminists into the 1990s and early 2000s. However, in recent times there has been a shift in the literature on romantic love. A search on ‘romantic love’, using the library’s vast database for articles post 2010, presented three strands of research: modern technologies for dating; life-changing or ‘deviant’ issues; and non-traditional relationships. The first strand of works draws attention to relationship formation via speed dating, online dating and internet mediation. Meanwhile,

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<sup>3</sup> In that mainstream investigators subscribe to realist, positivistic positions, which in the pursuit of universal laws assume that a subject can be empirically measured and understood.

the literature that focuses on the established couple tends to explore the impact of life-changing health issues and unsettling disclosures or 'deviance' on those relationships. Such articles might look at the effect of depression, major illness, infidelity, sexting deception, as well as pornography consumption on relationship wellbeing and lived experience. The third strand of literature raises attention to romantic love in the less conventional couple or relationship structure; these articles might look at people with learning disabilities and their romantic love experiences. More frequently, they consider the romantic love experiences within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community and/or those who have multiple partner relationships.

In sum, contemporary scholars seem to consider the romantic love experiences of the typical established heterosexual couple as passé; they assume that this front has been covered and already 'understood'. There's a sense that researchers should engage with more current, thought provoking, or politically motivated issues; and rightfully, give voice to those who have been marginalised.

This taken-for-granted knowledge that is heterosexual romantic love, among academics, has a surprising manifestation in the literature: it can be observed that there are literally hundreds of articles that reference 'romantic couple', 'romantic partner' and 'romantic relationships' in their titles.<sup>4</sup> On closer inspection it appears that the term 'romantic partner' is being used as a demographic label, it is a descriptor for those in a couple dyad, perhaps it is seen as a more acceptable alternative to the traditional husband and wife or married couple. Yet unlike married couple, established relationship or co-habiting partners, the label 'romantic couple' ascribes a certain experiential quality to the relationship. The use of 'romantic' designations, in some cases, can be deciphered as purely a demographic label, particularly when positioned with other relationship descriptors like peer.<sup>5</sup> However, in the most part, the use of the term is confusing especially when the authors have not qualified, nor are attempting to qualify, whether the couples are 'romantic' or not. This lack of differentiation likely reflects the dominant Western view that romance necessarily foregrounds the established couple. Alternatively, the indiscriminate labelling of couples and their love as automatically romantic, could be testament to the privileging of romantic love in a relationship to such an extent—it is assumed to be normal and/or healthy—that it would be disconcerting to suggest that some relationships are not.

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<sup>4</sup> Examples of journal article titles: *A Daily Diary Study of Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms and Romantic Partner Accommodation (2017)*; *Goal Disengagement, Well-Being, and Goal Achievement in Romantic Couples Pursuing Health Behavior Change: Evidence from Two Daily Diary Studies (2017)*.

<sup>5</sup> For example, *Bariatric Surgery Candidates' Peer and Romantic Relationships and Associations with Health Behaviors (2016)*.

This chapter is divided into two sections of literature—as discussed this reflects a separation of the social constructionist from the mainstream and mostly draws on authors and their research from the period of 1970 to the 1990s. The first section presents a summary of the experiential research on romantic love as found in the mainstream literature; it heavily draws on the 2006 *New Psychology of Love*, a follow-up to the seminal 1988 *The Psychology of Love*. As part of this section, I explore accepted definitions, theories and taxonomies of love. This pursuit of generalisable laws as seen in the literature, brings up debates: as to whether romantic love is gendered; and as to whether romantic love dies in a mature relationship or has the potential to exist.

The second section presents romantic love as socially constructed; it looks at the research that deconstructs romance in fiction and reveals the gendered nature of romantic scripts. This leads to a critical look at romantic love through the feminist lens. This second section introduces the rational constructions of romantic love as presented by Giddens (1992) in his democratic relationship and the ‘working at relationship’ discourses that feature in the self-help books and marital guidance. The chapter concludes that there is much research on the characteristics or behaviours of love in enduring relationships, yet little is understood as to whether these practices are interpreted as romantic or not.

The switch in perspectives in the literature between the first and second sections, (therefore between mainstream and the experiential and social constructionist) recognises that individuals understand romantic love as ‘real’; that there is an emotional and experiential quality to it, while the later social constructionist section acknowledges that this lived experience is produced by society and language. In this way, the two perspectives drawn from the literature resonate with the methodological approach that I deploy which combines the phenomenological with social constructionist. My choice of methods, as introduced in Chapter 1, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) are relatively modern entrants in the research field. FDA is a Foucauldian inspired approach to analysis that was developed in the 1990s; Ian Parker was a pioneer in making FDA accessible to the research community (see Parker, 1992). Meanwhile, IPA was first developed by Jonathan Smith (e.g. 1996) in relation to health psychology. In complementary ways, they both serve to explore those experiences that society can overlook as normal. At the point when scholarly interest in the subject of heterosexual romantic love was waning, these methods were just being introduced. In this way, I am meaningfully deploying an up-to-the-minute approach to an old fashioned taken-for-granted subject.

## **2.2 Mainstream and Experiential Perspectives**

### **Brief history of the scientific study of love**

Mainstream psychology applauds itself on its twentieth century body of knowledge on love<sup>6</sup> in the couple dyad. A number of traditions can be seen to have come together to produce this scientific research on love, these include: evolutionary theorising, psychodynamic theories, cultural anthropology, humanistic thought and the feminist movement. These dominant theories and perspectives, expanded on below, furnish the concepts and constructs which have been used to conduct mainstream research into (romantic) love.

Evolutionary theorising, initiated by Charles Darwin who proposed that reproductive success was a central factor underlying human activity, supports ideas of 'natural' gender differences, with initial love cementing pair bonding and sustained love as necessary to ensure offspring survive through to adulthood. This theory has spawned a number of concepts on love—that include mate preference, courting strategies and attachment. For example, it is widely accepted that humans typically begin life in an emotional attachment with one or more parent and that the nature and quality of that early bond provides a model which goes on to shape further adult attachments whether it be with friends, colleagues, siblings, lovers or spouses. Adult attachment theory proposes that working models of love, installed from early child experiences, provide individuals with a cognitive system for love (Shaver *et al.*, 1988).

Current literature on the subject of love also reflects a number of ideas first introduced by Sigmund Freud. Most notably is the lack of conscious awareness of issues that might be impacting relationship behaviours; to include motives that stem from early childhood experiences and the role of sexuality. Moreover, the idea of particular patterns of love as constituting subjectivities, like attachments and love styles, can be seen to originate from Freud's careful analysis of 'love histories' (Langford, 1999). Freud himself, was dismissive of romantic love, seeing it as blocked sex urges (Tennov, 1979/1999). He was also of the mind that romantic love was unlikely to bring the security and happiness that individuals craved (Langford, 1999).

Also impacting the research of love is the work of Margaret Mead, a prominent twentieth century cultural anthropologist whose research showed love being expressed in diverse ways across cultures (Reis & Aron, 2008). In this way, researchers are prompted to contemplate the significance of culture and socialisation. At a different end of the spectrum, looking at individual motivations in the pursuit of a whole self, is the work of Abraham Maslow (1962).

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<sup>6</sup> While my research is directed towards romantic love, the literature often equates it with love in the couple dyad, or subsumes it within this category. For that reason, much of the following reflects investigations into love in the couple forum.

Maslow championed the study of love and was a pioneer of humanistic psychology, which paints a picture in which everyone has a claim to happiness. Many people today conceive love and coupledness as central to fulfilment and happiness. Accordingly, we can also understand the prevalence of studies that involve measures of relationship satisfaction.

Also weighing in heavily on the research into love is the feminist movement of the 1970s; their concern with female subjugation brought marriage under the spotlight. The often-quoted feminist dictum: 'It starts when you sink in his arms and ends with your arms in his sink' fairly sums their perspective (e.g. Burns, 2000; Jackson, 1993). In contrast to the other views outlined above, romantic love is seen by many feminist scholars as a social construct that protects male privilege. In this way, feminist approaches to the study of romantic love can be seen to be informed by social constructionist perspectives (see 2.3 *Romantic Love as a Social Construction*). Yet, feminist research is also well represented, and heavily cited, in the mainstream literature (e.g. Cancian 1987/1990; Thompson, 1995). It can be seen that feminist concerns with gendered love fuelled both social constructionist and mainstream research.

These perspectives—feminist, psychodynamic, evolutionary and humanistic—all endorsed the relevance of the study of love. In addition, they provided the concepts and constructs that we see deployed in the literature.

### **2.2.1 Shedding Light on the Experience of Romantic Love**

A key feature of the research into love during the twentieth century was theory formulation and the development of taxonomies – which spawned the rapid rise of empirical scales in attempts to define and measure love. While phenomenological studies are lacking, there have been a number of empirical studies, surveys and interview-based research that provide indications of the lived experience of love in relationships. As shown below, there appears to be considerable attention given to love in general within the couple-dyad, but much less focus on the practice of romantic love.

This subsection charts the findings of some of the most prominent psychological researchers in the field of love (e.g. Aron, Berscheid, Cancian, Fehr, Hatfield, Hendrick and Hendrick, Lee, Sternberg and Tennov). It also observes that love has been essentially condensed in the positivist pursuit of universal 'truth' and in this quest for generalisable laws of love the following questions arose: did romantic love have the potential endure?; and was it gendered?

A noticeable way in which romantic love is constructed as differing from parental or brotherly love is that it is sexual. The most prominent taxonomy in place today, takes this into account with passionate vs. companionate love as being the two fundamental components of love in coupledness (Berscheid & Walster, 1974). This theory was borne out of experimental research

undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s on individuals and emotions. Passionate love being likened to being 'in love', incorporates obsession elements, described as 'limerence' by Tennov (1979/1999), and is heavily associated with attraction and courtship in general. Meanwhile, companionate love distinguishes itself as not necessarily including physical attraction or sexual desire, but associated with attachment and deep friendship (e.g. Grote & Frieze, 1994). Measures have been subsequently developed to tap into these constructs of love; they include the Passion Love Scale (PLS, Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986) and the Friendship-Based Love Scale (FBL, Grote & Frieze, 1994). In contrast, Lee's (1973, cited in Lee, 1988) theory of love is based on methodical cataloguing of love constructs as found in philosophy and classical literature. In order to verify his typology of love as resonating with a real-world population, Lee went onto the streets in Canada and Britain and recruited people to talk to him about their love experiences. Based on this data, he was able to confirm representational validity for eight love styles: eros (passionate love), ludus (game-playing love), storge (friendship-based love), pragma (practical love), mania (dependent, possessive love), storgic eros (responsive love), ludic eros (fun, creative love), storgic ludus (sexual affairs outside of primary love). To identify a person's preferred style of love, Lee, recognising the complexity of the experience of love, championed an elaborate Love Story Card Sort; or as a minimum, a careful review of a person's background and history of love. However, to Lee's disconcertion his methods which were time and resource intensive were bypassed by researchers, who instead deployed time-saving alternatives; for example Hendrick and Hendrick's (1986) questionnaire to measure an individual's preference for Lee's love styles, called the Love Attitude Scale (LAS). Mainstream researchers were attracted to the rating scales as being efficient and enabling correlations with other relational constructs and interpersonal factors.

Marston *et al.* (1987) embraced a qualitative approach, like Lee (1988), to explore people's experiential definitions of romantic love. They posited that love could be experienced in a range of different ways: in terms of embodied reactions, patterns of behaviours, non-verbal perceptions and relational constructs. With a sample of mostly married or co-habiting people, Marston *et al.* (1987) asked open-ended questions around the phenomenology of love, specifically inquiring about feelings and the physiology of love; as well as what the colours and rhythms of love might look like. They also delved into how love is communicated and received. Using content analysis, categories were created which were then subjected to cluster analysis. Their study revealed six 'ways of romantic love': collaborative, active, secure, intuitive, committed and traditional romantic. The Love Ways Inventory was latterly developed by Hecht *et al.* (1994) to measure levels of these 'love ways'; it is a self-report instrument, designed in a similar way as the LAS, based on factor analysis and again can be seen to be correlated with various relational constructs.

Best known for his triangular theory of love, Sternberg (1988, 2006) proposed a taxonomy involving: passion, intimacy, and decision/commitment. This is similar to the passionate vs. companionate taxonomy, however Sternberg (1988, 2006) divides companionate love into two: intimacy and decision/commitment. According to the triangular theory of love, the combinations of these components generate eight different kinds of love, one of which he defines as romantic love: a blend of intimacy and passion but without commitment. Sternberg (1988, 2006) advocates the ideal as consummate love, which represents the three components: passion, intimacy and decision/commitment in equal proportions. This would translate to physical desire and longing for each other, as well as intimate communication, with a focus on commitment too. Sternberg has created his own instrument, the Triangular Love Scale, which serves to measure someone's expression of love (Sternberg, 1997). It is a self-report instrument, requiring people to rate their responses on a 1-9 scale to a combination of feeling and action statements. The premise here is that each of the three components of love has a set of actions associated with it, for example, passion might manifest through gazing, touching and sexual intimacy. The Sternberg Triangular Love Scale (1997) was tested with 185 heterosexual adult individuals who reported being in a current relationship. Like LAS and the Love Ways Inventory, the Triangular Scale was validated by factor analysis and can be seen to be correlated with various relational constructs.

Another mainstay in the literature on love is Fehr (2006) who has been undertaking prototype analysis since the 1980s to understand how love is conceptualised by 'ordinary people' (primarily university students). This process involves feature listing, whereby Fehr would ask students to itemise attributes of love: those that were most frequently listed were seen as prototypical, whereas those less often documented were considered peripheral. She offers that love has a prototype structure in that some characteristics—for example, trust and caring—are more core than others. Fehr (2006) suggests that in considering different types of love, people see them as reflecting the same essential qualities. Mainstream researchers are enthused that investigations into the latent dimensions, using factor analysis, of Fehr's prototype of love reveals: intimacy, passion and commitment, which match Sternberg's triangular theory of love (Aron & Westbay, 1996).

In an attempt to subsume these love theories, Shaver *et al.* (1988) argued that adult attachment which conceptualised romantic bonds between partners as emotional attachments derived from childhood—that took the form of secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent—could account for them. Many scholars from wide ranging disciplines refuted this argument, pointing out that romantic relations in adults did not centrally revolve around attachment systems (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 1999, cited in Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006; Shumway, 2003). As was the imperative of the time, Shaver *et al.* (1988) developed a self-report instrument to measure an adult's attachment style (Adult Attachment Questionnaire);

subsequently a multitude of attachment instruments have entered the market (e.g. Relationship Questionnaire: Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Attachment Style Scale: Becker & Billings, 1997). Furthermore, correlations between these instruments that report on attachment styles and those that measure facets of the love theories are evident, for example the anxious-ambivalent type is related to mania, while the avoidant type is related to ludus (e.g. Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006).

As can be seen, the different taxonomies (including attachment styles) typically reflect overlapping constructs of love, for example companionate love can be read as storge and passionate love can be seen as a combination of eros and mania (e.g. Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006). Accordingly, there have been numerous reports of correlations between the various measures, such as the Sternberg's Scales and the Love Ways Inventory (Hecht *et al.*, 1994); and the Friendship-based Love Scale aligning with the Love Attitude Scale (Grote & Frieze, 1994). Indeed, Hendrick and Hendrick (1989) compared five different instruments that measure romantic love (here the Hendricks use romantic love interchangeably with love, as a descriptor of love in the couple-dyad) and found that all scales were intercorrelated and that two dominant factors emerged that matched the passionate and companionate love taxonomy as first described by Berscheid and Walster (1974). Support of this two-component taxonomy also comes from the biological cross-species perspective, whereby companionate and passionate love are thought to achieve different evolutionary goals (Buss, 2006). Passionate love is focused toward mate attraction and selection for the purpose of reproduction; and also the significant cognitive and emotional disorientation is thought to facilitate the change needed for an individual to adjust routines and activities to incorporate a partner. Considerably less research has been undertaken to look at the evolutionary significance of companionate love (or commitment and intimacy), however, it is thought that it serves to sustain the relationship through the period of raising children (Fisher, 2006).

The alignment of these findings—as seen from biological perspectives, attachment and empirical measures—are suggestive of a 'truth' and a generalisable law of love; the above investigators subscribe to realist, positivistic positions that see love as something to be understood and measured through experimental research. In which case, for them, the convergence of findings validates this 'truth', while social constructionists see this coherence as reproduction and merely reflective of available discursive resources. In the positivist pursuit of scientific definitions and empirical scales, love has been essentially condensed by the likes of factor analysis that focuses the attention of the investigator on identifying underlying latent constructs. It can be seen from the research discussed above, that much of the complexity and richness of the experience of love (as expressed via Lee, 1988, and Marston *et al.*, 1987) seems to have been lost in the surge to quantify, measure and correlate.

While we can see that the development of taxonomies and self-report measures dominates much of the literature, we can observe that in this pursuit of generalisable laws of love debates emerged. There was the argument as to whether romantic love lived on in established relationships, or died out with time. Secondly, there was dispute as to whether romantic love was gendered. Fuelling these debates is confusion in the literature as to the definition of romantic love; some authors specifically define romantic love (e.g. Sternberg, 1988, 2006) while most appear to use it interchangeably with love in the couple dyad (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006), and still others seem to see it as a subset of that love, and synonymous with passion (Buss, 2006; Fisher, 2006). A more comprehensive critique of the mainstream literature can be seen at the end of this first section (see 2.2.2 *Critique of the Mainstream Literature*).

### 2.2.1.1 Does Romantic Love Exist in Long-Term Relationships?

Romance is generally constructed as a part of the courtship process that in the Western society foregrounds marriage, or longer term commitment. Many of the major theories construct romantic love as predictably diminishing during the course of a relationship (Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Sternberg, 1988). Sternberg argues for passionate love dying over time and being replaced with another kind of love; with passion subsiding to be replaced with feelings associated with close companionship—intimacy and commitment. Sternberg's theory proposes that over the course of habituation into a relationship, that the emphasis shifts. In a mature relationship a couple might experience high levels of commitment and intimacy, which is balanced with correspondingly low levels of desire. Lee (1988) also concedes that eros (or passionate love) was likely to change over time, with storge taking a stronger place. Essentially the various taxonomies theorise passionate love, as associated with early relationships, as declining over time, and this is offset with a rise in companionate or friendship-type love. Compellingly for the mainstream researchers, empirical studies based on their various self-report instruments (e.g. LAS; PLS; Sternberg's Scales), consistently report lower passionate love scores for those in established unions than those in budding relationships (Acevedo & Aron, 2009).

While romantic love is thought to fizzle out, Hatfield (1988) has softened her view<sup>7</sup> and offers that in the main, people hope to have relationships that represent a combination of passionate and companionate love, that they sustain the pleasures of passionate love while enjoying the secure sanctuary offered by companionship. Hatfield *et al.*'s (2008) research found that older female participants (with an average marriage length of 33 years) reported experiencing

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<sup>7</sup> Elaine Hatfield, originally known as Elaine Walster, along with Ellen Berscheid pioneered the original passionate vs. companionate taxonomy. At that time, they conceptualised the love in relationships as being either passionate or companionate, but not co-existing.

moderate levels of passionate love; rating the question 'What is the level of passionate love that you feel for your partner?' between 'some' and a 'great deal'.

Indeed, qualitative research from as early as the 1960s and 1970s with those in established partnerships, reported couples sustaining vibrant, sexually alive and profoundly connected relationships (Cuber & Harroff, 1971; Tennov, 1979/1999). Cuber and Harroff's interview study of middle-class marriages described participants who reported demonstrable love<sup>8</sup> in their relationship as 'intrinsic', and labelled those participants who reported staying together for reasons other than love as 'utilitarian'. Cuber and Harroff (1971) proposed that some marriages start off as 'utilitarian', whereas other marriages can start out as 'intrinsic' but fail to tend the relationship until it eventually becomes devitalised. Such couples, Cuber and Harroff (1971) offered, may have focused their attention on their jobs, their interests, their friends or the children to the exclusion of each other. After a time, they even may have little interest in each other and then stay together for shared history or financial reasons, and thereby become 'utilitarian'.

Acevedo and Aron (2009) argue that romantic love, which they define as involving intensity, engagement and sexual interest, can thrive in maturing relationships. However, this premise is based on extracting the obsession element from passionate love. Thereby suggesting that obsession is absent from romantic love in maturing relationships. In line with Acevedo and Aron (2009) is Tennov (1979/1999), who conducted in-depth interviews into participants' romantic love experiences. She found many older, reportedly happily-married participants describing themselves as being 'in love'. However, Tennov noted that their interviews were marked with the absence of 'limerence', or the obsessive, intrusive thinking associated with new relationships. Indeed, contemporary evolutionary thought (e.g. Buss, 2006; Fisher, 2006) suggests that romantic attraction might continue for some established couples, in order to keep older people optimistic and energetic and sustain partnerships when faced with alternatives or relationship challenges.

Testing a hypothesis that obsession, or 'limerence', was confounding the scores couples in established relationships report on the Passionate Love Scales (PLS), Acevedo and Aron (2009) reanalysed several studies. The obsession-type items in the PLS questionnaire include 'I sometimes find it difficult to concentrate on work because thoughts of my partner occupy my mind' and 'Sometimes I feel I can't control my thoughts; they are obsessively on my partner'. These questions were coded separately from the generally romantic, that include: 'I want my partner – physically, emotionally, and mentally' and 'For me, my partner is the perfect

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<sup>8</sup> Whereby they experience central satisfaction in their life through each other; such couples seek out each other's company, enjoy sex and have a close identification to one another.

romantic partner'. In terms of total scores on the PLS, the participants in long-serving relationships reported passionate love results considerably lower than those participants that were dating or in newly established unions. However, when Acevedo and colleagues withdrew the obsessive items, then relationship length had no impact on passionate love results; the romantic love quotient—as defined by Acevedo and Aron (2009) as intensity, engagement, and sexual interest—for those participants in longer serving relationships was reportedly as high as those in new unions.

Aligned to the view that sexual interest persists, are the findings of British research team Gabb *et al.* (2013); they conducted a survey of 4500 Britons in established relationships to investigate the relationship between behaviours and the enduring feeling of love. Gabb *et al.* (2013) found that while respondents in mature relationships readily referred to their partner as 'best friend', they described sexual intimacy and friendship as interconnected. Grote and Frieze (1994) posit that there is a likely reciprocal relation between passionate and companionate love: that the presence of either in a relationship can provide a stimulus for the other. In other words, feeling admired and connected could result in feelings of physical desire. Conversely, a rewarding sexual experience with a partner can foster feelings of emotional closeness.

Above we have seen how research presents romantic love as having the potential to endure, when defined as a refinement of passionate love—as intensity, engagement, and sexual interest. Markedly, there is no reference as to whether the participants, in the long-term relationships experience these behaviours as romantic, or not. Nevertheless, Acevedo and Aron (2009) raise attention to confusion in the empirical studies and the literature, as to the definition of romantic love.

#### **2.2.1.2 Is Romantic Love Gendered?**

One characteristic of the literature on love in the couple dyad is the regular question of gender differences. Gendered expressions of love within heterosexual relationships are particularly relevant to this thesis. Many articles are quick to point out female and male variances in a number of areas, including sexuality and emotional responsiveness (e.g. Hatfield & Rapson, 1990). Explanations for gender differences are offered in evolutionary theories (the need to pass on one's genes) and social constructionism (see next section), that women and men have learned different narratives; gender-based social and sexual scripts which produce differences in sexuality and encourage congruence to traditional gender roles. Below are examples from the literature that observe and reflect upon this potential experiential difference.

Cancian (1986) commented on the 'feminization of love' over the past 50 years, whereby emotional intimacy and connection had become increasingly valued<sup>9</sup>. This she says has led to a conflicted situation for men; they are compelled to perform hegemonic masculinity, yet there is discontent relayed in relationships if they are not emotionally articulate.

We identify love with emotional expression and talking about feelings, aspects of love that women prefer and in which women tend to be more skilled than men... This feminized perspective leads us to believe that women are much more capable of love than men and that the way to make relationships more loving is for men to become more like women. (Cancian, 1986, p. 692)

Cancian (1986) demonstrated that women and men prefer to perform expressions of love that are aligned with their gender role: with women preferring emotional intimacy while men favour the giving of instrumental help and sex. However, she offered a critique of overspecialisation of roles, which she argued created conflict for the individual and the relationship (Cancian, 1987/1990).

During the 1980s, Cancian explored the day-to-day workings of marriage and love in the United States. These studies with participants in established relationships, revealed three forms of relationships which Cancian (1987/1990) labelled blueprints: Independence, Interdependence and Companionship. The extent that the blueprints differed, Cancian suggested was related to the degree to which love was in conflict with self-development, and the polarisation of gender roles. Cancian detected some participants with relationships which had a more androgynous form, with the men reportedly taking more responsibility for their partner's emotional wellbeing – this was the Interdependence blueprint. This form of relationship – which involved gender-neutral roles with both partners negotiating contributions, being dependent on each other, and supporting each other's self-development – was promoted as strengthening commitment to the relationship. In contrast, the Independence blueprint privileged individual pursuits and personal development over and above a committed relationship. Furthermore, among her participants she found the continuing presence of the Companionship blueprint, which reflected a traditional marital formula that privileged hegemonic ideals and involved women being subjugated in order to sustain family life. Cancian wrote that the Companionship blueprint serves to facilitate stable family life as it did in the 1950s, however the constrained gender roles limit the potential for self-development and could cause conflict over intimacy.

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that Cancian's (1986) work introduces social constructionist concerns into the literature by challenging taken-for-granted assumptions and demonstrating that the 'feminization of love' is historically situated.

Intriguingly, Wilcox and Nock's (2006) analysis of interviews of more than 5000 American couples found that contentment with emotionally expressive patterns of relating was associated with traditional beliefs and practices regarding gender. Wilcox and Nock's (2006) analysis showed a correlation between female participants who held traditional gender expectations, and happiness with their male partner's positive emotional contribution to the marriage. The researchers suggest that men in traditional gendered marriages might be more appreciative, affectionate and empathetic towards their wives. Wilcox and Nock (2006) posit that rising expectations among women for marital equality may also have the unintended effect of lowering investments in marital emotion work on the part of men. The authors are careful to caveat that the wives' reported happiness might not be related to their men doing more emotion work but an artefact of lower expectations.

Concerned that society's feminised view of love which focuses on emotional intimacy, might overlook expressions of love that men prefer, Schoenfeld *et al.* (2012) conducted a longitudinal empirical study to test whether women and men's love is associated with different emotional expressions and relational behaviours. Over the course of 13 years, with a sample of married American couples, Schoenfeld *et al.* (2012) asked participants to diary love behaviours, complete surveys as well as engage in interviews. The authors' findings challenge the belief that women's ability to love and show emotional affection surpasses that of men; their research showed male participants matching female display. Furthermore, the male participants reported deploying a wider range of behaviours to show their love. The skill gap in male use of affection and emotional literacy (e.g. Burns 2002; Cancian, 1986; Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Jackson, 1993, 1995) was not apparent in this study. Schoenfeld *et al.* (2012) propose: 'that persistent social pressure to view affectionate behaviours as the 'proper' way of demonstrating one's love has led men to embrace this stereotypically feminine form of expression' p. 1405.

Also looking at loving behaviours through the lens of gender is Gabb *et al.*'s (2013) *Enduring Love* project, which asked thousands of Britons in long standing relationships about the actions that made them feel loved. Interestingly, the questions in this survey employed the word 'appreciated' rather than 'loved'. Given the question, not surprisingly the highest rated behaviour was 'says thank you and/or gives me compliments'. Then what followed, suggested parental-status differences being more marked than gender, for example childless female respondents rated highly 'talks with me and listens to me', while respondents who were mothers reported valuing 'does a share of chores and childcare'. As for the study's male respondents, fathers rated highly 'supports and looks after me', while childless males reported 'is physically affectionate' as being valued. Notably, in this survey it seems that parenthood had a bigger impact than gender on the reported experience of love. This study did show that courtship rituals that comprised of flowers and chocolates were reported as persisting in

enduring relationships, and that for female respondents, a partner saying 'I love you' and continuing to express appreciation of physical attractiveness was particularly cherished. The authors found that there was not a discernible gender difference in rating of the statement 'sex is an important part of our relationship'. Yet there was a gendered distinction in answering 'my partner wants to have sex more often than I do'; female respondents were twice as likely to agree to this statement, and mothers were four times more likely to agree. Gabb *et al.* (2013) offer that parenting widens the gender difference when it comes to mutual desire for sex.

The gender gap in sexual interest has been noted by other researchers: Hendrick and Hendrick (1995) in their study of more than 1000 university students, found that male participants were more likely to link love to sex. However, 50 of their 60 correlations computed between sexual practices, love and relationship variables, showed no gender differences. Moreover, when they asked 80 students to produce written accounts of a current or ideal romantic relationship, Hendrick and Hendrick (1995) found no gender differences in how sex featured; they suggested that in the majority of cases a reader would not be able to discern the account of love as penned by a woman or a man.

While the above authors (Cancian, 1986, 1987/1990; Gabb *et al.*, 2013; Schoenfeld *et al.*, 2012; Wilcox & Nock, 2006) looked at general love in couple relationships, Prentice *et al.* (1983) focused in on romantic love. Measuring attitudes toward romance with Likert scales, they found in their American student sample, three factors that characterised reported expressions of romantic love: a) traditional purely romantic gestures, such as sending love notes; b) routine, day to day activities which, when shared, acquire romantic significance; and c) sexual activities. Following this, the authors conducted a study (Bradley *et al.*, 1990), which aimed to establish a measure of the relative importance of romantic behaviours in communicating love - the Romantic Communication Scale. This self-report instrument presented pairs of activities together, for example 'having dinner by candlelight' vs. 'being nude together' and required respondents to rate which member of the pair was more romantic, using a five point Likert scale. Bradley *et al.* (1990) administered this test to 1060 students and found that regardless of gender, the traditional romantic expressions were reported by participants as more romantic, followed by the sexual. The researchers found that sharing routine activities was comprehensively rejected in favour of the traditional romantic expressions and sexual expressions, by this predominately single student sample. It should be noted that the male participants differentiated themselves from females in their reported romantic association with sexual expressions; albeit as a whole the male participants still rated traditional romantic expressions as more romantic—like the females.

In terms of gender, there seems to be widespread challenge to common heterosexual assumptions that women attend to emotion and men attend to sex. Indeed, the literature reports that women and men are similar in a multitude of ways, that they are matched in their ability to love and show emotional affection (Schoenfeld *et al.*, 2012) and that there is neither difference in how sex is described in their relationship (Gabb *et al.*, 2013; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1995) nor in what women and men consider to be romantic (Bradley *et al.*, 1990). Expanding on Schoenfeld's *et al.*'s (2012) quote earlier, it might be that heterosexual imperatives have moved on from the 1980s<sup>10</sup> and now require women and men to demonstrate both stereotypically female and male forms of expressing (romantic) love.

### 2.2.2 Critique of the Mainstream Literature

The methods used in the studies presented in this literature review reflect a privileging of quantification; we can see the prolific collection of numerical data whether in surveys, questionnaires or self-report measures. Such research assumes love, or romantic love, can be measured; that an individual owns a certain level or amount—like money in a bank. So far we have seen repeated examples of this by preeminent researchers in the psychological study of love: Aron (2008, 2009), Hatfield (1974, 1990, 2008), Hendrick and Hendrick (1986, 1989, 1995, 2006), and Sternberg (1988, 1997). We also witness sociologists and social psychologists like Gabb *et al.* (2013) fall into quantification mode; their *Enduring Love* report featured no less than 24 statistical tables. As mentioned earlier, in respect to the use of factor analysis in empirical test construction, the quantitative approaches employed are underpinned by essentialist assumptions that seek to provide universal explanations. In pursuit of a 'truth' and a generalisable law of love, the above investigators subscribe to realist, positivistic positions that love can be understood through empirical research and is something that can be measured and that exists within (rather than between) individuals. Whereas the often tangled and complicated process, the web of behaviours and experience that people call (romantic) love warrants more of a sophisticated approach than being reduced to a level or an amount; this idea I develop further below.

We also observe a number of qualitative techniques being represented, from interviews and prototype analysis, to written accounts and diaries. These methods are limited by the participants' ability to recall and articulate the complexity of their experience, and the difficulty in processing what might be a multifaceted concept. In this way, people (and researchers) might default to common expressions and familiar scripts. For example, Marston *et al.* (1987) discovered that respondents were stumped and struggled to answer questions as

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<sup>10</sup> As a reminder, Cancian (1986) in *The Feminization of Love* recognised women prefer aspects of love that include emotional expression and talking about feelings while men prefer instrumental help and physical aspects of love. She proposed 'the way to make relationships more loving is for women and men to reject polarised gender roles and integrate 'masculine' and 'feminine' forms of love' p. 692.

to the rhythms and colours of the love in their relationship; these questions had been deliberately included in the interview schedule to circumvent participants answering in an obvious fashion, as was expected of the opening question ‘What is the feeling of love?’ Alas most participants were unable to answer ‘If this love has/had a colour what would it be?’ and/or ‘if you could say a rhythm expresses/expressed this love, what would it be?’; the researchers deemed these inquiries as ‘problematic’. In this way, investigators themselves retreat into recycled scripts. On a related point, it could be that Fehr’s (2006) suggestion that trust and caring are prototypical features of love merely reflects easily accessible discourse, as opposed to how ordinary people actually conceptualise love. Moreover, even researchers employing qualitative methods reflect positivistic perspectives that assume people’s love experiences can be reduced to generalisable typologies, for example: Cancian’s (1987/1990) three relationship blueprints; Lee’s (1988) love styles; and Tennov’s (1979/1999) ‘limerents’.

The mainstream literature is endemic with snapshot research, which records participants’ feelings, actions and/or attitudes at a single point in time, through surveys, interviews or self-report measures. Such research treats love as a discrete intrapersonal phenomenon and projects a static characterisation onto a subject that is continual and complicated, as well as likely contingent on others (including one’s partner). Studies that perpetuate this constricted approach include Avededo and Aron (2009), Hendrick and Hendrick (1995) and Shaver *et al.* (1988).

While some of the research has explored the love experiences of those in established relationships and marriages (e.g. Cancian, 1987/1990; Cuber & Harroff, 1971; Gabb *et al.*, 2013; Marston *et al.*, 1987; Schoenfeld *et al.*, 2012) a bulk of psychological research is seriously limited by those investigators who rely on young adult student samples (e.g. Bradley *et al.*, 1990; Fehr, 2006; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1995); such participants are not ordinary people, but rather an elite minority of society—who fundamentally lack relationship experience.

Yet one could argue, if the research question is to do with courtship rituals or passionate love, then a student sample would suffice, but herein lies another problem—and probably the biggest—it is not clear what love or romantic love is. These papers typically incorporate the term, love or romantic love, expecting it to be understood by the reader. Which is no easy task, especially as we see in the literature, love being used synonymously with the word appreciate (Gabb *et al.*, 2013); romantic love being used interchangeably with love in the couple dyad, as a demographic label (e.g. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1989; Marston *et al.*, 1987); and romantic love as a subset of love, thereby ascribing a certain quality to the love (e.g. Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Fisher, 2006; Sternberg, 2006). Most of these authors do not offer a definition of romantic love (with the exception of Sternberg, 1988; and Avededo & Aron, 2009) but slip it in as a shared and taken-for-granted construct.

### 2.2.3 Summary

The first section shows the mainstream literature shedding some light on the experience of romantic love. Notably the various papers and studies which present a range of behaviours—from emotional relatedness to sexual attraction and saying thank you—as characteristic or expressive of love in a relationship, fails to distinguish whether any of these feelings or behaviours are experienced as romantic.

As discussed earlier, the ‘truth’ about love discovered by empirical scales and surveys, is a by-product of a societal discourse rather than descriptive of some underlying characteristic. These ‘truths’ then reproduce romantic love subjectivities by privileging certain behaviours—like emotional relatedness. In this way, what is experienced as love, or romantic love, is not owned by an individual but is a product of historically and culturally located discursive resources. The following social constructionist section to this chapter, acknowledges that the lived experience of romantic love is produced by society through the linguistic resources available in a given socio-historical context.

## 2.3 Romantic Love as a Social Construction

In the literature, love is generally conceptualised as an intrapersonal phenomenon with, for example, levels of passionate love (Sternberg, 1988, 2006), styles of attachment (e.g. Shaver *et al.*, 1988), or preferences for love ways (Hecht *et al.*, 1994) being ascribed to individuals. The fact that these expressions of love take place in a particular social and historical context is not always fully acknowledged.

Some mainstream scholars respect that love is, at least partially, a social construction (e.g. Hatfield, 1988; Noller, 1996). This recognition has been primarily led by cross-cultural studies, whereby the relevance and expression of love varies radically between societies. As Hatfield (1988) writes, we all carry around assumptions about what the experience of love will be like, and these assumptions have a profound impact on our experience and sense-making of love. Social constructionism goes one step further—rather than suggest that it simply affects our experience of love, it claims that language and culture produces this lived reality.

An early proponent of romantic love being a social construction is the anthropologist Greenfield. His 1965 article on the role of love in marriage looked at it as a cultural phenomenon, with a prescribed set of behaviours that is produced in a particular social

context. Greenfield's (1965) functional analysis<sup>11</sup> concluded that, what he termed the 'romantic love complex', served to motivate individuals to take up positions in society (i.e. mother-wife, husband-father-provider) which are essential for the capitalist economy to continue. Greenfield argued that rational beings would not otherwise be inclined to take up these positions. For example, he points out that wealth in middle-class America is seen as an indicator of personal worth and that the expense of raising children depletes an individual's resources, but serves to encourage consumption. He presented the 'romantic love complex' as having the power to jolt people out of their material values with the higher goal of love and the 'happy ever after', which promises rewards of affection, sex, emotional security and happiness. Greenfield points out that while Americans believe in romantic love, they are not naïve to the fact that it may not turn out as the 'happy ever after'. He advocated that irrespective of this knowledge, people will seek to proximate the ideal—as they do with other cultural phenomena. Elaborating on this point, Greenfield offered that marrying for love and being romantic in middle-class America, is endorsed and rewarded by society, that family and friends will affirm that you are doing the right thing. Furthermore, seeing romantic love as a social construction that is culturally specific, Greenfield inspected the American attachment to, and experiential quality of romantic performance—like falling in love, which he describes as 'emotional and flighty'. This pattern of behaviours Greenfield called 'institutionalized irrationality' and proffered that with social encouragement a performer may not know that these feelings do not originate within him or herself. Love may have a clear emotional quality but these emotions are constructed by ideas about love that are produced by society.<sup>12</sup>

While Greenfield (1965) limits his analysis to the falling in love experience and fails to examine the role of romantic love in the established relationship, he introduces the theoretical notion that romantic love is a social construct that performs functions for its users and society.

When it comes to social constructionist research into love, feminists have been at the forefront. For them, romantic love serves to maintain patriarchal marriage and raises potent questions regarding gender differences and power inequalities. Pioneering feminists (e.g. Simone de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer) were concerned that female absorption and singular focus on love, diverted energies from accomplishments that could be had elsewhere. Meanwhile, others were additionally concerned about female preoccupation with heterosexual monogamy (e.g. Lee Comer and Shulamith Firestone). Indeed, the feminist perspective from

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<sup>11</sup> Elster (1982) described the 'strong functional paradigm' as an assumption that all institutions or behaviour patterns have a function that explains their presence. Due to the functionalist way which Foucault studies power, Brenner (1994) describes him as a 'new functionalist'.

<sup>12</sup> Jackson (1993) argues the case that the emotion of love is socially constructed, 'as just as much social as the conventions which surround it' p. 202. She points out that our understanding of emotions is culturally specific and that our very ability to manage feelings suggests that we are active in its (re)production.

the 1970s was that once people realised the façade of romantic love, then it would be readily rejected. In her 1993 seminal article *Even Sociologists Fall in Love*, Jackson revisits this feminist stance and points out that time paints a different story: that the persistence of the romantic love discourse suggests that it is heavily embedded and the constructions that reinforce its dominance are layered. 'The cultural construction of romantic love is multi faceted' writes Jackson (1993) – there are some firmly embedded taken-for-granted constructions like the overpowering emotion of 'falling in love', there's the connection of love with the institution of marriage, there's hopes for personal fulfilment and affection through the relationship. On a more superficial level, there are romantic conventions which can be more easily challenged like candle-lit dinners and cards on Valentine's day. What can be seen is that the discourse of romantic love has persisted—and is hard to shift (as attempted by feminists).

### 2.3.1 Deconstructing the Romance in Fiction and Texts

Acknowledging that our desire for romantic love is based on contact with culturally created narratives, there have been a number of studies that have adopted a social constructionist approach to explore romantic love in fiction and texts. As Burns (2002, p. 153) notes:

From a postmodern perspective, identities and personal experience are understood and reproduced in relation to the cultural narratives we have available, so romance reading or more general knowledge of romantic stories, may be a powerful force in shaping heterosexual relationships, sex, love and gendered desire.

Notably, there has been significant efforts deployed to deconstruct romantic narratives as they feature in novels, songs and film by scholars in the sociology and literary domain. For example, Shumway (2003) investigated romantic love representations in twentieth century cinema and television, while Jackson (1993) looks at how the narratives of fairy tales and romantic fiction engage with our desires. Their deconstruction of romantic fiction uncovers a number of patterns: the story lines promote hegemonic norms and most stories are about overcoming obstacles in order to win the heart of 'the one' (for more insights see Chapter 3). Shumway (2003) found that the popular actors of movies with romantic storylines were stereotypically heroic and handsome. Indeed, Radway's (1984/1991) sample of female readers assume that the heroes of their romantic fiction will be masculine, protective and strong. Stories tend to end at the point of a couple's assertion of love, with no details provided of the 'happy ever after' (or otherwise).

Shumway (2003) and Jackson (1993) theorise, rather than research, the influence of these romantic love narratives on people's lives. For example Jackson (1993) theorises the impact of a passage of fiction – whereby a male character left waiting at a café for his lover becomes increasingly anxious and angry about being abandoned – as providing conventions on

appropriate emotional response (when stood up) and furnishing the reader with resources for making sense of their social world. While people might argue that they are not active media viewers or readers, Shumway (2003) points out that we readily absorb story-lines second hand—by friends and family or partners too. Increasingly, the media is a forum for personal disclosure of people's private love lives, whether reader's letters, advice columns, stories based on 'real life', or documented reality television. In such ways Shumway and Jackson posit that we cannot escape the 'knowledge' of what love is.

While Shumway and Jackson focused on fictional narratives that mostly involved the pursuit of romantic love (by virtue of prominent story lines), marital discourse comes under scrutiny when Crawford (2004) deconstructs a bestselling relationship self-help book. Crawford uses feminist discourse analysis to look at *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (Gray, 1992), and a documentary following the author, John Gray's coaching of six heterosexual couples over a five month duration. Clearly, underlying *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, is an assumption that men and women are fundamentally different, each bringing distinct relationship behaviours, and that these differences are biological, natural and healthy. For feminists this gender-differences discourse is considered an ideological cover up, but for most it is 'just common-sense'. Like any dominant discourse, its strength is that it is a recognisable 'way of seeing the world' and its popularity results in continuing discursive recycling, which then feeds back into its popularity and reinforces its dominance (Cameron, 1996).

From a feminist perspective self-help materials like these may do more harm than good, functioning to (re)produce antiquated gender roles and to buttress the institution of patriarchal marriage. (Crawford, 2004, p.65)

Crawford's (2004) analysis of the book and in particular the associated documentary of the couples being coached by author John Gray, shows that there is a relative balance of gender power; the men recognised that if they do not measure-up to their wife's expectations that it can be costly and they could lose their woman. Men liken marriage to a 'job' and that they have a responsibility to do their share of relationship work. While acknowledging that the book does uphold the gender-differences discourse, Crawford (2004) suggests that the text offers readers a platform for holding each other accountable and challenging heterosexual inequalities in the relationship.

### **2.3.2 Gendered Love**

As can be seen the texts and narratives of love are highly gendered: the classic romances, movies and even the self-help literature, are based on heterosexual relationships in which the male and female partners enact very different roles. Social constructionist research, mostly led by feminists, has continued this enquiry into the gendered dynamics involved in romantic

love by looking into the constructions that people deploy and the discourses that produce them. Most of the articles referenced in this subsection acknowledge Cancian's (1986) commentary on the feminisation of love and identification of blueprints (1987/1990), in addition the authors also salute the work of social theorist Giddens (1992) on sexuality and love. Giddens developed the theory of structuration, as a model of how social construction takes place: his landmark book on the subject of intimacy (1992) *The Transformation of Intimacy* provides a theory of how sexuality and gender are reproduced and transformed. In this text, Giddens examines the various social and ideological factors that have contributed to changes in intimate relationships and offers hope of the possibility of a 'pure' relationship<sup>13</sup>, which is egalitarian and operates on democratic negotiation. It can be seen that this version of coupledness promotes the discourse of intimacy, or personal emotional fulfilment. In such relationships there is a more symmetrical balance of power in the relationship, it is gender-neutral and accordingly less observant of the heteronormative order. Giddens' portrayal of the 'pure' relationship is one that can be entered and exited at will, and where people only stay together when they can achieve emotional and personal fulfilment. In this way, Giddens' 'pure' relationship pre-supposes an individualistic society and a privileging of the needs of 'the self' over the needs of society or family life.

Outlined next are social constructionist studies or articles that embrace the Foucauldian spirit of unpacking the taken-for-granted to reveal underlying power issues. This research into the gendered dynamics of romantic love is presented below in chronological order.

Feminist aligned Duncombe and Marsden's (1993, 1995) in-depth interview study of 38 couples in 15 year relationships, looked into the role of ideologies of love in the social construction of coupledness. They were interested in the way heterosexual couples in Britain negotiate emotional change in maturing relationships. This issue was particularly topical at the time, given Giddens' (1992) recent publication on the couple dyad being transformed with an emphasis placed on emotional intimacy. The study reported that female participants experienced an emotional loneliness as their relationships became committed and established; accordingly, the authors presented romance in established relationships as characterised by disappointment for women, that they want to be emotionally acknowledged as special by their partner, yet it is them, the women, doing the 'emotion work'. Duncombe and Marsden (1993) explored the social construction of gender divisions in emotional behaviour and discussed this asymmetry as being related to gender inequalities of power. They posit that the denial by men of desired emotional intimacy is a way of exercising

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<sup>13</sup> In the literature Giddens' (1992) 'pure' relationship is sometimes interpreted as mirroring Cancian's (1987/1990) Independence blueprint based on confluent love as opposed to forever love (e.g. Watts & Stenner, 2014), while others see it as reflecting the Interdependence blueprint (e.g. van Hooff, 2016). The Interdependence and Independent blueprints, as well as the 'pure' relationship, subscribe to personal relationships being a critical site for self-development.

masculine power, and they speculate that females have the possibility of exercising power if they withhold their emotional services.

In a later essay, Duncombe and Marsden (1995) showed how couples from the same study 'construct narratives' and 'position themselves' in relation to romance. They found that at the beginning of the relationship, romance was characterised by typical falling in love experiences, as well as the development of emotional intimacy (confidences exchanged, long heart felt conversations) and that this deep emotional connectivity was not sustained after the establishment of the relationship. For many of their participants, romance fell by the way side early on in the relationship; Duncombe and Marsden (1995) speculate that emotional intimacy requires time to talk, which was not compatible with everyday life, family and work responsibilities. They also found evidence of participants drawing on the gendered narratives of romance as perpetuated by the media; for example, women seeking and performing romantic relationships in order to be 'complete' and men constructing sex and traditional gestures (more so than emotional intimacy) as romantic. Duncombe and Marsden (1995) concluded questioning the very possibility of romantic love being able to persist in long term relationships, they liken it to a performance that can only be kept up while in love or in the short term.

Recognising the democratisation concept offered by Giddens as appealing and signposting social progress, feminist psychologist Langford (1999) conducted in-depth interviews with 15 women (of varied relationship status) in Britain to understand their attempts to realise the romantic ideal, which she describes as intimate, equal and emotionally satisfying. While not explicitly social constructionist, Langford mirrored Foucault's interest in the exercise of power and the systems that sustain dominance, and can be seen to explore how love is socially constructed to produce particular forms of gendered power. Developing a 'sociopschoanalytic' approach, Langford reviewed her interview data through the lens of available cultural narratives and sociology research, and then deployed psychoanalytic techniques in an attempt to shed further light on how the experience of love might be connected to social power. For example, Langford observed that after the 'falling in love' stage, her female participants reported distress due to emotional distancing on the part of their male partners (as noted above by Duncombe & Marsden, 1993). She discussed this as reflecting the closure of fairy tales at the point when mutual love is declared; and additionally offered that this change reveals the development of a mother-son dynamic. She drew on Chodorow's (1989) theory that explains the social construction of gender roles and posits that male dominance is embedded in pre-Oedipal behaviours with the male infant's struggle to emotionally withdraw and establish autonomy from his mother; and consequently the male adult will continue to denigrate the feminine as a defence against being consumed by it. In her analysis, Langford unpacked and critiqued dominant Western constructions of romantic love

that see it not only as the most important form of human connection but that its pursuit leads to self-development. For example, she presented evidence that her participants, rather than progressing and moving forward, they go around in circles, repeating patterns of behaviour. Langford (1999) also expressed concern over the privileging of emotional satisfaction; she discusses that such self-referential quests cannot be good for society and that dissolving relationships on this basis (as per Giddens' 'pure' relationship) may find individuals being discarded like flotsam on a whim. Langford (1999) concluded challenging the presence and even the possibility of a democratic relationship. She writes that such a union assumes that one can be rational, and appreciate what will benefit your position, whereas often with love one may not.

Feminist psychologist Burns (2000, 2002) interviewed people on their ideas and experiences of love and intimate relationships in order to explore whether their discourse (re)produced gender inequality. Her discourse analysis of the 22 interviews (women and men of varied relationship status in Britain) highlighted two discourses: 'the romantic love' and the 'working at love and intimacy'. These discourses affirmed gendered views of women being emotionally literate and men being emotionally distant, with women and men constructing themselves in traditionally gendered ways. The 'working at' discourse was drawn on by men, and sees them taking the relationship seriously and approaching it in a business-like manner. Burns (2002) suggests that this discourse represents a democratic account and reflects Giddens' (1992) 'pure' relationship. Burns' (2000, 2002) articles indicate that the subject positions available to the women, within the 'romantic love' discourse, required that they express strong emotion as an indication of their love, and subscribe to the view of a male partner being special and central to their life; Burns (2002) illustrates this with an example of a female participant who by being irrational and emotional, demonstrates to herself and anyone she tells, how much she cares. Such emotional positions were sidestepped by Burns' male participants, who might see such demonstrative emotion as a lack of self-containment and/or a challenge to their masculinity. Burns also suggests that drawing on the 'working at' discourse allowed male participants to position themselves as being in control of relationship success. In her analysis, Burns (2002) likens participants' accounts to romantic narratives whereby it is the hero who directs the relationship. Accordingly, she found that both discourses—the 'working at love and intimacy' and the 'romantic love'—served to privilege men, as they reproduced men's leading role in heterosexual relationships. Burns (2000) posits that in order to contest the gender inequality that persists, feminists might challenge the constructed superior ranking of rationality over emotionality.

Curious as to whether traditional gendered perspectives dominated contemporary discourse, Watts and Stenner (2014) conducted research with 59 British women (of varied relationship status) to tap into their personal definitions and experiences of love. They used Q

methodology, which involved a short writing exercise, a sorting exercise of 54 descriptors of love and opportunity to comment at length; in this context Q methodology is seen to be aligned to social constructionist aims and is regarded as a form of discourse analysis<sup>14</sup> (e.g. Stainton Rogers, 1995). Many qualitative researchers are wary of Q methodology because its mathematical substructure can be seen as privileging quantification and representing another essentialist attempt to measure and define. However, Kitzinger (1987) who deployed Q methodology to explore the social construction of lesbianism, points out that its aim is not to reveal a universal 'truth', but to assemble and study the variety of accounts people construct. Watts and Stenner's (2014) analysis using Q methodology, offers that participants' experiences and personal definitions of love could be arranged into six distinct definitions, or subject positions: attraction, passion and romance; unconditional love; sex and fun; friendship and spirituality; a permanent commitment; and separate people, separate lives. The most commonly expressed subject position among the sample who took part in this study was: attraction, passion and romance. For the participants who take up this subject position, it is romance that is highlighted as of essential importance; substantiating this were their comments that included: 'Fun, excitement, and particularly romance are what keep the relationship alive'; 'Red roses, dinner for two, quiet evenings in... and saying 'I love you' all act as little personal reminders of how much you love one another'; 'Be warned! No romance means relationships are 'just plain boring.'" In this way, Watts and Stenner (2014) report that women view love and relationships as contingent on satisfactory romantic performance, they conclude:

Romance has instead been reconstructed for predominantly individualist, masculine and capitalist market, first as a serious business, and second as a commodity that must be delivered, and delivered effectively, if a woman's love and attention is to be sustained. (p. 568)

Furthermore, the authors acknowledge that half the subject positions taken up by their female participants reflect a masculine code, whereby loving without conditions is rejected—support, affection and kindness are all downplayed—rather love is characterised by physical attraction and the governance of relationships according to rational and economic principles like exchange and equity, where the primary goal is individual satisfaction.

In sum, the literature on the social construction of romantic love has produced a range of insightful observations, which although diverse, converge on the claim that the discourse of

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<sup>14</sup> Q methodology can identify currently dominant social viewpoints and knowledge structures: 'For readers familiar with the work of Foucault, a participant's Q sort can be seen as an expression of 'subject position', while the interpreted factors allow the constructionist to understand and explicate the main discourses at work' (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 41).

romantic love is deeply engrained, gendered, has an emotional quality and imbued with power inequities. It can be seen that they privilege emotional relatedness (as reflecting female concern and a site of socially constructed gender inequality) and that most authors question the merit of rational constructions of love as perpetuating masculine discourses.

### **2.3.3 Critique of the Social Constructionist Literature**

Feminist researchers share a commitment to social and political change and it can be seen that in these studies the analysis and reading of discourse attends to material that support this agenda. As an example, feminist Burns (2002) admits that the interviews of her male participants contained less gender-differences dialogue than female accounts; this discourse—that men are just like this and women like that—is generally considered by feminists as signposting the (re)production of traditional gender roles (e.g. Cameron, 1996). Rather than applaud the evident less gender asymmetry in the male talk, Burns critiques the males for not explicitly acknowledging their privileged position. It is Crawford (2004) who, despite her stated feminist commitment to social and political change, is prepared to acknowledge that her discourse analysis indicates a relative balance of gender power.

As shown in this section, the bulk of social constructionist research on the subject of romantic love, has been undertaken by researchers with such feminist agendas (e.g. Burns, 2002; Crawford, 2004; Duncombe & Marsden, 1995; Jackson, 1993). By virtue of their drive for change, feminists typically adopt a realist position, whereby women are seen as sharing an identity distinct to that of men. In this way, it can be easy for feminists to fall into essentialist mode with a generalisable law ascribed to males or females (e.g. Duncombe & Marsden, 1993, 1995; Jackson, 1993). Of the feminist work presented, it is Burns (2002) who diligently protects her research from this tendency. Some relativist feminists argue that such sex-based categorisations are detrimental to the feminist cause as they perpetuate a gender-differences discourse (e.g. Burr, 2015). However, a realist position critically affords feminists political leverage; whereas from a relativist position arguably a feminist would not promote one account over another.

In terms of the feminist premise that male power resides at the heart of romantic love discourse, the sociologist Illouz (2012) challenges this assumption and points out that romantic love has flourished when there has been a corresponding decline, not an increase, in patriarchal power. She also suggests that feminists often fail to realise that romantic love is equally captivating to both women and men alike.

The criticisms rendered to the mainstream research (as seen in *2.2.2 Critique of the Mainstream Literature*) of their attempts to unveil universal 'truth' and generalisable laws, like the snapshot measures and researcher influence on the factor analysis, do not feature here.

Social constructionist research acknowledges many 'truths' and versions of knowledge; it even recognises the researcher's reading of these 'truths' as part of the discursive terrain.

Like the mainstream literature there is no consistency as to how social constructionist researchers deploy the term romantic love, whether it is specific to budding relationships or equated to love in general in a long-term relationship, or seen as a subset of that love. While it is reasonable to expect multiplicity in the constructions of (romantic) love (especially in social constructionist research), the authors however, slip it in as a shared and taken-for-granted construct. For example, Greenfield (1965) and Jackson (1993) trade the word love with romantic love, yet are specific to the falling in love experience. We can also see researchers (e.g. Burns, 2002; Duncombe & Marsden, 1993, 1995; Langford, 1999) connecting romantic love to an expression of intimacy and emotional relatedness in relationships, while it is not evident that their participants share the same view. Meanwhile, Langford (1999) describes her participants as seeking a romantic ideal of a relationship that is intimate, equal and emotionally satisfying, yet her participants were not recruited on that basis and neither articulated this as romantic, nor their ideal. It is only Watts and Stenner (2014) who allow for participants' personal definitions of love to come through and these, for many, transpired to include romance.

However, Watts and Stenner (2014) and others (Burns, 2000, 2002; Langford, 1999) melded single participants with those in relationships, which presented a blurred picture of discursive resources and prompts closer inspection. For example, would Watts and Stenner (2014) find the subject position 'attraction, passion and romance' dominating if the participants were all in established relationships? And would Burns (2002) find more women speaking from the 'working at' discourse if they were all in enduring unions? This concern may read like an essentialist preoccupation, to control for variability in order to reveal a 'truth', rather here I recognise that available discourses are a product of social context, and that the social domain of people in a couple dyad is visibly different to those who are not.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In the mainstream literature, there is continuing debate as to whether romantic love is gendered; and as to whether romantic love dies in a mature relationship or has the potential to exist. Meanwhile, the social constructionist research, which examines the gendered scripts of love, likens romantic love to a performance and questions its potential to endure a longer-term relationship.

The 'truths' authored on romantic love, as mentioned in this literature review, have been constructed against a backdrop of Western cultural values and practices, which have dictated

what is appropriate in terms of romantic love within established relationships. Therefore, it is important to highlight the discursive context from which this psychological knowledge and our current understanding of romantic love has been produced. The next chapter presents a history of the rise of romance in the established relationship. It shows how our current understanding is historically-situated, that meanings constructed around romantic love vary over the centuries, and that depending on our location in time we are positioned by available discourse.

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## Chapter 3

# A History of Romantic Love

The aim of historicising, or exploring the ‘histories of the present’ as Foucault called them, is to question the common sense ways of being and thinking. This history of romance shows how available discursive resources constructed the ways in which people could experience themselves as romantic. In charting the historical manifestations of romantic love, this chapter serves to identify the subject as worthy of further exploration within its contemporary context. It also allows the reader to situate the research outlined in the previous chapter within a historical perspective.

### 3.1 Introduction

Foucault promoted the concept of creating a history of a subject as a way of demonstrating that what is taken-for-granted as normal and/or healthy, is always specific to a certain culture and location in time. Foucault referred to his historical studies initially as ‘archaeologies’ then as ‘genealogies’ to distinguish them as philosophical exercises as opposed to the work of a historian (Oksala, 2007). The term genealogy is borrowed from Nietzsche’s writings, which also used history as a form of critique. Foucault’s genealogies bear similarity to Marx’s material histories as a form of method, and as an analysis of social structure. Like Marxism, Foucault represents social practices as temporary and all knowledge as driven by social relations and power (Olssen, 2004).

It is generally taken-for-granted that men and women fall in love and have done so since the beginning of recorded time. However, this may more accurately reflect a record of passion and infatuation. The experience of infatuation that is sometimes referred to as love, lust or passion could be a universal human capacity according to anthropologist Helen Fisher (2006).<sup>15</sup> Whereas romantic love is considered a culturally specific discourse; it holds a particular place and takes a shape in Western societies that is not mirrored elsewhere.

Indeed, most people in the United Kingdom or the United States typically associate love with marriage<sup>16</sup> (or what we have come to call ‘relationships’). Yet for much of Western history

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<sup>15</sup> Yet there are arguments, as presented in *2.3 Romantic Love as a Social Construction* that passionate love is also socially constructed (e.g. Greenfield, 1965; Jackson, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> I would typically use the word relationships, but this, in itself, is a modern usage of the word to describe committed coupledom; it came into use during the 1960s and 1970s. Given this section is focused on the history where marriage was prevalent, the word marriage is used.

and in many cultures today, marriage has been understood as a social institution and a vehicle to manage wealth and property. So historically the word 'love', associated with marriage, represents a duty of care as opposed to romantic love (Luhman, 1986, cited in Shumway, 2003). Romantic love is only relatively recently associated with marriage.

Before embarking further, it should be noted that histories are written as versions of truth—no two accounts are ever the same—they reflect different constructions and agendas that are produced by available discursive resources. Therefore, prior to outlining and discussing a history of romantic love's involvement in marriage, I firstly want to frame this account by acknowledging my main influencers. After Foucault, it is Giddens (1992) and Shumway (2003); both of whom feature in the social constructionist section of Chapter 2: Literature Review. This chapter draws significantly on Shumway (2003) a scholar of Foucault; whose book *Modern Love* shows how discourses of love are contingent on wider social conditions. His book charts the history and social context of love discourses and primarily grounds these in changes in fiction and film. I also reference Giddens (1992), whose book *The Transformation of Intimacy* revealed my own taken-for-granted privileging of emotional exchange in romantic relations and consequently I find myself sensitive to its manifestations and alert to the systems that (re)produce it. Thus, I offer this chapter, as a particular reading of history that reflects my absorption of the social constructionist ideas of Foucault (1966/1994; 1976/1990; 1984/1988; 1984/1990), Giddens (1992) and Shumway (2003). While Foucault's genealogies are detailed (e.g. three volumes for *The History of Sexuality*) and elaborate on power relations and social-economic forces, for the purpose of the thesis, this genealogy focuses on changes in romantic love ideologies and their connection with marriage.

### **3.2 A Genealogy of Romantic Love**

Through the reading of myths and tragedies, the ancient Greek period is often connected to romantic love. This however, appears to be a misunderstanding. The Greeks were known to have four different words for love: agape, eros, storge and philia, yet not one of them could be seen as corresponding to romantic love; it is generally accepted that they cover love of god (agape), brotherly love (philia), sexual passion and lust (eros), affection between parents and offspring (storge), and loyalty to community, friends and family (philia). The stories from that time delivered on passion and sexual escapades, which could be seen as reflecting the culturally universal infatuation that is referenced by Fisher above. Indeed, Shumway (2003) argues that these tales are misunderstood today as stories of romance. Not only do they consistently depict passion as a misfortune, he argues that the early audiences would view them as accounts of, amongst other things: power, status and fate. Shumway (2003) goes on to point out that the so-called 'Greek romances' reveal little about courtship, marriage or true love, but 'seem to be about the exchange of women between fathers and husbands' (p.12).

Among the early Teutonic and Celtic people, monogamy was the common practice but polygamy was not unknown, especially among the Nordic tribes. As those groups were converted to Christianity, the Church assumed the regulation of morals. Around the tenth century, the religious requirement of marriage and monogamy was insisted upon, divorce and re-marriage became more difficult. At this stage the concept of love was still not connected with marriage. It was said that the correct approach for a married couple, during this era, was friendship, tenderness and respect (Shumway, 2003).

In the twelfth century there was a major change in attitudes towards romantic love, it became glamorised. This change may have laid the groundwork for how Western societies see romantic love today. In feudal Europe, it was thought that the unconsummated love between a knight and a lady of a higher rank, was the purest form of love (e.g. Boase, 1977). This came to be known as courtly love; it did not sanction love within marriage, but focused on the rapport between a lady and the knights that served her court. For a knight, devoting one's life to love was considered honourable and this became a part of knightly conduct (no doubt a precursor of the expression 'knight in shining armour'). A knight would serve a lady and after her, all other ladies. Here there is particular emphasis on the protection and kindness to women.

It can be seen that the glorification of love was entwined with an idealised view of women, to almost goddess status. This coincided with the widespread practice of Mariology; where people would seek the Virgin Mary's protection. It is thought that perceptions of women, who had been looked down upon and were often thought to be sources of evil, improved as a result of the reverence to Mary and romantic love narratives.

A major source of romantic prose were troubadours, who were predominately based in the south of France and then Italy and Spain. Troubadours composed and performed love poems, based on courtly love and chivalry. Apparently, crusaders returning from the Holy Land and passing through these regions fuelled the spread of this romantic narrative.

Whilst the creed of courtly love promoted the unconsummated love between a lady and a knight, the stories of the time mostly resulted in adultery. Examples include: Sir Lancelot and Guinevere (King Arthur's queen); and Tristan and his love for Princess Iseult (the wife of his uncle, King Mark). Aside from love stories, also popular were tales of the returning Christian war hero, which was in itself also called a *romance*<sup>17</sup>. It should be noted that whilst the subject

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<sup>17</sup> Romances was the term for the fiction of the day, they were heavily embellished stories with extravagant settings. In the eighteenth century there came a new form of fiction, the novel. Novels had

of romantic love was pervasive in medieval and early European storylines, it was less common in daily life. As reflected in the stories, between the twelfth and sixteenth century it was only experienced within aristocratic society and found *outside* of marriage.

During this time, stories of romantic love flourished but not without criticism: the Church thought that they were distracting and immoral. In the seventeenth century intellectuals would deem the idealisation of love and overly romantic or chivalric gestures as naïve and trite (e.g. Don Quixote who parodies the chivalric knight).

A portrayal of romantic love leading to marriage can be found in Shakespeare's turn of the seventeenth century *Much Ado about Nothing*. In this story one of the couples, Beatrice and Benedict do indeed marry for love. However, this depiction of love and marriage cannot be seen as reflecting the social practice of the time: according to Stone (1977) marriage was still deemed to serve more practical considerations, whether to establish political connections, preserve wealth or to sustain religious expectations.

Romantic love and seduction remained firmly linked to the upper classes and their adulterous unions. Armour passion, an extramarital game of seduction, was proving popular in aristocratic Europe. As reflected in Casanova's memoir, seduction combined with a transient approach to love and sex was typical of the wealthy. It should be noted that the romantic lives of the poor or working class is less clear, without the resources to write, they could not leave a document trail (for example memoirs, diaries and letters) in the same way as the wealthy. Stone (1977) suggests that the earliest diaries of the working class date from the mid-nineteenth century.

Romantic love and marriage is however, increasingly positively referenced in eighteenth century novels. The 1740 bestseller<sup>18</sup> *Pamela* by Samuel Richardson, tells the story of a maid who eventually falls in love and marries her widowed master. Rather than a tragic end—as would be more likely the case in earlier romances—the book suggests the couple live 'happily ever after'. By the nineteenth century, as typified by the works of the Bronte sisters and Jane Austen, plots followed the pursuit of true love, overcoming challenges and eventually succeeding in marriage.

During the nineteenth century there was a major shift: from the ideals of romantic love being *not* strongly followed in the selection of a spouse (e.g. Borscheid, 1986), to romantic love

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a closer relation to truth. Depending on its degree of realism, a tale of romantic love could have been a sub-genre within romance, or alternatively given the term romantic novel (Shumway, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> As was custom at the time, books were often read aloud to groups, whether in the home, coffee house or other communal public space.

becoming the dominant way of conceiving love and marriage. It could be seen that the reading of romantic love literature contributed to this change, however there were a number of significant socio-environmental factors: the Industrial Revolution, the rise of the middle classes and changes in the family.

The Industrial Revolution, experienced in Europe and the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, had an important impact on the nature of households and family life. With less need for offspring to physically support the running of the household, a large proportion of women were freed from a constant cycle of childbirth. However, with this came sexual repression: the Victorian approach to birth control was restraint and discipline, which mostly impacted wives, as men would commonly seek sex elsewhere. For women, motherhood took on an elevated status; the rearing of children was now for expressive rather than instrumental reasons, which meant that women were more emotionally invested in their offspring. Emotional nurturing came to be known as the female domain. Meanwhile, the rise of professional occupations and changes in transportation and housing, meant that for the first time there was a separation of work from home. Women and men thereby operated in different spheres; women in the home and men in the outside world. It may be that women in the subordinated sphere of the home, where marriage was forever, were more receptive to ideas of romantic love; such narratives likely provided escapism from their domestic lives. Giddens' (1992) suggests that the development of romantic love ideals could also be seen as an assertion of women's power in the face of deprivation; a reaction to Victorian repression. While the above account relates primarily to middle-class women, according to Stone (1977) there is clear evidence that the domestic life of the poor moved closer to the middling classes from 1840. Not only was the government taking responsibility for health, welfare and education, which resulted in better housing, nutrition and increased autonomy for the poor, but Stone (1977) also offers that the economic benefits from the Industrial Revolution were also trickling down and they had more money to spend on minor extravagances.

As a result of the state involvement in education, reading became more widespread as schools and libraries became more accessible for the masses. According to Mitch (2004) illiteracy rates in England rapidly dropped from an estimated 60% of women and 35% of men in 1800 to 5% for both sexes in 1900. Meanwhile, the technological advances that revolutionised the publishing industry made more books available and affordable. People in large numbers were embracing books and their content without that much critical engagement; reading and writing in the past had been the preserve of scholars and the upper classes so books were held in high regard (Shumway, 2003).<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Shumway suggests that literature at the time had

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<sup>19</sup> That is not to say that there were not critics of the romantic novel (e.g. William Dean Howells and other realists, as discussed by Shumway, 2003). However, even among the literary elite there was still high regard for the romantic novel.

more influence than the Church, politics or education. The impact of the best-selling romantic novel was thus enormous; in 1900 it is reported that the romantic novel sold ten times more copies than more literary works (Batchelor, 2002).

At the turn of the twentieth century people generally believed that there was a right person for everyone—a true love—and that falling in love would naturally connect to marital bliss. The fundamental assumption was that this personal happiness, found through romantic love and leading to marriage, would not be available through any other means.

Perhaps surprisingly, sexual fulfilment was not a key requirement for romantic love in marriage until the early twentieth century. Whilst sex in marriage could be expected, pleasure was not assumed. BBC Four's *A Very British Romance with Lucy Worsley* claims that World War I brought about a heightened awareness of mortality and as a result people were more joy seeking and explicit about fulfilling sexual desire. Marie Stopes, who had divorced her husband due to sexual incompatibility, published *Married Love* in 1918, which was essentially the first sex manual for married couples—her book was considered scandalous in many social circles and was banned in the United States until 1931. It built on the romantic love discourse that a person would become complete, and one, with an other in marriage, while introducing the view that physical chemistry and a proactive sex life was essential to the 'happy ever after'. Thurber and White (1929/2004) described the decade of the 1920s as a sexual revolution and recognised how sex became topical with medical professionals, sociologists, psychologists and authors. As noted by Thurber and White 'To prepare for marriage young girls no longer assembled a hope chest... If they finally did marry, they find themselves with a large number of sex books on hand' (p. 12).

While in real life Marie Stopes urged husbands and wives to explore their sexual desire, the cinema was also celebrating sexual tension and pleasure as romantic. In the 1920s and 1930s movies had over taken novels as the primary enabler of the romantic love discourse (Shumway, 2003). The use of fine-looking actors helped to propagate the sexual ideal of romantic love. Rudolf Valentino, the star of the hit 1921 movie *The Sheik*, the *Fifty Shades of Grey* of its time, is widely regarded as the first male sex symbol. Upon news of his early death in 1926, it was reported that 100,000 mourners gathered in the streets around his Manhattan address.

The picture theatre enabled romance with more than actors and plots, it represented a darkened space, where couples could go for privacy. While not all the hit movies of the 1920s and 1930s were as racy as *The Sheik*, the documentary *A Very British Romance with Lucy Worsley* suggests that the dancing and physical intimacy in movies like those starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, could be seen as a metaphor for sex. Indeed, their permanent

Hollywood smiles perpetuated the idea of romantic love and coupledness being the source of happiness.

The emphasis on personal happiness was relatively new and attributed to the rise of individualism (Stone, 1990); an outlook that is primarily concerned with preserving autonomy. It advocates self-reliance and the pursuit of one's own goals and desires as more important than the satisfaction of societal, or other group expectations. The movement promotes that the achievement of one's own goals and desires will result in personal wellbeing. However, it is not universally valued, often because it is seen to displace community responsibility and the increased need for individual freedom, or personal growth, is often at odds with the need for interpersonal closeness.

During the twentieth century, given the breakdown of other social ties, marriage became the primary domain for human connection. Here was an integration of marriage, romantic love and intimacy. Intimacy being defined by Shumway (2003) as a special closeness founded on verbal openness. Self-disclosure was found in early nineteenth century love letters between courting couples, but once married it was less evident (Cancian, 1987/1990). Indeed, during Victorian times, it was advocated that dialogue between a husband and wife would be considered and calm, almost business like.

The seeds of the privileging of verbal intimacy can be found in the screwball comedies of the 1940s (Shumway, 2003). For example, *The Palm Beach Story* (1942), with its focus on the fast and familiar talk of a married couple, fosters the concept of an emotionally open dialogue between a husband and wife, and that the couple dyad is a place to further personal happiness. This depiction of couples having fun banter and enjoying conversation also became a new basis for falling in love, as seen in *Pillow Talk* (1959) and latterly *When Harry Met Sally* (1989) and *You've Got Mail* (1998).

Yet with the advent of individualism and an expectation of romantic love that incorporated emotional closeness, people became more demanding of themselves and of their marriages. Released from the need to marry, or stay married, for societal or family reasons, divorce subsequently became increasingly prevalent (the divorce rate started to grow in earnest after World War II).

The need for personal fulfilment and emotional intimacy can be seen as contributing to an increase in divorce but also being developed as a result of it. With failing marriages, some people went to therapy; albeit not widely sought, therapy had become increasingly accepted in the 1950s and 1960s. The premise and language of therapy—that issues can be worked through—was popularised in advice columns and marital guides.

In the last half of the twentieth century, there was a marked transformation in the self-identities of women. Reacting against the subordination of their mothers in the household, women become more vocal and successful in their quest for power and economic equity; women in the workplace have increased dramatically since the 1970s. Accordingly, females became less reliant on marriage for economic security. The female drive for financial independence can also be seen as stemming from the increase in divorce, where the longevity of marriage and associated economic stability could no longer be guaranteed.

It was the reduced social, economic and sexual function of marriage that enabled relationships and new ways of relating to evolve. The term 'relationship', to mean an emotional and sexual association between two people, only became part of the vernacular in the 1960s and 1970s. Here we can see the impact of the birth control pill, which released sex from its tie with marriage. Giddens (1992) goes further and presents birth control, or sexual plasticity, as releasing relationships from sexual association and exclusivity. The liberation of sex from marriage or heterosexual relationships may have been informed by homosexual practices, which have been increasingly represented in the last 40 years. Giddens (1992) and Shumway (2003) agree that the democratically negotiated terms of gay unions (e.g. fidelity, autonomy and roles), is increasingly incorporated in modern heterosexual relationships. Accordingly, Giddens' (1992) presents a more liberated definition of relationships: 'a close and continuing emotional tie, to another' (p. 58). It can also be seen that marriage's place as a sanctuary for human connectivity persists in these new ways of relating.

Indeed, romantic love concepts have been reworked under these conditions. Sharon Thompson (1995) in a study on sex and romance with teenage girls, found that whilst traditional views of romantic love were evident, many conceptualised romantic love as finding the right person with whom they could work through issues. These girls spoke of the impermanence of love, that rather than lasting forever, the union would last as long as they could offer restorative support to the other. This view of romantic love is largely influenced by the discourse of intimacy.

The discourse of intimacy makes emotional closeness, rather than romantic love, the pursuit. Shumway (2003) suggests that intimacy does not replace romance but co-exists with it. The discourse of intimacy, in the context of romantic love, has been flourishing since the 1970s, as seen by the enormous popularity of relationship self-help books and television talk shows which make relationship issues a focus (e.g. *Dr Phil* from the US, 2002-present; *Loose Women* from the UK, 1999-present; *The View* from the US, 1997-present; and *The Talk* from the US, 2010-present). Similarly, romantic love features within the discourse of intimacy: 'it is both a stage of the relationship or a reproducible experience that a couple can make or purchase'

(Shumway, 2003, p. 26). As these discourses co-occur and both influence people, most individuals remain unaware of their difference. This lack of differentiation is not helped by the fact that the intimacy literature and popular media continues to assume the couple dyad as its norm. For example, in an American reality television programme *Guiliana and Bill* (2009-2014), a show that followed the lives of a glamorous married couple, the viewer witnesses the discourse of intimacy and from it, assumes the discourse of romantic love. This association is furthered in the couple's relationship guide, entitled *Advice from a Madly-In-Love Couple* (2010), which explicitly refers to romantic love, yet the offering is focused on communication.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

In conclusion, romantic love is a Western construct that evolved from the glorification of courtly love in twelfth century feudal Europe and became the dominant way of conceiving marriage in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The rise of individualism and the breakdown of wider social ties, means that modern relationships are focused on emotional connectivity and personal happiness. This has given great importance to the discourse of intimacy, which is significantly affecting the conceptualisation of romantic love in the new millennium.

In charting the historical manifestations of romantic love, this chapter serves to identify the subject as worthwhile of further exploration within its contemporary context. This chapter also acts as a link between Chapter 2: Literature Review and Chapter 4: Enlivened Social Constructionism. It highlights the discursive context from which the psychological knowledge, as outlined in Chapter 2, and our understanding of romantic love have been produced, while also contributing to the theorising necessary to integrate Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as discussed in Chapter 4.

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## **Chapter 4**

# **Enlivened Social Constructionism: A Dual Focus Methodology**

This chapter situates the research within current discussions on social constructionism and outlines the philosophical and theoretical position that informs this thesis. It introduces the methodologies that have contributed to the approach taken to the study of romance in established relationships, specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). These, while distinctive, can also be understood as complementary in allowing for psychological research that values the phenomenological, and locates subjective experience within a particular social and discursive context.

This chapter's introduction and rationale for the social constructionist position taken in this thesis precedes and prepares the ground for Chapter 5: Methods, which provides a detailed account of the specific methodological procedures used to operationalise the research.

### **4.1 Why Social Constructionism?**

Social constructionism is a broad theoretical framework which denies the idea of a single universal 'truth'. It proposes that knowledge is constructed between people through everyday practices and language. As demonstrated in Chapter 2: Literature Review and Chapter 3: A History of Romance, this view offers that any 'truth' is an artefact of its cultural and historical location (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2013; Giddens, 1992; Shumway, 2003).

I write from my desk in Dubai the United Arab Emirates, the country that has been home for seven years. Before living here, I resided for more than a decade in the United Kingdom and Ireland, and prior to that China and Hong Kong. My birth country is New Zealand. In 1993, when I moved to China, I found myself confronted not only by Chinese culture, but more notably my own. In China, the things that I had taken for granted, as common sense, were displaced - were shown as 'other than'. At that point I started to take a more critical view of my own beliefs and behaviours. I was living in Shenyang, then a communist stronghold, where the Mao suit was still commonplace and androgynous uniform dressing was *de rigueur*; clothing choices were after all limited and only available at government-controlled department stores. I also recall that time as being a particularly asexual period of my life. I was no longer an object of desire, as I had been in my home country; I was officially off-limits to Chinese men and even if I were not, my physicality (clumsy and tall) and manners were not

seen as attractive. I was no longer feminine; I did not fit their delicate and nimble ideal. Indeed, I must have been awkward too as I was often baffled by their ways of socialising. I recall being invited to a dance party, expecting a nightclub or something akin to that, where in fact it was a traditional ballroom dancing event. Adopting brazen masculine ways, I could be regularly found breaking government curfew and occasionally drinking baijiu—a strong liquor that was a male preserve. Needless to say there was no romance for me in China.

Some twenty years later, I am here in Dubai where it is not unusual for an Emirati man to have two or more wives. It is in this environment that I had to become a spouse (albeit the one-and-only wife); in choosing to live in the United Arab Emirates my long-term partner and I were obligated to marry, in order for me to legally reside and operate here (medical insurance and driving licenses, for example, require proof of marriage). Our wedding was a dismissive administrative affair: we wore jeans and our sole witnesses were two construction workers, who we lured from the street. Now, a few years later I can be heard enthusiastically peppering my speech with ‘my husband...’ as is common in these parts. I know that my behaviours are also different, invested in being a good wife: I am more generous, patient and kind. I also seek to be an attractive wife. Enmeshed now in a society which focuses more on grooming, I even have beauty rituals in place, which I frame as requisite ‘maintenance’. I acknowledge too that I savour those practices I can label as romantic, perhaps as signifying some wifely prowess.

When faced with the practices of other societies, I observe the fluidity of gender, sexuality and romance. Indeed, it is relatively easy to recognise myself as socially constructed—and see the individual and social as entwined.

## **4.2 *Enlivening Social Constructionism***

Romantic notions are culturally and historically contingent (e.g. Giddens, 1992; Shumway, 2003) as reflected in Chapter 3: A History of Romantic Love. Also mentioned in Chapter 3, is that the historicising of taken-for-granted, common sense ways of being and thinking is borrowed from Foucault. Indeed, Foucault sought to reveal the social mechanisms of power that made some discourses and accordant subjective experiences possible during a particular period. In this way, Foucault proposed (1966/1994) that understanding subjectivity—ways of being, thinking and feeling—does not require an examination of an individual’s thoughts but a consideration of the wider conditions that make it possible to think in a certain way (and not in other ways).

It was thus my aim to maintain a Foucauldian inspired, social constructionist approach in this research on the topic of romance in established relationships. I undertook a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) to map the discursive resources available for people to talk about

romance. FDA was developed in the 1990s as a Foucauldian inspired approach to the analysis of text or narrative. There is no strict method to this approach, however, it typically requires a detailed examination of the text or transcript to highlight the ways in which discourses construct objects, the social conditions which make this possible, and the practices that it sustains (Willig, 2008). The FDA seeks to identify some of the social features and speak to the cultural forces that empower the talk that is dominant—taken-for-granted, considered for example as healthy or as normal. Within this discursive economy<sup>20</sup>, it is theorised that individuals take up various subject positions, which provide the basis for their identity and experience (e.g. Burr, 2015). As articulated by Davies and Harré (1999):

Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from a vantage point of that position in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. (p. 35)

As such, a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis can deduce, from within various subject positions, what can be felt, thought and experienced. However, as Willig (2013) cautions, the reality of what people actually feel, think or experience cannot be answered by this approach alone. Burr (2015) concurs, advocating for a social constructionist psychology that 'gives us some purchase upon the experience of being a person...' (p. 232). Burr is calling for more creative approaches to social constructionist research and suggests phenomenological methods of enquiry as potentially insightful.

Therefore, with reference to hermeneutic phenomenology in the form of IPA, I chose to *enliven*<sup>21</sup> my research, to voice the lived consequences of romantic discourses.

I found myself attracted to phenomenology and IPA on several levels. While the following pages detail the theoretical grounds for IPA's match with FDA, there are for me other more intuitive reasons for *enlivening* this social constructionist research with the support of IPA.

I was inspired to *enliven* by Foucault. He could be seen to embellish his writing with visceral portrayals of the lived experience of the oppressed (with the exception of the last two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, which may have been rushed before his death). His forewords and introductions typically contained emblems and shocking images. Foucault would use this technique to emotionally engage the reader and compel them to read on—and potentially act

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<sup>20</sup>The term discursive economy represents the discursive resources that are accessible to the participants. I have a preference for the word 'economy' over 'resources' as it encompasses issues related to power (Willig, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> In comparison, Stephen Frosh refers to a discursive reading *thickening* when he additionally employs psychoanalytic interpretative strategies (Willig, 2013).

differently. Whilst writing the thesis in Foucault's graphic style might indeed *enliven* the reading, illustrating the feelings of the participants and explicating the actuality of their romantic experience, via IPA, would fundamentally *enliven* the research.

The genealogy, as shared in Chapter 3, references the modern turn to affective individualism. It shows that in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' emotional intimacy and affective support is readily featured in relationships. IPA, with its attention on affect and lived experience, respects and speaks to this emotional direction. In this way, the research is relevantly *enlivened*.

Finally, I felt compelled on a compassionate level to choose IPA to *enliven* the FDA. Romance, which is typically associated with joyful experience, also involves sadness and pain; there may be anger, grief and loneliness too. Having witnessed the fraught romantic journeys of friends and family—and lived through my own heartache—I wanted to recognise the considerable personal impact of romance. *Enlivening* the research with IPA honours that emotional path and speaks to romantic actuality—it gives us a meaningful grasp on individual experience.

The IPA explores in detail participants' personal lived romantic experience and how participants make sense of that experience they label as 'romance'. It naturally *enlivens* as it encompasses affective and embodied experience. FDA informs an approach which considers how broader social, historical and political discursive practices shape what can be said about romance and thereby outlines a discursive frame for romance. Neither approach on its own is able to theorise the lived consequences of discursive constructions.

#### **4.2.1 Reflecting Human Concerns**

IPA is an articulation of a phenomenological approach to psychology that involves the meticulous examination of human lived experience, in an attempt to provide an 'insider's perspective'. It requires a detailed analysis of verbatim accounts, generally produced by interview, with the aim of amplifying experiential qualities to reflect human concerns. IPA was introduced by Jonathan Smith (e.g. 1996), who saw its merit in the field of health psychology, which had been dominated by social cognitive theory. The social cognition models failed to address the experiential reality of receiving treatment or health care. The allure of divulging the 'insider's perspective' combined with IPA's flexibility has seen it heralded by researchers and psychologists with diverse interests from health and sport to business and relationships. Part of its popularity has been that it is not prescriptive and is considered an integrative approach; in that it can work with other methodologies and accommodate a range of theoretical positions (Smith *et al.*, 2009). For example, IPA can be found combined with: narrative analysis (Eatough & Smith, 2006), which hails from social constructionist theory;

and more recently repertory grid analysis (e.g. Yorke & Dallos, 2015), which is based on George Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory of personality.

Of key importance to IPA is giving voice to the experiential claims and concerns of people. While phenomenological approaches (like IPA) are concerned with individual meaning, they have relatively little to say about the origins of the concepts used by participants to construct their experience. Thus, the complementary use of FDA alongside IPA, provides us with a more holistic view.

#### **4.2.2 The Person-In-Context**

The IPA researcher, aims to get 'in the shoes' of participants to try and understand their lived experience with respect to the phenomenon in question. Yet it is recognised that the researcher will never fully achieve this, as there is an interpretative process in place; referred to as the double hermeneutics, whereby the participant is making sense of their experience and the researcher is in turn making sense of that expression. In this respect IPA owes much to Heidegger, who in the early twentieth century articulated a hermeneutic phenomenology.

Hermeneutics is generally defined as the theory of the rules that preside over interpretation (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2013; Stewart, 1989). Heidegger explicated that access to people's lived world is always through interpretation. 'Heidegger...points out that our interpretations of experience are always shaped, limited and enabled by, language' (Smith *et al.*, 2009, p. 194). In this way, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology is sympathetic to social constructionism. Indeed, participants accounts are constructed by the researcher and the participant (Larkin *et al.*, 2006). Smith *et al.* (2009) assert that an analysis cannot possibly realise a pure first-hand account, the researcher is not the participant and thus access to someone else's experience is always incomplete. The researcher must make sense of the participant's account through their own view. Improving the acuity of this lens—by understanding the person-in-context and themselves in the context of the study—can help the researcher get closer to the participant's life world.

It is Heidegger's view of the person-in-context that presents IPA as a valuable ally to FDA—and vice versa. As Larkin *et al.* (2006) explain: '...discourse analytic approaches make a contribution to our understanding of the means by which 'love' (for example) can be understood and enacted. ...IPA simply uses the participant's account in an inverse fashion, to reflect upon 'love' from the perspective of the participant's engagement of it' (p.110). FDA offers the IPA researcher access to the wider context of the phenomenon—its cultural and historical location and the constructions that are privileged. In this way, the IPA researcher can be more cognisant and sensitive to the person-in-context and more understanding of their experiential claims.

### **4.2.3 Realising Theoretical Cohesion**

Smith *et al.* (2009) suggest that IPA subscribes to a 'less strong form of social constructionism than FDA' (p. 196). Indeed, IPA appears wary of the consequences of being associated with 'strong' social constructionism. Social constructionism suffers from a reputation for being radical and has been afflicted with internal disputes (e.g. Burr, 2015; Nightingale & Cromby, 1999), which might make potential methodological bedmates<sup>22</sup>—like IPA—uneasy of them. At the core of the wariness is a concern that social constructionists see language as the only reality and that a person is without agency—that people are simply constructed.

Foucault himself did not address the issue of agency directly, but implicit in his writing is that people actively partake in construction. In his late works, *The Use of Pleasure* (1984/1990) and *The Care of the Self* (1984/1988) he emphasises that people are not docile beings but are active in shaping themselves. He encourages people to recognise their power to resist dominant or normalising discourses and mobilise other constructions.

On the fraught issue of reality, here IPA seems particularly nervous of social constructionism. As Coyle and Lyons (2007) express on the prospect of combining the two '...it would be necessary to find a way of doing this which would allow the study to retain IPA's central understanding that participants' talk bears some relation to the actuality of which it speaks' (p. 28).

I was thus glad to read Edley's (2001) perspective on social constructionism, which neutralises this angst. He unravels social constructionism by drawing on Edwards' (1997, cited in Edley, 2001) epistemic view that language can be seen as the vehicle through which we come to understand the world. In this way, social constructionism is not denying a world outside of talk. Rather, that how people talk about the world is seen as constitutive of how we understand ourselves. Importantly, this view does not deny that feelings and experiences or places and events exist, but that they do so as a socially constructed reality. This represents a crucial theoretical underpinning of this research and thesis.

Heidegger concurs with the central role of language; he writes 'language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell' (1947, cited in Mugerauer, 2008). Indeed, Edley's (2001) take on social constructionism appears compatible with Heidegger's theoretical position on

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<sup>22</sup> Sullivan's (2014) playful commentary *Promiscuous phenomenology and defensive discourse analysis*, provides a compelling perspective on these two bedfellows. I argue here that IPA is more cautious and not quite as promiscuous as Sullivan suggests.

reality<sup>23</sup>: that things exist, and would have existed even if humans had not, but nothing is revealed except when it is encountered and brought meaningfully into the context of human life (Larkin *et al.*, 2006). If people make meaning, then for something to be encountered as meaningful is a production of our interaction with others. Or as eloquently phrased by Smith *et al.* (2009): 'our understanding of our experiences are woven from the fabric of our many and varied relationships with others' (p.194). Here we can see the potential harmony between IPA's focus on sense-making of experience and FDA's exposure of discursive resources. The social constructionist would argue that discursive resources produce particular experiential realities.

This perspective helps to conceptualise the relationship between 'discourse' and 'experience'; a necessary articulation for my synthesis of the analysis from the FDA with the themes from the IPA (Willig, 2017). Realising the promising methodological connection of FDA and IPA as social constructionist means that the relationship between 'discourse' and 'experience' can be articulated as language-dominant, which proposes that discourse constructs experience (Willig, 2017). In addition to the language-dominant view, Willig proposes two additional conceptualisations for the dual methodology researcher: a phenomenological led theorisation; and an in-between position, which could be seen as reflecting a critical realist perspective, whereby discourse shapes rather than produces experience. The elected conceptualisation, in this case language-dominant, shaped the way my themes from the IPA were integrated with the FDA and how the reading unfolds (as outlined in 4.3.1 *Role of the Researcher*). (See also Appendix 1: Reflexive Account for Language-Dominant Conceptualisation.)

#### 4.2.4 FDA and IPA Current Status

In recent years, there have been references to the potency of social constructionist research combined with phenomenology and more specifically using IPA and FDA (e.g. Burr, 2015; Coyle & Lyons, 2007; Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith *et al.*, 2009). Yet there is an absence of research deployed in this manner; perhaps due to the wariness of 'strong' social constructionism discussed earlier. An exception is Colahan's exploration of relationship satisfaction (Colahan *et al.*, 2012; Colahan, 2014). More commonly, studies using IPA might discuss, but not investigate, the impact of particular discursive constructions or wider constraints on lived experience (e.g. Duncan *et al.*, 2001; Flowers *et al.*, 2000; Larkin *et al.*, 2009). As an example, Eatough and Smith's (2006) research on anger noted that the participant's commitment to current cultural discourses on emotion influenced the way she thought about, and acted upon, her anger.

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<sup>23</sup> Heidegger has been described by Dreyfus (1995, cited by Larkin *et al.*, 2006) as a minimal hermeneutic realist.

Colahan's (2014) pioneering research employed both IPA and FDA to interviews with lay people and also Relate counsellors; taking what is described as an 'and/and' approach. Like my research, it rejects an 'either/or' approach in favour of combining methodologies. The use of multiple methodologies and methods is not new in quantitative and qualitative research. However, the rationale for their use has significantly changed. In the past, triangulation—multiple studies—would seek to show coherence amongst the outcomes as a way of enhancing the credibility of findings and gaining commitment to recommendations for policy or practice alterations. Implicit was positivism and a claim to a universal 'truth'. Whereas today the employment of multiple methodologies and methods is not about demonstrating a single 'truth', but more about honouring the research question and reflecting complexity (Chamberlain *et al.*, 2011).

It is integrity in addressing the research question that is championed by Chamberlain (2000, 2012) and to which I subscribe. Rather than following prescribed methodological approaches, he is calling psychologists to be more cognisant of research aims and to think more creatively about our means of engagement.

Most questions about human experience, perception and understandings should be approached by as many viewpoints as possible. Only then can we begin to understand the complexity within which we negotiate our everyday lives and sense of self. (Frost, 2011, p. 14)

Pluralists, like Frost, seek to provide rich insight into the complexity of individual experience. They do so with a careful and thorough study of a single data set, which they review from multiple perspectives. This they achieve through either: a within-method approach, whereby variations of an analytical technique are applied (e.g. Frost, 2009); or across-methods, which addresses the research question with distinctly different methods (e.g. Burck, 2005, 2011). Furthermore, pluralist approaches can draw on the eyes of multiple researchers to interpret the data (e.g. Frost *et al.*, 2010). As can be seen, common to pluralism is an ongoing review of a data set and a desire to extract as much as possible in order to illuminate meaning. While my combination of methods seeks to honour complexity and address the research topic from multiple perspectives it does so with two data sets (specifically IPA for the interviews and FDA for the focus groups).

Frequently, pluralists adopt a pragmatic view for their use of divergent methods,<sup>24</sup> however Burck (2005, 2011) theorised her use of discourse analysis, grounded theory and narrative

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<sup>24</sup> Such an approach can be helpful in countering the 'imposition of supposed truth or reality on to participants' accounts of their experience' (Frost, 2011, p. 188).

analysis as social constructionist. As discussed earlier, my research is also formulated as social constructionist (see 4.2.3 *Realising Theoretical Cohesion*). My use of two methodologies, FDA and IPA, also reflects a genuine concern for addressing the research and understanding the subjective experience of romance in a cohesive and meaningful way. Embracing hermeneutic phenomenology within this social constructionist study *enlivens* the research and voices the felt consequences of discourses. As such, the synthesis of FDA and IPA provides an input into the development of a social constructionist psychology that 'gives us some purchase on the experience of being a person...' (Burr, 2015, p.232). Furthermore, it builds upon the approach taken by Colahan (2014), with the hope of strengthening our grasp of how these methodologies connect.

### **4.3 *Enlivened Constructions of Romance***

I envisage the combination of FDA and IPA as providing a dynamic animation of romance in today's established relationships. FDA draws a one-dimensional outline of the discursive economy, and then locates subject positions within this; somewhat like a comic strip. There is movement as people are seen in subsequent panels taking up different subject positions; some are more active than others. Yet the people are flat characters. Then IPA, with its attention on emotion, embodiment and experiential claims, can be seen as fully *enlivening* the animation. We can now appreciate their joy and hope or their hurt and frustration. Also, we can observe the entrenchment or pace and gait that comes with taking up subject positions; some may be emphatically rejected, others may be swiftly adopted, some moves might involve tentative steps or negotiating hurdles.

I argue that this *enlivened*, or animated, view of romance enables awareness of the experiential actuality of taking up specific subject positions. We can additionally grasp the effort it might take to shift from one subject position to another; which may assist in counselling those who understand themselves as suffering some form of romantic distress. (See Chapter 8: Discursive Emotional Dynamics, which explores the relationship between discourses, accordant subject positions and the emotional meaning making produced by that discursive location which then implicates future positioning, as illustrated with reference to navigating positions from the subjugated, 'Poor Me' subject position.) Furthermore, revealing through the discourse analysis and genealogy, as explained in the introduction, that what is taken as common sense ways of relating has not always been so, may open doors to alternative ways of seeing and doing relationships and romance.

#### **4.3.1 Role of the Researcher**

In combining FDA and IPA, I have needed to address inherent hermeneutic differences. Whilst I have touched on hermeneutics earlier, it is worth expanding on here.

Ricoeur (1970; 1996, cited in Willig, 2017) clarified two kinds of hermeneutics:

- a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' where interpretation is generated on the basis of a 'suspicious' attitude with the aim to uncover a hidden meaning beneath the surface of a text.
- a 'hermeneutics of empathy' where the aim of the interpretation is to get closer to the intended meaning of a text.

Heidegger in his book *Being and Time* can be seen to place value on the hermeneutic of empathy (1927, cited in Raffoul & Pettigrew, 2002), whereby he suggests that any interpretation ought to be grounded in the actual words with a central focus on understanding human action from the 'inside'. An empathetic interpretation is concerned with amplifying meaning within the text, as it is presented, without introducing the lens of theoretical concepts. Whereas the hermeneutics of suspicion draws on theoretical frameworks in order to interrogate the text.

Ricoeur (1970, cited in Olivieri & Leurs, 2014) suggested the hermeneutics of suspicion as presupposing underlying mechanisms operating below the surface of words 'and circumvents obvious or self-evident meanings in order to draw out less visible and less flattering truths' (p. 356). In this way, the hermeneutics of suspicion is reflected in Foucault's approach, which searched for 'the shameful, fragmented origin behind societal phenomena whose origins have become mythologised, with the passing of time, as noble rationality and unambiguous clarity' (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2017, p.161). Accordingly, FDA seeks to reveal the cultural forces that construct those discourses which have become naturalised or taken-for-granted and operates from within the hermeneutics of suspicion.

Ricoeur advocated a need for both the hermeneutics of suspicion and empathy in order to promote understanding. The FDA in this research is *enlivened* with IPA, which approaches the interpretative process from a position of empathy, or more accurately 'less suspicious' (psychological perspectives can be applied later in the analysis), in order to give voice to the participants experiential claims (Willig, 2012). These hermeneutic differences were navigated by doing the 'less suspicious' IPA first and engaging in the 'suspicious' FDA later (see operational procedures in Chapter 5: Methods).

Furthermore, in order to integrate my reading from the FDA with the IPA, I have needed to be fully confident of my conceptualising of the relationship between 'discourse' and 'experience'. As mentioned earlier (4.2.3 *Realising Theoretical Cohesion*) in positioning this research as social constructionist, I was motivated towards a language-dominant conceptualisation, which proposes that discourse constructs experience—that discursive resources produce particular

experiential realities (Willig, 2017). Yet, I have tried to remain open during the research and analysis of both the IPA and FDA to theorising the research differently. Of Willig's (2017) two alternatives the phenomenological led conceptualisation, whereby arguably the experience pre-dates a vocabulary for it, ceased to be a viable option after my assembling of the genealogy (Chapter 2: A History of Romantic Love), which revealed romantic love to be a historically situated social practice that has evolved from the courtly love of the twelfth century. Meanwhile the in-between position, which proposes that discourse shapes experience by providing a context for it, required more considered deliberation. Accordingly, during the focus groups and the analysis of the transcripts, I asked myself: is discourse shaping or producing romantic experience? In attending to this difference I became convinced that the lived experience of romance is fully mediated by language and social discourse. (For more details see Appendix 1: Reflexive Account for Language-Dominant Conceptualisation.)

Theorising the research as social constructionist and therefore language-dominant, enables a top-down story with discourses producing experience. Accordingly, the next chapters are organised with the FDA analysis being presented first in Chapter 6: Romantic Discursive Terrain, which is then followed by my interpretation of the experiential themes from the IPA, Chapter 7: The Insider Perspective of Romantic Realities. The latter part of Chapter 7 presents the *enlivened* analysis that integrates the IPA reading with the FDA.

### **4.3.2 Respecting the Interpretative Space**

Ultimately, the judgment of the quality of a social constructionist reading, where multiplicity of 'truths' is acknowledged, is determined in part by its usefulness (Holt, 2011). Theorising discursive production of romantic realities is potentially powerful; it offers that the romantic practices of couples and lived experiences of individuals are furnished by social and discursive location. Undeniably, the utility of this research rests enormously on the sensitivity of my interpretation and sense-making. Many qualitative researchers face this challenge, as Madill *et al.* (2000) write: 'A dominant theme in qualitative inquiry is the understanding of linguistic meaning... This explication of meaning requires a certain level of inference by the researcher, and this has been criticised for the space it affords the subjectivity of the researcher' (p.1). Whilst I am not looking for single 'truths' and acknowledge the subjective role of the researcher as inevitable and not a problem that needs to be controlled, none-the-less I was aware of the impact it has when undertaking two separate analyses.

Indeed, this interpretative space, that Madill *et al.* (2000) references, is particularly vast in my case, as I employed two methodologies that offer stances rather than prescriptive steps. I reflected upon this space as somewhat exciting but also daunting; most certainly it needed to be respected. Essentially as a researcher I was cut-off from a traditional method recipe: although guided by concepts and those offerings where available in texts (e.g. Parker, 1992;

Willig, 2008, 2013 for the FDA; and Smith *et al.*, 2009 for the IPA). I was also primed to regularly question myself—and ask questions of the data (e.g. Larkin *et al.*, 2006). Implicit in these methodologies, which offer stances rather than formulaic steps, is an expectation that the researcher is intellectually astute enough to grasp and operationalise the suggested ways of thinking. I wanted to do well by Foucault, an intellectual giant, who had faith in the ability of people like me to handle his ideas. I sensed also an expectation of creativity; Willig (2013) suggests that a methodological stance, or way of thinking, enables the researcher to address questions in innovative ways. Finally, I wanted to do justice to IPA and honour the intimate insider views that the participants entrusted to me. Smith *et al.* (2009) say that interpretation in IPA calls for critical awareness and imagination in order to illuminate meaning. Like a precious house, I approached the interpretative space as a privilege that requires attention and respect. I wanted to curate sensitively and creatively; find the space where the shadow and light *enlivens*.

Madill *et al.* (2000) suggest the researcher thoroughly document their processes in order to create something like an audit trail, thereby instilling confidence in the rigour of the interpretation. Burr (2015) also references this audit trail concept to attest to the soundness of the study. Consequently, Chapter 5: Methods is extensive and detailed—and supported with more than 25 appendixes.

Furthermore, making transparent the researcher's relationship with the study is additionally seen as promoting credibility (e.g. Frost, 2011; Willig, 2012). Thus, I have tried to be explicit about my perspectives as well as processes, choices and progress as an author. Accordingly, I did my best to be reflective, to understand and develop myself in the context of the research. For these reasons, I have kept a reflexivity log throughout my research (see Appendix 2: Reflexivity Log Extract) and have written this thesis in a reflective manner. Moreover, in order to broaden my knowledge and develop myself as a sensitive explorer of romantic love, I volunteered at the Juliet Club in Verona; to answer the many lovelorn letters that are sent to Juliet, is to be at the front end of experiential disclosures and encounter divergent romantic discourses (see Appendix 3: Juliet Secretary Report). In this way, I endeavoured to be respectful of—and effective in—the interpretative space that I have been privileged to inhabit.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

Complementing the social constructionist study with hermeneutic phenomenology *enlivens* the research and voices the felt consequences of discourses. My theorising of the methodology, acknowledges that the lived experience of romantic love is likely produced by society. As such, what is experienced as romantic love, is arguably not owned by an individual but is a product of historically and culturally located discursive resources. Accordingly, this

thesis attempts to elucidate the *process* of discursive production of romantic realities. It is hoped that by highlighting the discourses—whether accepted or contested—deployed by people in dialogue with each other, greater understandings of romance and relationships in general, will result.

Mindful of the need for an audit trail, Chapter 5: Methods, which follows next, delivers a comprehensive and reflective description of my approach to operationalising the methodology.

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## Chapter 5

# Methods

The research takes a novel methodological approach—combining Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA)—to the topic of romance in established relationships. Having outlined in Chapter 4 the theoretical stance taken in this thesis, this chapter will detail how this was operationalised through the research. It will provide an outline of the methods used for data collection and analysis and the rationale for their use.

As discussed in Chapter 4, for research to be considered valid and rigorous it is essential that the ethical researcher articulate their investments in the study, whether they be emotional, personal or conceptual (e.g. Frost, 2011; Willig, 2012). Accordingly, this chapter describes my personal experience of conducting the research and undertaking the analysis. It is written as a reflective first person account to show my ownership of the research journey and to make clear the thought processes and decisions taken along the path. As an example, at times I reference and reflect on supervisory guidance. Concerned with transparency and instilling confidence in the quality of interpretation, this method chapter is extensive and supported by numerous appendixes to document and demonstrate my process; as such, it provides a comprehensive and accessible audit trail (Burr, 2015; Madill *et al.*, 2000).

The research involved two independent inquiries with people in established relationships: in-depth interviews with IPA to capture an insider perspective of the lived experience of romance; and focus groups with FDA to map the romantic discursive terrain and establish the means by which people come to understand their romantic reality. Each of these inquiries has individual merit in the study of romance. However, their combination attempts to shed light on the *process* whereby individuals in established relationships position themselves within available discourses and thus experience their relationships as romantic (or otherwise).

Respecting hermeneutic differences, I approached the studies as discrete and undertook the interviews first, then allowed for the phenomenological analysis, before undertaking the FDA of the focus groups. For IPA, it is essential for the researcher to remain present and empathic with the data in order to be sensitive to the meaning making of the individuals. By contrast, FDA is 'suspicious' and approaches the data with theoretical assumptions and a social constructionist lens. It is feasible to undertake the FDA and IPA in parallel, however

separating them helped to ensure that my IPA reading of participants' lived experience of romance was not 'blurred' by any perspectives that arose from the Foucauldian analysis.

Undertaking the research with the interview study and IPA first, followed by the focus group and FDA, represents a form of 'bottom-up' analysis in a number of ways: going from the individual lived experience to the broader social realm which (re)produces the dominant talk; whilst also going from a position of empathic interpretation, or more accurately 'less suspicious', with the IPA, to 'suspicious' with the FDA.

Insights from these studies are shown in Chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 7 also includes a presentation of the *enlivened* research that integrates the IPA reading with the FDA, which uniquely provides us with a view to the discursive production of romantic realities. This *enlivened* reading also constitutes a methodological innovation and is one of the original contributions of this thesis.

## **5.1 IPA Study of Interviews**

*Exploring how romance is experienced for those in established relationships: an analysis of in-depth interviews.*

### **Why Interviews?**

In-depth interviews and diaries are thought to be the best means for accessing rich, detailed first-person accounts of experiences (e.g. Smith *et al.*, 2009). In the interview the researcher has the opportunity to adjust the questions in light of responses and to encourage both the storyteller and their reflections on the events. Interviews by nature are interactive, which enables the researcher to check their understanding of what is being said. Diaries meanwhile, deny the researcher the chance to check or explore their own meaning making of what is being expressed. In this way, the researcher's interpretation of the diary may be more open to misrepresentation of the participant's lived experience. Another problem with diaries is the low completion rates: as many as 50% of diary keepers may fail to finish a 7-day journaling exercise (Batra & Glazer, 1989). This attrition issue might be exacerbated with my working-class sample (see 5.1.1.2 *Sampling*), as diary practice continues to be correlated with length of education (Lejeune, 2009). It also occurred to me that asking people to keep diaries on their romantic lives might in some way be threatening to partners and intrusive on the relationship. Thus, I predicted that the lived experience of romance would be more realistically attained via the interview.

The IPA of the in-depth interviews seeks to gain an insider perspective of participants' experiential and emotional romantic realities. The specific research questions to be addressed by the interview study are:

- What does romance mean to people in established relationships?
- How do people in established relationships experience romance?

### 5.1.1 Before the Analysis

#### 5.1.1.1 Preparing for the Interview

The phenomenological interview is not so much about gaining access to relevant information but an opportunity to throw light on the meanings that interviewees give to their experiences (C. Willig, Personal Communication, 5 March 2015).

Keeping this perspective helped to frame my style of engagement in the interview and nature of questioning. In IPA the interviewee can be seen as the experiential expert and the researcher travels their path in order to access their life-world and sense-making. Unstructured interviews are particularly suited to this style of research. They set out a single core question 'tell me about x' and the researcher explores the path as set out by the participant. Feminists (e.g. Wilkinson, 1999) welcome this approach as redressing the traditional power dynamics that exist in the interviewer-interviewee relationship. Given its uncharted nature, it has the advantage of accessing information that might be unanticipated by the researcher.

However, Smith *et al.* (2009) warn that unstructured interviews should be left to experienced researchers; as they require agility in questioning, the ability to handle unexpected sensitive topics, and an extra level of awareness to ensure that the interviewee does not go completely off track. For these reasons, I elected to use the format of a semi-structured interview and created a schedule of open-ended questions. The semi-structured interview allowed me the flexibility to depart from the questions and follow the participant's lead, but also the security of having ready-made questions, just in case I got stuck, drew a blank, or had less forthcoming interviewees. Compared to a prescribed structured interview, the semi-structured interview maintains many of the advantages found within an unstructured discussion: namely it facilitates rapport building with the participant, enables the interview to go into novel areas and thus produces rich data (Osborn & Smith, 2008). Indeed, Osborn and Smith endorse semi-structured interviews as 'the exemplary method for IPA' (2008, p.57).

I followed the guidance, set out in Smith *et al.* (2009) in creating my original schedule of interview questions. There are descriptive, contrasting and circular questions, for example: 'Can you tell me about romance in your relationship?'; 'Can you tell me about a recent

experience which was less romantic than was expected?'; and 'In what ways would your partner describe you as romantic?'

Inspired by Sheridan (2014) who asked her interview participants to produce material objects such as photographs, pieces of clothing, diaries and medical records to facilitate their storytelling, I had wanted to ask participants to bring something that 'told me about the romance in their relationship'. However, after some consideration of practical logistics, rather than bring the physical item I decided instead to ask them within the interview, 'If you were asked to bring something with you that told me about the romance in your relationship, what might you have chosen?'

In advance of practicing the interviews, I reminded myself of the essential skills of a good interviewer. Wilkinson *et al.* (2004) advocate the following four elements (borrowed from counselling psychology): being an attentive listener; being empathetic and non judgmental; allowing the participant to express themselves in their own way; and encouraging exploration of feelings.

### **Interview Pilot**

Wanting to pilot my interview with a stranger, to assess my rapport building and interview style, I posted a note on the Facebook page for Dubai's American Women's Association. The volunteer, indeed a stranger, was reading my book, which was not ideal (and indeed affected her responses<sup>25</sup>) but still a valuable pilot none-the-less. I did go 'off piste' from the schedule, trying to be flexible, but even so the interview only lasted thirty minutes. I initially considered that I was too enthusiastic, chummy, and did not pick up on opportunities to go deeper. On listening to the audio recording I was astonished to hear myself talking at length. This pilot knocked my confidence as I fully appreciated how fundamental a good interview is to IPA analysis.

Unless one has engaged deeply with the participant and their concerns, unless one has listened attentively and probed in order to learn more about their life world, then the data will be too thin for analysis. (Smith *et al.*, 2009, p.58)

Evidently, I was apprehensive about going deeper into her private romantic life-world. Having utilised IPA and in-depth interviews for my MSc dissertation, I had been sure of my technique. However, my MSc research was on sense-making of organisational change, which must have felt to me to be less intrusive.

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<sup>25</sup> In 5.1.1.9 *Additional Ethical Issues*, the impact of my being the author of *The Date Night Manifesto* is considered. It was predicted that participants' disclosure would be affected if they had knowledge of my authorship on the subject of romance.

Shortly after the troublesome pilot, I was coaching individuals on New York University's leadership programme and found myself comparing my engagement with them, the pilot participant and my MSc participants. Notably I was more confident in my role as a coach and with the MSc participants; perhaps the organisational setting and subject helped. For the first half of any coaching session I try and step into their shoes through attentive listening and probing and find myself doing very little talking. Similarly, I recall being surprised at how little my voice featured on my MSc interview recordings.

My supervisors reviewed the recording of the pilot and reassured me that it was okay to have a voice in the interview and that being chummy might be necessary to build rapport with some participants. They suggested that earlier in the conversation I encourage more reflection on the meaning of romance itself; in order to get a sense of the interviewee's expectations of romance at the outset. In addition, they reminded me not to assume that I know what he/she means: they recommended that I question further to unpack things the interviewee said to explore the meanings attached to what is being shared. We also agreed an additional comparative question. Accordingly, I reworked the interview schedule, adding some probes to 'explore the obvious' and incorporated two new questions. (For the final version, see Appendix 4: Interview Schedule.)

Bolstered by this feedback, I set up further practice interviews – to bring a more confident approach, practice my probing and to increase my comfort stepping into people's romantic lives. The next pilot was much more successful. A total of five practice interviews were completed in advance of the data collection. Two of the practice interviews were with my supervisors and three were with friends who were familiar with my research topic and volunteered to help. It should be noted that all involved knew that these were practice sessions for the purpose of improving my technique in Dubai before travelling to Birmingham for the actual interviews.

Before starting the pilot session, I outlined that while the interview would be audio recorded it would not be transcribed: it would be confidential to myself and my supervisors and deployed solely to understand the flow and depth of the interview. As these pilot interviews would not constitute primary data, the recordings were destroyed within 30 days of their review. For detailed information on my ethical considerations during the data collection see subsections *5.1.1.6 Informed Consent*; *5.1.1.7 Debrief*; *5.1.1.8 Anonymity, Confidentiality and Storage of Data*; and *5.1.1.9 Additional Ethical Considerations*.

### **5.1.1.2 Sampling**

Samples are typically small when using IPA (between three to twelve participants) so the participants need to be relatively homogeneous in terms of the phenomenon under investigation (Osborn & Smith, 2008). Given that most adults will have experiences of romantic love in established relationships, the naturally available pool of participants would be wide and too heterogeneous for IPA. For this reason, I needed to narrow the field and draw a sample from those with similar demographic, socio-economic status or relationship profiles. Accordingly, I designed the following sample criteria that recognised theory in the literature on romance and good practice in research (this applied for the interviews and focus groups):

- Firstly, in addressing homogeneity of socio-economic status, I elected that participants should be working class. I use the term working class in its broadest sense—those who are not educationally or financially privileged. This requirement, I operationalised by specifying that participants needed to be grades C1, C2 and D (from the widely known Ipsos MORI Social Grading classification system, which is based on the British National Readership Survey) and by additionally requesting that university graduates be excluded. I recognise that the term ‘social grade’ might be encountered as insensitive and could be read as implying that someone of lower social grade has lower human worth. This is not the intention of my use of the term, rather ‘social grade’ is a technical term used by Ipsos MORI to distinguish their demographic classification system from others. There is a fair amount of theoretical justification for selecting a working-class socio-economic group: feminist Sharon Thompson’s (1995) research shows that the discourse of romance seems to be most important to working-class girls. In addition, Shumway (2003) suggests that the separate gender spheres of the Victorian age continue to define working-class marriages and partnerships. Indeed, a large proportion of the British population could still be defined as working class (approximately 45%), thus adding support for the relevance of the study and the potential impact of the research.

It should be noted that I also considered the professional managerial classes as an alternative socio-economic group; Shumway (2003) suggests that it is the petite bourgeoisie and the professional managerial classes who are positioned economically and educationally to develop new patterns of love and intimacy. It is this group who has led the socio-cultural changes in the past with respect to romance and marriage. However only 6% of the British population fall into this category (Savage *et al.*, 2013), and so drawing from this group could limit the relevance and potential impact of the study. On the other hand, it could be seen that they are the early adopters and that research focused on this professional managerial class could shine a light on future romantic directions that would impact a wider population in time. I elected the working-class sample as it is more immediately relevant and there is a tendency for participants

in qualitative interview based research to be university-educated and that the experiences of the demographic selected (Ipsos social grades C1, C2 and D) are under researched.

- In addition to working class, I asked that participants be British with English as their first language. My rationale for this requirement is that romantic love is considered a culturally specific discourse; it holds a particular place and takes a shape in Western societies that is not mirrored elsewhere (e.g. Giddens, 1992; Shumway, 2003). If a participant were British with Urdu as their first language, for example, it could be that their concepts of romance in relationships have non-Western cultural references.
- In order to further support homogeneity, I requested that participants be heterosexual. Academic fields such as social anthropology, women's studies and gay and lesbian studies invested effort to recognise the position of those who are marginalised by a dominant perspective. These studies have rightly warned us against heteronormative lenses. Recently, cultural studies are returning their focus to the dominant, now reframed by the significant body of work on minority issues. For example, 'queer theory' borne out of research with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, provides a lens to 'queer' heterosexuality, to see it as a peculiar phenomenon rather than treat it as a taken-for-granted way of seeing everyday life (Coates, 2013a).
- Participants were also required to have a minimum of five years cohabiting in their current relationship. Mainstream academic theorists would argue that some aspects of romance like infatuation, lust and passion are bound to the beginning or the early stages of a relationship (e.g. Fisher, 2006), so selecting those with five years, as a minimum, in a relationship will reduce the likelihood of introducing a different phenomenon.

Given the sample required, I decided to draw the participants from Birmingham, which has a sizeable British working-class population. It is also a city with over one million inhabitants, which importantly means that there was less chance of people knowing fellow attendees in the focus groups. I had considered drawing the interview participants from a different town (in a more personally convenient area), but I worried about introducing regional differences to the research. As discourses represent socio-cultural context, it could be that the discursive resources in one region differ from another and that participants' experiences of romance might also vary. This concern felt more pertinent with a working-class sample; who might engage in less relocation.

For the interviews, a sample of 10 persons was sought with an even split of women and men. The participants were limited to those aged 35-50 years to aid homogeneity. This age group

represents a major slice of the British population; according to the Office for National Statistics (2012) census bulletin, more people were aged 40-49 than in any other age group. Furthermore, compared with a younger sample or university-based research, those aged 35-50 are more likely to have some tenure in established relationships.

In sum, the sample parameters described above reflect a large part of Britain: Heterosexual women and men aged between 35 and 50 years old, who have been living with their partner, wife or husband for a minimum of 5 years. The research called for people from the Birmingham area that have English as their first language. Wanting to hear the experiences of working-class people required that those who were financially and educationally privileged were excluded.

### **5.1.1.3 Recruitment**

Recruitment in Birmingham was going to be a challenge for me; I am resident in Dubai, and have limited time in the United Kingdom. Given these proximity issues, I made the pragmatic decision to employ Angelfish, a Birmingham based research recruitment organisation, to identify, approach and recruit the participants on my behalf. Market research organisations like Angelfish, recruit people for all kinds of domestic life studies from supermarket shopping to television watching, and the topic of romance in established relationships could be seen to sit within the domestic domain.

I considered four other organisations, before selecting Angelfish as my fieldwork representative. Angelfish demonstrated a rigorous approach to the recruitment of participants and applies a strict code of conduct. Angelfish is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office; accordingly, they comply fully with the Data Protection Act 1998. They are also members of the Market Research Society (MRS) and ESOMAR and abide by their code of conduct. Angelfish's approach to the recruitment of participants is detailed in the 'How we work' document (Appendix 5: Angelfish 'How we work'). To recruit for this project Angelfish firstly consulted their flexi panel (an Angelfish database of individuals who have signed up to be available for research and are financially incentivised) to identify those who matched the sample criteria. They emailed and telephoned these candidates to see if they were interested in taking part in the research and encouraged them to refer a friend/colleague/family member if they were not eligible themselves. This was successful in recruiting the females and a couple of men. In addition, they employed a social media campaign, posting the project on their Facebook and Twitter feed, which prompted more men to come forward. Owing to the difficulty in recruiting males, they also utilised one of their trusted external recruiters based in Birmingham to source local leads. (For Angelfish's Facebook and Twitter posts see Appendix 6: Social Media Interview Recruitment.)

Market research organisations typically pay up to £70 to participants depending on the nature and length of the study. Angelfish advised £35 would be a sufficient incentive for the in-depth interview study. With only a week until the interviews taking place in Birmingham, Angelfish could only confirm two males, but they had a full recruit of six females. They said that they had to work harder to attract males to the study. Admittedly at this point, I was worried that there would not be enough male respondents and found myself questioning my decision to outsource the recruitment. Thankfully with four days to go, Angelfish confirmed a full recruit.

Angelfish internally validated all respondents as matching the sample criteria via a telephone interview. Whenever they were unsure whether a candidate was right for the study, they would double-check with me. For example, a college educated nursery nurse applied to participate in the study. She met all the criteria, yet her husband (who was not participating in the study) was university educated—should we include her? In this case, because they were *not* financially privileged we included her. There was another case of a forty-year-old British Pakistani female who Angelfish had included in the study, the data submitted to me indicated that she had been with her husband for twenty-four years, therefore married at sixteen years old. I wondered if this was an arranged marriage, which is common within the Pakistani community. Would this participant represent Western society’s lived experience of romance? (See 5.1.1.2 *Sampling*. The associated screening criteria was British with English as their first language.) Angelfish clarified that she had been with her husband twenty-four years, but married twenty-one years and therefore dating for three. So indeed representing, on paper at least, a Western style of relationship.

For the interviews, we over-recruited by two participants (one female and one male) to allow for attrition, as I was aiming for 10 participants. Whilst attrition was thought to be unlikely given the financial incentives being paid, unforeseen events – illness, travel or work issues – could result in some people being unable to make their interview. The impact of losing participants was considered critical, as I would not be returning to Birmingham until the time of the focus groups. All individuals showed up, so there are 12 participants in this in-depth interview study.

Lisa Boughton, Director at Angelfish, oversaw the recruitment of participants for this study and ensured that strict adherence to the Market Research Society code of conduct was upheld. She also made provisions so that all potential participants were able to see the participant information sheet (Appendix 7: Interview Participant Information Sheet), before agreeing to take part in the research.

#### **5.1.1.4 Participants**

Of the 12 participants, who took part in the interviews, 6 were female and 6 were male. They were aged between 35 and 50 years (with a mean age of 41 years). Nearly all participants were white British: 6 of the men and 5 females—with just 1 woman being Pakistani British. Their occupations included: sales staff, nursery nurse, administrators, electrician, factory worker, customer service and cashiers. At the time of the interviews, they all self-identified as living with their partners; the length of relationships ranged from 5 to 30 years (with a mean relationship length of 17 years). Only 1 of the 12 participants had been previously married or in a significant partnership. Of the 12 participants, 10 were parents and they had between 1 and 5 children (a mean of 2.5). Potentially noteworthy to the subject of romance, is that all 12 working-class participants seemed invested in the concept of marriage: 9 of the participants were married; 1 was engaged to be married; and 2 were in the process of planning the engagement.

#### **5.1.1.5 Interview Events**

During the period when the participants were being recruited I considered the arrangements for the actual interviews. Having practiced five interviews (see 5.1.1.1 earlier in this chapter) and built my confidence in stepping into people's romantic lives, I was eager to get underway. Yet I was mindful of finding the right environment and spent much time and effort reflecting on the ideal location for the interviews. A good location, according to Smith *et al.* (2009), will be free from distraction, quiet, comfortable, familiar (for the participant) and safe for all. In-depth interviews are sometimes conducted at the participant's home, whilst this may be convenient and comfortable for the individual it can increase the chance of interruption and distractions (e.g. telephones, children and visitors). Given the subject under research is romance in their current relationship, I felt that if the participant were in the same space (even if in a different room) as their spouse or partner it may make it harder for people to be open about their romantic experiences. Furthermore, there might be a sense of personal exposure for the participants, to have the interviews take place in their homes. For myself, I was somewhat anxious at the prospect of travelling to participants' homes, especially as I am unfamiliar with Birmingham's neighbourhoods. Accordingly, I elected to find a meeting room for the purpose of the interviews.

I explored several central city meeting room options and turned down the most cost-effective: a space in a pub and a wine cellar. I thought that these options increased the likelihood of distractions that might interrupt the flow of conversation (particularly in the busier post-work times allocated for the interviews). In addition, I was concerned that a pub-like environment, where people normally meet friends, might mean that the participants assume a greater intimacy with me, which might negatively impact my comfort in questioning them and probing deeper for more information. This may not be an issue if the subject under discussion was

impersonal, but the topic of romance combined with the empathetic style of interview required by IPA increased this likelihood.

I also considered booking a meeting room in the hotel where I was staying for the period of the research, Hotel du Vin. However, it could be perceived as elitist and some people might find it intimidating. The interviews took place at a meeting room in the MacDonald Burlington Hotel, previously called the Midland Hotel – a well-known Birmingham landmark. This hotel is conveniently located on New Street and just a few minutes' walk from the Birmingham New Street train station. It is not a five star hotel but is approachable and welcoming. In this way, I thought that the participants would be relaxed in the environment. With a dedicated meeting room, I was able to configure the space, placing chairs perpendicular to each other and facing away from the window to avert distractions and assist interviewer-interviewee rapport (see Wilkinson *et al.*, 2004).

In a similar vein, I was concerned that my embodied self would harm my ability to connect with the participants. I was apprehensive that participants might see me as academically and financially privileged (which would invariably be reflected in appearance, accent and vocabulary) and therefore be less comfortable taking part in the interview. Accordingly, I dressed modestly, was especially welcoming and did my best to mirror their choice of words and phrases. I suspect my New Zealand accent helped my cause as most participants remarked on it at the outset of the interview and seemed to recognise me as a friendly foreigner. On two occasions there were surprised looks—raised eyebrows—from participants when they walked in the room, which prompted me to work extra hard to make them feel special and comfortable. Given my apprehensions about rapport building, I felt pleased with the connection that I was able to make with the participants; they all wanted to linger and chat after the recording ended, and a few even showed me photographs of their loved ones. I suspect this rapport would have been achieved regardless of my attempts to downplay my privileged self, and resulted from a full focus on the individual: the attentive body language, warm eye contact and expressions of empathy and concern as they shared their story.

The interviews took place over three days in March, 2015. The interviews were anticipated to take between sixty and ninety minutes; indeed the shortest interview was sixty minutes and the longest ninety. Interview slots were pre-arranged with Angelfish, the recruitment company, for 10.30-12.00, 12.00-1.30 to coincide with lunchtime and then 4.30-6.00, 6.00-7.30 for those who preferred an after-work time. The timing of two interviews were reworked to accommodate participants' schedules.

#### **5.1.1.6 Informed Consent**

*The following content pertains to both the interviews and the focus groups.*

Angelfish arranged to show the participant information sheets (Appendix 7: Interview Participant Information Sheet; Appendix 10: Focus Group Participant Information Sheet) to all potential participants before they agreed to take part in the interviews or the focus groups. The information sheets were fully explanatory and even provided example questions to ensure that there was no confusion about the nature of the study. When the participant arrived at the venue for their session, they were again presented with the information sheet and then given the consent form (Appendix 8: Interview Consent Form), which they signed in order to participate in the study. At any point of the study they could request to withdraw from the research.

Before starting the interview or focus group, I reminded participants—collectively for the focus groups—that the session would be recorded and that their involvement would be treated confidentially. (Recording is customary practice for IPA and FDA, as it aids transcription and analysis, whilst allowing the researcher to be present with the participants.) I explained that their content would be associated with a pseudonym to protect their real identity. Further procedural considerations to do with anonymity and confidentiality were also covered and can be seen in the forthcoming subsections 5.1.1.8 and 5.2.1.7. In the case of the focus groups, ground rules were also addressed before proceeding with the session (for further details see Appendix 9: Focus Group Administration).

A couple of interviewees, particularly those who had not taken part in any research before, seemed a little nervous. I assured them that there was no right or wrong answer to the questions and that my prime interest was hearing their story and perspectives (see Wilkinson *et al.*, 2004). At this stage, I invited participants to ask any questions before I progressed with the session. There were few questions posed; rather they seemed eager to get started.

#### **5.1.1.7 Debriefing**

*The following content pertains to both the interviews and the focus groups.*

All participants had the opportunity to ask questions after the sessions. Most participants, having engaged in a reflection on romance in their relationship, seemed curious to know more about the research and my next steps. Given the rapport built, particularly with the interview participants, and the depth of their sharing, I felt it was appropriate to spend time to chat with them and talk more about the project.

A specific debrief form was not deemed necessary for these studies, as the information typically shown on the debrief form had been provided in the explanatory participant information sheet (e.g. a summary of the research aims, the explanation of the interviews or

focus group and what the research may show; contact details for the further questions. See Appendix 7: Interview Participant Information Sheet and Appendix 10: Focus Group Participant Information Sheet). Spare copies of these information sheets were re-issued on the day of the research where participants wanted a reminder of the study.

It was considered unlikely, but possible, that a participant might become upset talking about a romantic, or non-romantic, experience. Accordingly, I had created a list detailing contacts for Relate, BACP, The Birmingham Counselling and Psychotherapy Centre and the NHS should individuals feel the need to seek professional support to discuss the issue further (see Appendix 11: Birmingham Referrals for Counselling and Health). In the interviews the participants did not have a need for this information. However, it proved valuable for the focus groups, as I had a distressed participant who appeared in need of counselling support (for further details see 5.2.1.5 *Focus Group Events*).

#### **5.1.1.8 Anonymity, Confidentiality and Storage of Data**

*The following content pertains to both the interviews and the focus groups. For anonymity and confidentiality issues specific to the focus groups, please see 5.2.1.7.*

Anonymity was assured to the participants, as the research involved an *irreversible* process whereby once the consent form was signed, the individual was referred to by a pseudonym. There was no record retained of how the pseudonym related to the consent form or the participant's real identity. It was then impossible to identify the individual to whom the data related.

I had enlisted the support of a volunteer, Linda Steel<sup>26</sup>, to assist my hosting participants and administration during the interviews and focus groups. Linda checked the identities of participants, followed up on late arrivals, ensured that they were familiar with the participant information sheet and oversaw the signing of the consent forms. She also issued the participants their financial reward at the end of the session. Given exposure to the sample's real identities Linda signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix 12: Confidentiality Agreements). In the focus groups Linda remained present in the room—discretely sitting to the side. In this way, she could furnish refreshments, assist with the equipment and be ready to support with any unforeseen problems (as recommended by Wilkinson, 2008). The attendance of a researcher's assistant in the session is made explicit in the focus group consent form (Appendix 13: Focus Group Consent Form).

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<sup>26</sup> Linda Steel, a personal friend, is well qualified to assist in this hosting and administrative role: she is a retired school-teacher who has a warm and welcoming disposition while also being assertive, organised and efficient. Furthermore, she has primarily been employed in schools within working-class communities so is experienced and comfortable dealing with parents from this socio-economic group.

As a Chartered Psychologist and Associate Fellow of The British Psychological Society I am obligated to respect the Data Protection Act 1998. In terms of data and session content, the following methods of assuring confidentiality were implemented: associated computer files were password protected; and consent forms, hard copies of the data, plus audio files, were kept in a locked filing cabinet. During the period of conducting the sessions in Birmingham, the data—consent forms and recordings—was secured in my hotel room safe. At all other times the data, including hard copies of the transcripts, will be stored at my home office in Dubai, where I have a locked filing cabinet.

The transcription services of Take Note were employed for both the interviews and focus groups. (For more details see *5.1.1.10 Transcription of Interviews* and *5.2.1.9 Transcription of the Focus Groups*.) Take Note assures that all employees, including typists and proofreaders, sign a confidentiality agreement. They also state that all recordings and the hard and soft copies of the resultant transcripts are destroyed within 30 days of assignment completion (see Appendix 14: Transcribers Confidentiality Statement).

From my side, all primary data including the transcripts, audio and video recordings (resulting from the focus groups), will be kept for a minimum of 10 years after the publication of the PhD, in order to comply with the University's Framework for Good Practice in Research. After this period the data can be destroyed. Given that the information will be anonymised, and there is no participant identity disclosed, I am personally able to shred and physically destroy the material (reference: First Principle Data Protection Act 1998).

#### **5.1.1.9 Additional Ethical Considerations**

*The following content pertains to both the interviews and the focus groups. For additional ethical considerations that are specific to focus groups, please see 5.2.1.8.*

City University's Psychology Research Ethics Committee granted ethical approvals for this research in February 2015 (see Appendix 15: University Ethical Approval).

In designing an ethical study, I had been mindful of the intimate nature of the research questions and taken care to be respectful of the participants and their stories. I worked hard to ensure that the experience was professional, respectful and warm: extensively practicing the discussion questions and interview schedule; thinking through the privacy and comfort offered by the venue; and making sure that participants were genially welcomed.

A potential ethical concern is my reliance on a fieldwork organisation to recruit participants. In order to reduce any ethical fears, I selected Angelfish who is registered with ESOMAR and

the Market Research Society; these bodies require that members observe a strict code of conduct on all their recruitment activities. In addition, Angelfish has a robust approach to recruiting participants (see the explanatory Angelfish 'How we work' document, Appendix 5). To protect the participants from over-research Angelfish asked potential participants if they had taken part in any research within the past six months. If they have contributed to research in the past six months, they were excluded from this study and encouraged to apply for research opportunities in the future.

As participants were financially incentivised to take part in the study (a payment was given to each attendee), there was a chance that this remuneration may attract serial participants or individuals who are falsifying their identity or fit with the criteria. A number of steps were put in place to mitigate the risk of people faking their credentials:

- All potential participants were telephone screened, by Angelfish, to ensure that they fit the sample criteria;
- All participants were rechecked on arrival that they meet the sample criteria;
- All participants were asked to bring photo ID on the day of the interview, so that they can be verified as the individual that has been selected.

Another ethical consideration was that people might agree to participate without fully understanding the exact nature of the discussion or topic. In order to ensure that all participants were fully briefed in advanced of partaking in the study, I ensured the following:

- Sample questions were included on the participant information sheet (Appendixes 7 and 10), to guarantee that all participants were absolutely clear about the nature of inquiry and the kind of discussion they could expect;
- Angelfish ensured that all potential participants had seen the participant information sheet before agreeing to participate;
- Extra information sheets were available on the day of the research and as participants arrived, before they signed the consent form, they were asked if they were familiar with the content;
- The consent forms, signed by participants on the day of research, reminded them that they have the right to withdraw at any time (Appendixes 8 and 13).

A further ethical consideration stemmed from my authorship of a popular book on romance *The Date Night Manifesto* – a self-help book for relationships. If this were to be known by the participants it might inhibit the authenticity of responses or alter the power dynamics. Indeed, whilst piloting the interview schedule with a stranger, it became apparent that she was reading my book. She even quoted the advice contained in the book during her interview and answered many of the questions on romance with specific reference to 'date night'. The pilot had affirmed a threat to the quality of data of me being knowingly connected to *The Date Night*

*Manifesto*. As referenced earlier, in IPA it is the interviewee and *not* the researcher, who is the experiential expert. Fortunately none of the participants indicated in any way that they had read or associated me with authorship of *The Date Night Manifesto*.

#### **5.1.1.10 Transcription of Interviews**

In preparation for the analysis, all the interviews were fully transcribed by Take Note; a transcription service provider.<sup>27</sup> I uploaded anonymised digital audio recordings of the interviews to a protected area of Take Note's portal. The resulting full verbatim transcripts reflected everything uttered, which means that any grammatical errors or false starts were delivered exactly as they were spoken in the interview. Every repetition, 'um' and 'ahh' was captured and there was a bracketed note for significant non-verbal utterances, notable pauses and laughter (see Appendix 16: Transcription Conventions). This recording of the discussion suits IPA, where the interest is in the meaning of the content. Other forms of interpretation like conversation analysis, which is concerned with the organisation of talk between people, requires that transcripts include specific symbols to describe subtle speaker interactions. Following the advice from Smith *et al.* (2009) I asked for wide left and right margins to allow room for coding and a line space between every turn in conversation. When the transcriptions were completed, I reviewed the documents while listening to the original recordings to confirm the accuracy of the text provided. In all cases the interviews had been carefully transcribed.

#### **5.1.2 The Analysis - IPA**

With the in-depth interviews from the 12 participants transcribed, it was time to conduct the analysis. The literature does not prescribe a fixed approach for IPA. Larkin *et al.* (2006) suggest that rather than view IPA as a 'method', it may be more appropriate to understand IPA as a 'stance' from which to approach the task of analysis. As long as the researcher is focused on the participant's sense-making activities, there is much flexibility in how one might engage with the data. Broadly speaking, I tried to understand the participant by attempting to experience their romantic journey as if I were them. From this insider perspective I would routinely move to an observer position to ask the critical question: What is going on here? My approach was guided by: Larkin *et al.* (2006); Osborn and Smith (2008); Smith *et al.* (2009); and Willig (2008). (For further details on the analytic process see *5.1.2.1.a Exploratory Comments*.) In addition, as I immersed myself in the analysis I found myself seeking

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<sup>27</sup> I would normally have considered transcribing the interviews myself, as I had undertaken the task previously. Alas, I have tendonitis in my right arm so I needed to outsource this activity. I was a little apprehensive that by not personally transcribing the interviews that would affect my intimacy with the text. However, this proved not to be the case; most likely because I replayed the audio recording before engaging with the analysis.

reassurance and repeatedly consulting articles that featured examples of IPA (e.g. Lond & Williamson, 2015; Torbrand & Ellam-Dyson, 2015).

I will describe in the next pages my particular process of analysis, which worked through one case to conclusion and then started anew with a second case until all interviews were completed. Then began a process of integration of the analyses.

### 5.1.2.1 The First Case

It was difficult to choose the first transcript to analyse; with its idiographic perspective, IPA works through one case at a time. Each of the interviews had uniquely compelling aspects that I was curious to investigate. Whilst all transcripts would involve a careful study, I predicted that I would be even more immersed in the first case as I would need to develop my approach and hone my skills in analysis. Accordingly, I struggled to decide whether I should start with: an interview that I particularly enjoyed; or an individual that I felt that I connected with; or begin with a story that could be seen as more 'typical'. Smith *et al.* (2009) suggest that the researcher should start with a case that is complex and engaging. I eventually chose Peter's transcript as I was captivated by his story of navigating romance with a blended family of five children. He was the only participant who had been married before, which seemed to mediate his account of romance with repeated references to 'failure', 'learning' and the 'need to be best friends' to protect his current relationship from breaking down. I also found him to be likeable<sup>28</sup>. In addition, the interview was lengthy (90 minutes) and was littered with pockets of emotion thereby suggesting rich phenomenological material.

I created a three columned table and placed the transcript itself in the middle column. As recommended by Smith *et al.* (2009) the right hand column was designated for exploratory comments and the left hand column for emergent themes (see Appendix 17: Example of IPA Coding).

#### 5.1.2.1.a Exploratory Comments

The initial analysis involved detailing exploratory comments in the right hand column. Exploratory comments can be likened to free text codes; where the code is a brief commentary on the data. This commenting occurs at any number of levels to include paraphrasing, word association and linguistic observations. Essentially anything that might provide a clue as to the participant's psychological world could be noted.

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<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that my 'liking' Peter did initially cloud my analysis: I had described him as having a strong sense of right and wrong, whereas my supervisor suggested that he was taking the moral high ground. It was the case that Peter would take the moral high ground, but I had not wanted to see it. This is evidence of the double hermeneutic acknowledged by IPA, whereby access to the participant's world is dependent on the researcher's conceptions (e.g. Smith *et al.*, 2009).

As part of my commitment to an empathic interpretation, whereby the analyst seeks to experience the narrative from the participant's perspective, I tried to *plant* myself firmly 'in their shoes'. In this way, I hoped to develop an account of what romance means, that is stimulated and anchored in the participant's sense-making and perception of reality (Eatough & Smith, 2008). To prepare for this, I listened to the interview to remind myself of the participant's pace, tone and emotion, whilst reading through the transcript. Upon the second replay of the audio, I sought zones of 'hot' and 'cold' cognition as signs of where the participant is, or has been, invested in meaning making. The original terms 'hot' and 'cold' cognition were introduced by Ableson (1963, cited in Safran & Greenberg, 1982) to distinguish between mediating processes which are affective in nature and those which are affect free. The underlying idea is that feelings can serve as a signal, to the individual experiencing them, of the need for sense-making (e.g. Goldfried & Davison, 1976, cited in Safran & Greenberg, 1982). 'Hot' cognition can be defined as 'those matters in a person's life which are burning, emotive and dilemmatic' (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p.186). 'Hot' cognition can be recognised by affect-laden verbal or non-verbal expressions, for example tears, change in pitch or abruptness. Accordingly, I would stop the recording to note voice patterns and emotion that might suggest 'hot' cognition and thus tried to identify where, in the participant's account, amplification of meaning might be helpful (Willig, 2013). 'Hot' cognition, in particular, requires interpretation by the researcher, as the nature of the emotion suggests that the individual has yet to process or make sense of these feelings. By contrast 'cold'—or 'cool'—cognition can be understood as those issues, which may have at one time been 'hot', that have been addressed with reflection and extensive meaning making and now are expressed in a considered measured manner. Areas of 'cool' cognition can be recognised when the participant speaks about their own sense-making, a theory they have developed, or a cooling of emotion (for example, the underlined text below).

I began by underlining items in the text that stood out as reflecting 'hot' or 'cool' cognition and would halt the recording to comment in the right hand column on why they seemed important (Smith *et al.*, 2009). For example, in Appendix 17, I underlined Peter's words as indicative of 'cool' cognition: "...my failed marriage. as, as, I'm not angry now." Here I write: he is owning the marital failure; and seems to be recalling the fury that he once felt.

Attending to areas of 'hot' and 'cool' cognition can serve as a filter for aspects of the text that might be of importance to the participant. These are indicators that the individual is actually sharing something that is significant to them, as opposed to simply responding to a question with a hypothetical or socially-desirable answer. In this way, it supports IPA's concern with illuminating meaningful subjective experience.

After listening to the audio recording twice I turned my attention solely to the text. I began to detail as exploratory comments any associations, questions, summary statements or descriptive labels (Willig, 2008). Recognising that I would return several times to the same passages, I was cognisant of noting anything that might guide my insights and journey into Peter's world. As such, questions to myself and issues that I might revisit are listed in the exploratory comments. At times I was concerned that I would import too much of myself into the analysis, so I found grounding in noting Peter's actual language use, the words he repeated and any use of metaphor, which I registered in italics. For example, the metaphorical "Threw in my face" is repeated by Peter with reference to his first wife; here it can be read that Peter felt injured and belittled. Interpretative or conceptual comments that departed from the participant's actual words I distinguished by underlining as suggested by Smith *et al.* (2009). (As shown in Appendix 17: Example of IPA Coding).

With the desire to attend to the text in a careful and empathic manner, and drawing on concepts like 'hot' cognition, I recognised that there was a risk that I could go off tangent and fail to address the research questions. Essentially, I wanted to see how the participants relate to romance in their partnerships. Hence, as I worked through the narrative, I made a point of asking myself: 'What does romance mean to this participant?', 'How do they care for romance in their relationship?' and 'What distresses and concerns them about romance?' (Larkin *et al.*, 2006). Having these questions in mind proved helpful as I could clearly see, for example, that Peter was concerned about 'getting the desired response' to his romantic gestures and 'doing it right'.

At times I found myself fatigued by the close examination of the script and feared that I was losing my connection with the participant's experience. To keep my concentration on the participant's words, rather than fall into recycled explanations, I reversed sections of the narrative (Smith *et al.*, 2009). I would take a paragraph and start with the final sentence and read it backwards. In this way, I avoided making assumptions about what was being said by simply engaging with the text as a collection of words that had been summoned together. This indeed brought into light words and patterns that I had not 'seen' before. For example, reading the last of three sentences firstly and backwards, I was alerted by the word 'rock', which drew my attention to the 'foundation' in the middle sentence and then 'plot' in the first. Reading the paragraph in a typical fashion, I might have missed the pattern of words that suggests the building of a strong home, and solely focused on the word 'rock'.

After re-reading the transcript several times and having amassed exploratory comments in the right column, I finished the initial analysis by re-listening to the audio. As I replayed the recording and heard again the tone, pace and emotion, I checked the corresponding exploratory comments as a way of verifying that they reflected the participant's voice. This

process resulted in some adjustments, for example I had written 'talking is nice', alongside the transcription of Peter saying: "For Grace and me, I-, you know, it's nice to talk". Yet listening to Peter's actual voice revealed the "and me" as a mere add on. My original comment was edited to 'talking is nice for Grace'.

#### **5.1.2.1.b Emergent Themes**

The next stage of the analysis involved identifying emergent themes. Emergent themes are conceptual labels that draw on the exploratory comments to represent each section of text. They should capture experiential qualities that are significant at that point (e.g. Willig, 2008). Initially I focused on summarising exploratory comments with a single concise statement (e.g. Smith *et al.*, 2009). My supervisor reviewed my labels, on my first attempt, and suggested that my emergent themes were a bit dry. Truly, I had lost the experiential quality with my drive for concision. For example, Peter delighted in telling me how great his partner is, I reflected this with the emergent theme 'virtues emphasised'. Yet this statement failed to capture the essence of Peter's experience: he was 'struck by her' and was experiencing a feeling of 'she's almost too good to be true': the theme was renamed 'in awe of his angel'. I then went back through the exploratory comments with a view of being under 'Peter's skin' and created additional themes that were more experiential—embodied and emotional (see Eatough & Smith, 2008). In tandem, I jotted on a separate piece of paper those themes that seemed particularly meaningful and sketched plausible links between them.

#### **5.1.2.1.c Higher Order Themes, Master Themes and Formulations**

In order to identify the higher order themes, I began by copying all of the emergent themes, contained in the left column of the table and pasting them into an excel spreadsheet (which resulted in Peter's case, with a staggering 450 rows). I then sorted the rows of emergent themes in alphabetical order to see duplicated items; noting the themes that were most frequent - as a potential marker of relative importance (Smith *et al.*, 2009). This numeration process is advocated by Smith *et al.* (2009) as an additional way of seeing patterns and issues of relevance for the participant. As shown in Appendix 18: IPA Example Repetition of Themes, 'fulfilling duty/expectations' and 'doing the right thing' were some of the most repeatedly occurring themes in the analysis of Peter's case. I then deleted from the excel spreadsheet the duplicated themes so that only discrete emergent themes remained.

With a core set of emergent themes, I placed those that resonated with each other, seemed alike, into same columns (Smith *et al.*, 2009). This process is referred to as abstraction by Smith *et al.* (2009); whereby patterns can be identified and higher order themes can evolve from putting like with like. A single emergent theme could go into two or more columns. For example, the 'being best friends as a protective layer' was placed into the 'preserving personal happiness' column and the 'spectre of past relationship' column. As I worked through this

sorting process I named the columns as possible higher order themes. Some columns were renamed several times as new themes were added and impacted my thinking. I continued to generate new columns or higher order themes until all emergent themes found a home. This resulted in 15 columns or higher order themes (for an extract see Appendix 19: Example of IPA Higher Order Theme Spreadsheet). If an emergent theme fell in multiple columns I highlighted the accordant cells in yellow, this helped me when it came to mapping the connections. I then printed the spreadsheet and drew the links between the higher order themes, guided by those highlighted cells and taking into account my sketching from the emergent theme stage detailed above.

The 15 higher order themes (column titles) were then copied over to a word document and I tried to see how these could be reduced to around five master themes (or fewer) that related to the research questions. In IPA there is no set expectation to have a specific number of master themes, rather they will vary from one study to another. Yet for me this focus on reduction, helped to bring to light shared reference points between the themes. For example, some themes were clearly able to umbrella others, in Peter's case 'Pleasing women' was able to bring together other related themes. It should be noted that this was not a strictly linear process, and themes and their titles were reworked as I adjusted the 'pieces of the puzzle' and engaged with different framings.

This process resulted in potential formulations or gestalts; arrangements of the master themes underpinned with various combinations of the higher order themes as experiential sub themes. See Appendix 20: Example of IPA Potential Formulations for the three options that resulted from my analysis of Peter's transcript. Two of the options reflected only four master themes, with the fifth being repositioned as a sub theme: for example, the proposed master theme 'Pleasing women' was incorporated under 'Managing the happy ever after' in option 1. Some of the titles were also adjusted across the three formulations, for example, 'Feeling good about oneself', is reworked to 'Being significant (has a gender quality)' in option 2, and then is shown as 'Being the significant male' in option 3.

Mindful of the research questions (what does romance mean? and how is it experienced?), options 2 and 3 spoke more convincingly to Peter's phenomenology of romance and option 1 was dropped. It was then a matter of revisiting the transcript and checking Peter's voice against the themes of the two remaining formulations. Moving back and forth between the transcript and these options, I was able to identify that option 3 was the formulation that could be illustrated by more verbatim quotes; in this way it had a richer evidential base. Based on this formulation, I then created the summary table, which clusters the master themes with their accordant experiential sub themes and associated quotes (see Appendix 21: Example of IPA Summary Table).

Observing IPA's idiographic commitment, the remaining 11 transcripts cases were analysed in the same way, with a focus on the phenomenology of each participant and, as much as possible, a disregard to the themes that had emerged in earlier transcripts. While it may have been tempting to speed up the analytical process and apply themes that had presented themselves before, I was curious to get an inside view of the next participant's romantic reality and see if unexpected themes might emerge. As such, each analysis was personalised and resulted in a unique set of higher order themes, master themes and formulations.

#### **5.1.2.2 Integration of Cases**

In order to maintain a consistent approach, I mirrored the same process that had been successful in identifying higher order themes, master themes and formulations for the individual cases, to the consolidation of the 12 sets of analyses. Accordingly, I collected the master themes and higher order themes from all the 12 cases and placed them in a single excel worksheet and repeated the process of sorting these themes into like categories—from which potential gestalts or formulations arose. This process can be seen as having a channelling or compacting effect and is an exact repeat of the process as described in detail in 5.1.2.1.c. The only modification is that now the higher order themes and master themes that arose from the analyses of the individual cases take the place of the emergent themes, for the purpose of the integration.

As a check, to make sure the compacting to the final formulation was not blind to broadly felt themes, I undertook a frequency appraisal of the combined master themes and higher order themes to identify recurring themes. Then acknowledging that a theme revealed via one participant's transcript may have been overlooked in an earlier case, I revisited the transcript data to establish which of the amalgamated master themes were experienced across the group. To achieve this, I created a composite list of all identified master themes and revisited the 12 transcripts, to explore whether a participant's account had included an expression of each theme. In this way, I was able to identify which of those themes were widely voiced. Smith *et al.* (2009) advocate that measuring recurrence, in this manner, is important and can be seen as a way of enhancing validity. I chose to highlight those themes that featured in 75% of cases, as shown in Appendix 22: IPA Integration Recurrent Themes. As Smith *et al.* (2009) reference there is no set rule for what counts as recurrence. My choice for 75% instead of 50% was only established when I discovered that the majority of themes were commonly experienced (albeit in different ways) and that a 50% recurrence rate would not offer any meaning in terms of my engagement or reading of the data. At the fairly demanding 75% level, there were still 22 themes that were voiced by 9 or more of the 12 participants. Some of the themes, which failed the 50% threshold test, were meaningful to a few participants but not the majority and could be cut from the integrated analysis. For example, the theme 'Life is short' captured the lived-

romantic reality for two participants only: Kenny who was terminally ill, and Hannah whose husband had already outlived his life expectancy, whereas the other participants did not experience romance in a 'Life is short' way. It should be noted that failing the threshold test either at 50% or 75% did not automatically mean that themes that did not meet the requirement were blindly cut. The theme 'Identifying as the successful wife' failed the threshold test, with only 5 out of 12 participant accounts connecting with this theme, however, these participants reflected 5 out of the 6 women who were interviewed. Essentially, the threshold test and recurrence information is used as a check to ensure that a finalised gestalt did voice the predominant experience of the group.<sup>29</sup>

Accordingly, my options for the final gestalt were revisited against the recurrent themes to ensure that claims could be made for the larger group. Then with recall to the research questions of 'what does romance mean' and 'how is it experienced', I was able to select what could be a fitting gestalt. At this point I was fairly relaxed about the gestalt not being a perfect fit, as having learned from working with the individual cases, that the gestalt morphs and reshapes when re-engaging with the participant's voice to substantiate a master summary table.

I drafted a master summary table with the proposed gestalt, and then worked through one participant's transcript, illustrating each theme with that person's verbatim quotes, before moving onto the next transcript. After six participants, I relooked at the formulation in light of the amassed quotes and altered the gestalt - and accordant master themes - in line with this evidential base. All adjustments to the themes required cycling back to earlier transcripts for verification. I repeated this formulation review process after the 9<sup>th</sup> transcript and again at the end. As the quotes from the group converged on the master summary table, I found it important to signpost the voices of those individuals who experienced romantic relationships from those who did not. While theme relevant, the quotes from the unromantic participants starkly contrasted in tone and content from the others and might be unsettling or confusing for the reader. For example under the master theme 'Pleasing her', Kelly is referenced saying "I was just amazed; I couldn't believe he'd done it", whereas unromantic Elaine is quoted as saying: "I'd go, 'If you'd just listened to me in the first place, then you'd know what I'd want'". Consequently, on the master summary table, the unromantic voices are flagged and placed together, after the romantic quotes.

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<sup>29</sup> Focusing on the prevalence of a theme might seem at odds with the idiographic approach to knowledge that IPA represents, however it should be remembered that a widely voiced theme still manifests differently across the participants and it is this attention to the individual experience that is reflected in the master summary table (for example Appendix 31: Insider Perspective Final Formulation).

The proposed integrated formulation reflected in a master summary table and supported with quotes from all 12 participants (a wieldy 16 page document), was sent to my supervisors for review. See Appendix 23: IPA Integration Draft Summary Table, for the document that was first submitted. While they thought it was comprehensive, it was linear and thematic. I needed to bring out more of the phenomenological expression to highlight the affective and embodied elements. It is likely that in the lengthy process of integration I had lost my footing—and I was no longer in the participants' shoes.

*Returning to an Insider Perspective*

In order to return to the insider perspective and to get back in touch with the phenomenological aspects of romance, my supervisors asked that I revisit the analysis. I was guided by my supervisors, to imagine the themes as views to a globe, a rotation that imparts a different but meaningful perspective on the same matter. In this way, it was hoped that I would avoid a descriptive and linear analysis but offer an integrated interpretative account of romance.

I began by reviewing my previously submitted master summary table and scrutinized each theme for the presence of 'hot' and 'cool' cognition. It could be seen that areas of 'hot' cognition – those affect laden expressions - included: the excitement over a big gesture; savouring a sentimental experience; dealing with rejection; and change in romantic routines. By contrast, 'cool' cognition was found necessary for people in established relationships to step back into romance after an extended 'romance-less' period. In addition, my first supervisor suggested that I draw insights from those who do not have romance, as a lens on experiential differences. This was particularly helpful, as I doubt that without this guidance, I would have engaged with the interview material in this way.

By looking at the affect rich expressions—and considering non-romantic experiences—I was able to get to the essence of romance. And feel a stronger sense of the participants' lived romantic reality. I extracted three key experiential master themes and presented a reworked 'Insider Perspective', showing: *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane; Claiming Romance - Romance as a Badge of Honour; Romance as Give and Take - a Transaction*. In order to remain anchored in the participants' shoes, I opened each master theme with a phenomenological account, detailing what it means and feels like to experience romance from within this perspective.

My supervisors welcomed this integrated account of romance. While convinced of all themes, on discussion, it was agreed that I would adjust my focus on the second experiential theme, towards issues of self/ and identity. It could be seen, on close inspection of the quotes, that there was tension around participants' drive to protect their romantic identity. The third

theme was also refocused towards *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*, to cover the participants' concern over the matched effort that is needed to sustain their romantic repertoire<sup>30</sup>, whether that be primarily focused on sex, going out to dinner or watching box-sets. Also, how fruitful romantic transactions impact perceptions of relationship quality. Accordingly, this third theme needed to capture the affective and cognitive consequence of when the romantic transaction fails, for example the rejection or displacement after the arrival of children—and the 'cool' cognition required to step back into romance after a break. In other words, reflecting the internal reasoning that romance does not happen by itself and that they need to take responsibility for it. The participants shared that this meaning making is propelled by fear of not having a relationship—or being stuck in a boring life. A full account of the themes, supported with quotes from all participants, can be found in Appendix 31: Insider Perspective Final Formulation.

The end result of the analysis represents a nuanced reading of the data: it suggests that the lived romantic reality of participants can be viewed via the lenses of three master experiential themes: *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane*; *Striving to Protect the Self*; *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*. Together, the three themes reflect the complexity of the participants' romantic experiential and emotional meaning making. For this reading of the interviews, see Chapter 7: The Insider Perspective of Romantic Realities.

## 5.2 FDA Study of Focus Groups

*Exploring how romance is socially constructed through discourse for those in established relationships: An analysis of focus group discussions.*

Having dedicated time to the IPA analysis of the interviews and examined the subjective lived experience of romance for those in established relationships, it was time to switch lenses: to embrace Foucault's social constructionist way of seeing the world and attempt to capture the broader context from where understandings of romance stem; to move from a close-up unfiltered lens of the phenomenological interview to a wide-lens with a theoretical filter.

The aim of this focus group study is to map the discursive terrain of romance—to discover the macro-level processes and tensions that underpin understandings of romance and to see how the discourses may warrant certain romantic (or otherwise) positions and practices for those in established relationships. This will attempt to shed further light on the sense-making of romance as shared in the previous interview study.

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<sup>30</sup> Romantic repertoire refers to the formula of romantic rituals that a couple engages in—whether it be getting drunk together, going out for dinner or sexual intimacy. It is not to be confused with the technical usage of repertoire as derived from discursive psychology, which is a way of understanding the linguistic resources that a speaker uses in their constructions.

Essentially, the FDA will explore how women and men in established relationships construct romance and are positioned by ready made and historically situated discourses. The specific research questions are:

- What discursive resources are available and drawn upon?
- How does available discourse and relational context construct the ways in which people can experience themselves in their relationships?

In other words, in this analysis I will pay attention to participant's choice of discourse and the role of the context in which it is deployed.

### **Why Focus Groups?**

Discourse analysis can be conducted on all kinds of materials, from individual interviews to literature and media sources. Focus groups were elected as the data source for the FDA ahead of these options. Inspired by Shumway (2003), who explored the discourses of romantic love in movies, I had considered progressing Foucauldian inspired analysis on self-help relationship books or coupledness as represented in magazines, reality television or talk-shows. However, focus groups provide a unique opportunity to witness the actual *process* of collective sense-making that is not made available outside of a group setting. The social constructionist view, noted by Wilkinson (1999), is that human experience is produced within social settings:

Collective sense is made, meanings negotiated, and identities elaborated through the social processes of interaction between people. (p.224)

Marks and Yardley (2004) confirm that focus groups are advantageous when the purpose of the research is to explore how people's own perspectives, opinions or views are advanced and negotiated in a social context.

Provocatively, Clarke (2015) contends that the focus group might be dead; she mentions conversation analysts' preference towards naturally occurring data, over researcher-generated. For my research, this would require people naturally discussing romance—as in the recording of men at the pub, for example. However, such an approach invites ethical and practical limitations: the subject of romance may not even enter into conversation; and, then there is the serious issue, or implication, of informed consent to the recording. By contrast, focus groups provide a transparent platform for data collection. Indeed, Wilkinson's (1999) acknowledgement of focus group merits for feminist research, continues to be relevant for FDA purposes. She presented the advantages of focus groups over traditional psychological

research methods as: being relatively naturalistic; offering social context for meaning-making; and shifting the balance of power from the researcher towards the participants.

When compared with individual interviews, focus groups lend themselves well to FDA ‘...focus groups are particularly suited to discourse analysis because group processes play a central role in the dynamics of social interaction’ (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.136). As an FDA researcher, I was keen to discover the points of tension, contradictions and differing views, as indicative of the nature of macro-level influences on participants’ understandings of romance. These points of tension are likely to be more fluid—naturally occurring—and ‘visible’ in a focus group setting than in any individual interview.

Furthermore, I enjoy interacting with people and my life (at the time of preparing the research) involved significant periods of social isolation, so I was enthused at the prospect of engaging with actual people in the form of focus groups.

## **5.2.1 Before the Analysis**

### **5.2.1.1 Preparing for the Focus Groups**

The design of my topic guide needed to be multifunctional, it had to address the research questions and also to warm up the group and then sustain the energy in the room. There are countless formats that can be taken in focus groups (see Marks & Yardley, 2004; Onwuegbuzie *et al.*, 2009; Wilkinson, 2008), from the traditional group discussion, to giving a card sorting exercise, to discussing newspaper clippings or asking for opinions on video clips. I decided to prepare a set of discussion questions, and supplement it with a video clip of romantic clichés shown mid-way through the session to keep members engaged and stimulate further conversation. Some questions pertained to social practices: ‘What (acts/gestures) would you describe as romantic?’, ‘In what ways would your partner say that you’re romantic?’ Other questions are focused on problematising: ‘Can romance be a problem?’, ‘If so, when?’ and ‘For whom?’

As I was interested to see how people flex themselves within the available discourses then it was not essential that participants speak only about their own romantic experience. In contrast, IPA asks that individuals share the phenomenon that is their personal experience. Accordingly, in this FDA study, in addition to asking about their own behaviours, I asked for their views on other couples ‘romantic’ or ‘non romantic’ relationships. For example, ‘Do you know couples who have little/or no romance in their relationship?’, ‘Does it matter?’, ‘If so, for whom?’ I also sensed that speaking about others relationships, versus their own, might be more comfortable for some members.

With several participants to facilitate and a format to finesse, managing a focus group is like staging an event. As such it was important to ensure sufficient resources and that the event is rehearsed so that it operates smoothly. Wilkinson *et al.* (2004) suggest that it is wise to have an assistant on hand during the day. Accordingly, I enlisted the support of Linda Steel, who helped with the participant administration, to assist with the focus groups. She was responsible for on the day administration: following up on late arrivals, managing departures, checking materials, ensuring consent forms are signed and issuing payment.

### **Focus Group Pilot**

To be assured of focus group success, I arranged to pilot a session; the need to rehearse focus groups, to run through the process and trial the materials is well documented (e.g. Marks & Yardley, 2004; Wilkinson, 2008). A pilot provides an opportunity to practice the administration and introductions as well as the debrief. In the main, one can gauge the effectiveness of the warm up, the flow of the questions, timing, as well as check the technology— in my case the use of the video clip. The pilot also served as an opportunity to practice my facilitation style. Whilst many of the skills required to facilitate a focus group are similar to conducting interviews, it does require much more in the way of people management (Marks & Yardley, 2004). For example, ensuring that a quiet person has a chance to speak and being aware and active in diffusing any marginalisation or hostility within the group. Furthermore, the FDA style of analysis to be conducted on the focus group data, adds another layer of expectation from the facilitation. It had become apparent in conversations with my second supervisor and reading the experiences of other FDA researchers (e.g. O’Neachtain, 2013)—those who have ‘tread the path before’—that on occasions there is a need to challenge more: to abandon politeness and to almost be provocative in order to tease out alternative discourses.

A pilot session was arranged at my home in Dubai. It was the middle of Ramadan and many British expats were away, so recruiting for this pilot was going to be challenging. Pragmatically, I asked two separate friends to invite others they knew who had English as their first language, and had been in a relationship a minimum of five years to join a focus group on romance. The resultant attendees were five women:

- All had English as their first language;
- There was an Australian, a New Zealander and three Americans;
- They were aged between 56-59 years; and
- The length of their current relationship was between 17-37 years.

It should be noted that the pilot group participants were quite different from the sample that was to be recruited for my actual focus groups (see *5.2.1.2 Sampling*), namely: they were not British; they were fractionally older; they were not complete strangers; and they were

financially privileged. However, the purpose of the pilot was not to generate relevant data but to practice the considerable administration required. To keep myself on track, I created a logistics checklist based on Wilkinson's (2008) focus group practical activities (Appendix 9: Focus Group Administration). In addition, I used the pilot as an opportunity to check the flow of the questions and review my facilitation style.

Mirroring the process required for the Birmingham focus groups, each participant was asked to read the participant information sheet, sign consent forms and wear a name badge. Following my checklist, I provided a welcome and introduction, covered amenities (bathrooms, drinks), outlined ground rules (including finish time) and reinforced issues of confidentiality. At the end of the session I verbally debriefed them, invited questions, offered thanks and so forth.

I felt that the pilot went smoothly: the timing was perfect at 1.5 hours; Wilkinson (2008) insists, as a sign of respect to participants, facilitators should ensure that sessions do not run over their allotted time. The questions seemed to work well and the participants engaged with each other to explore the topic. I found myself comfortably adjusting the order of the questions, to build off their discussion points. The mid-point showing of the animated video clip, featuring romantic clichés, worked well in terms of breaking up the session and energising the participants. However, I felt that I should have connected the follow-up questions more directly to the animation content as the group seemed expectant of an interrelated probe. I chose to add the sex related question: 'Should some bedroom action now and again be more than enough?' as 'bedroom action' is mentioned in the video clip. Sexual intimacy had been discussed late in the session. In the subsequent post-focus group discussion, the participants admitted that they were waiting for someone to bring up sex; they were almost seeking permission to mention it. As a result, I decided to be more proactive and introduce the subject of sex earlier in the session with a direct question. (See Appendix 24: Focus Group Topic Guide.)

In terms of dynamics, I observed when replaying the audio recording, that the pilot participants seemed to agree with each other and seek consensus, which might be a result of their similar ages (lack of heterogeneity) or that they knew either me or another person in the group. However, after someone had disclosed a divergent view, then others felt free to express alternative perspectives. In recognition of this possible propensity to show alignment, I adjusted my introduction and outline of the ground rules to reinforce that differing views were anticipated and welcomed. I also resolved that going forward, if there was too much agreement that I would need to probe for a counter perspective.

The pilot participants also seemed eager to share evidence of them taking the initiative for romance in their relationships. The readiness to share the romantic lead was considerably different to that expressed by the females in the actual focus groups, who invariably expected their male partners to take romantic responsibility (as can be seen in Chapter 6: The Romantic Discursive Terrain). This could be due to location or sampling differences like wealth, age, nationality, and the presence of friends. Alternatively, as the pilot participants all knew of my book *The Date Night Manifesto*, they could have felt compelled to relay their investment in romance.

My supervisors reviewed the audio recording of the pilot and they were pleased with my facilitation and choice of questions. My first supervisor particularly liked my calling upon quieter members to invite their perspectives on a question. She pointed out that when I did this, the participant typically offered a competing or alternative discourse. They thought that the conversation flowed well and that the resultant content would have offered rich data for FDA.

#### **5.2.1.2 Sampling**

The focus group sample needed to cohere with the interview sample. Later in the research process I relate the experiential reading from the phenomenological interviews to the social discourse generated in the focus groups – the *enlivening* process described in Chapter 4. To aid the matching of the separate readings, I kept the sample criteria mostly the same, namely: working class; British with English as their first language; heterosexual males and females who have been living with their partner or spouse for a minimum of five years. (For a full justification of the rationale for these parameters see *5.1.1.2 Interview Sampling*.) The only change is that I broadened the age range of participants from 35-50 years for the interviews to 30-55 years for the focus groups. This is because homogeneity, a crucial requirement for IPA, is less essential to FDA; indeed, heterogeneity can prompt a greater array of discourses. However, one needs to be mindful that heterogeneity in a focus group can negatively impact member comfort and quality of responses. For example, differences in demographics, knowledge or experience can adversely affect a member's confidence or willingness to contribute to a group (Sim, 1998; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, cited in Onwuegbuzie *et al.*, 2009).

With a view to maximizing participant comfort and making the discussion as naturalistic as possible, I considered using pre-existing friendship groups. Researchers are capitalising on the advantages of using established groups, whether they are colleagues, friends or fellow club/association members for studies on a range of subjects from drinking behaviours to attitudes towards abortion (see Lyons & Willott, 2008; Press, 1991). Authorities on the subject (e.g. Bloor *et al.*, 2001; Wilkinson, 1999) agree that by using pre-existing groups, like

friends or colleagues, a researcher is more likely to elicit discussions that mirror real life. Friends and colleagues are able to recall events from their shared lives and are more likely to question each other and challenge discrepancies about what they're sharing in the group and real behaviour: 'But you told me last week...' However, the familiarity and implicit understanding in friendship groups means that the researcher needs to be more consciously engaged in unpacking shared knowledge and assumptions. In groups made from people unknown to each other there can still be assumptions, yet here the members themselves will inadvertently probe in order to understand a person's point of view.

My prime concern with using pre-existing groups was the negative impact of over-sharing. For example, if someone were to reveal during the course of the focus group discussion that their relationship was 'non romantic', or that they had found romance elsewhere—having an affair—this new information could affect the nature of their relations with these friends or colleagues. Bloor *et al.* (2001) cite situations in pre-existing groups where over-disclosure can be problematic. Moreover, it is well documented (e.g. Bloor *et al.*, 2001; Wilkinson, 2008) that strangers are comfortable speaking freely and revealing intimacies. As per the candid conversations a person might have with a stranger on a train or a flight; there is negligible fear of repercussions once the journey is over. For this reason, I elected to progress with the more traditional style of focus group (groups of strangers have been historically preferred by researchers and is termed a purpose-constructed group).

#### **5.2.1.2.a Focus Group Composition**

In bringing together a group of strangers, numerous factors were considered in order to optimise each member's participation in the focus group. These factors are touched on briefly next, they include: age range; number of participants; group dynamics; and gender mix.

As mentioned earlier, I selected an age range of 30-55 for the focus groups. An age range wider than this could become counterproductive. Morgan (1997) suggests that diversely aged participants, older people in groups with those who are much younger, may have difficulty communicating. This might be because of different experiences or it could be that references are generationally different. I also felt that discussing romantic issues with people who are much younger, or older, might be awkward for some members.

Each focus group encompassed between six to eight participants. Focus groups used for research can be as large as 12 persons. However, given the subject of romance being discussed, it is thought that a more intimate group might be more appropriate and conducive to the discussion (for more information on sensitive topics and group size, see Bloor *et al.*, 2001). Yet, I did not want to go below five members as I felt that a very small group might produce a narrower, less diverse range of discursive positions in relation to romance.

Within each group, I ensured that there was a narrow range in Ipsos social grade. As can be seen on Table 5-1, the range differential for each group is limited to one Ipsos social grade and I did not mix C1 with D. Individuals who are classified as C1 may be office employees, whereas D are semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Knodel (1993) warns that members who perceive themselves as less privileged in a focus group may be deferential and fail to express themselves. I felt that limiting the span of Ipsos social grades in each group mitigated this risk.

The focus groups involved mostly same-sex groups and just one mixed-sex group. Gender likely represents a major difference in how romantic love is constructed (e.g. Giddens, 1992). It is also probable that my working-class sample were more likely to experience gender division more than other socio-economic groups (e.g. Shumway, 2003; Thompson, 1995). My use of same-sex groups reflected that the natural forum for their discussion of romance and relationships might still involve exclusively male or female forums; for example, the men at the pub or the women at the hairdressers. Thus, I assumed that it might be more comfortable and naturalistic for participants to discuss the topic in same-sex groups. Indeed, it appears that same-sex groups are favoured by researchers—irrespective of subject (Hennink, 2014). One mixed-sex group was undertaken; this group provided a lens to the different tensions that may feature in the discourse of romance between women and men.

#### **5.2.1.2.b Number of Groups**

I was initially undecided whether to have five groups (2 x male, 2 x female, 1 mixed) or three (1 x male, 1 x female, 1 mixed). It is generally accepted that three to six different focus groups are adequate to reach saturation, whereby the collection of further data does not additionally benefit the research (Morgan, 1997). Yet FDA is looking for discursive constructions, tensions and social influences as opposed to themes, in which case one does not necessarily need to look for saturation in the same way as other forms of qualitative analysis. However, it is still desirable to access a good range of discursive resources, particularly if the aim is to map the discursive territory.

Conscious of the practical demands of focus groups, Bloor *et al.* (2001) advocate keeping the numbers of groups to a bare minimum:

Focus groups are labour intensive in recruitment, transcription and analysis, therefore, where possible, numbers should be kept down to the bare minimum. (p.14)

In this way, there is support on the basis of preserving researcher resources, for my conducting just three focus groups. On the other hand, more groups might capture a wider range of discourses, and the increased data might inspire wider confidence in my commitment

to conducting research at the doctorate level. A decision was made, just prior to recruitment that given my resources, five groups would be arranged. The focus groups were organised in the following way:

Table 5-1: Organisation of Focus Groups

Focus group	Gender	Ipsos social grade
1	Males	C2/D
2	Males	C1/C2
3	Females	C2/D
4	Females	C1/C2
5	Males/Females	C1/C2

### 5.2.1.3 Recruitment

I employed Angelfish to support the recruitment activity for the focus groups. (For more information on Angelfish see *5.1.1.3 Recruitment*.) They had successfully recruited 12 participants for the interviews, thus demonstrating a solid understanding of the sample requirements. The challenge with the focus groups, compared to the interviews, was the large number of participants required—here we needed between 30 to 40 participants. To facilitate the large recruitment, incentives were increased to £40 per participant. In addition, the age span had been widened by 10 years to 30 to 55 years (for the rationale see *5.2.1.2 Sampling*).

As per the recruitment for the interviews, Angelfish consulted their database of pre-registered individuals for candidates who match the sample criteria. In parallel they created a social media campaign, posting the project on their Facebook and Twitter feed (see Appendix 25: Social Media Focus Group Recruitment for Angelfish’s Facebook and Twitter posts). To widen the reach of the campaign £10 Amazon vouchers were offered to their social media followers for successful referrals. Owing to the volume required they also engaged external recruiters based in Birmingham to source local leads. All respondents were internally validated, by Angelfish, as meeting the sample criteria.

The recruitment effort got underway earlier than in the interviews; this time we allowed four weeks. For each focus group I required between five to eight participants and ideally wanted a minimum of six (see *5.2.1.2.a Focus Group Composition* for rationale). I asked Angelfish to recruit eight participants, so if a few persons could not make a session, the minimum would still be met. Many texts on focus groups suggest over-recruiting by between 20% and 50% to account for no shows (Onwuegbuzie *et al.*, 2009; Wilkinson *et al.*, 2004). However, attrition in this project is less likely given the financial incentives being paid. Moreover, Angelfish call to remind participants the day before the focus group.

As in the interview study, Lisa Boughton, Director at Angelfish, oversaw the recruitment of participants for the focus group study and ensured that strict adherence to the Market Research Society code of conduct was upheld. Consistent with the interviews, she also made provisions so that all potential participants were able to see the participant information sheet (Appendix 10: Focus Group Participant Information Sheet), before agreeing to take part in the research.

#### **5.2.1.4 Participants**

A total of 33 people participated in the focus groups. As shown in Table 5-2, there were 17 males and 16 females, aged between 34 and 55 years, who were in established relationships spanning from 5 to 37 years.

Table 5-2: Focus Group Composition

Focus group	Ipsos social grade	Participants	Age	Relationship length
1	C2/D	8 males	39-55 years Mean = 48	5-28 years Mean = 12
2	C1/C2	6 males	35-55 years Mean = 44	8-37 years Mean = 20
3	C2/D	7 females	35-54 years Mean = 45	8-30 years Mean = 17
4	C1/C2	6 females	34-47 years Mean = 40	6-13 years Mean = 8
5	C1/C2	3 males/ 3 females	36-54 years Mean = 45	9-36 years Mean = 16

Reflecting the working-class sample, males reported occupations that included: labourers; painter and decorators; builders; warehouse operators; and sales staff. Females reported occupations that included: teaching assistants; admin support and secretaries; homemakers; and retail staff. The participants were predominately white British; this included all 16 females and 14 of the men. Two men reported being Black Caribbean and another male as Indian. All were British nationals with English as their first language. Nearly all of the participants were parents: 29 out of 33. However, many would have had their children with previous partners. For a lot of the participants this was not their first established relationship, 20 affirmed that they had either been married or in a partnership arrangement before. Across current relationships, which averaged 17 years, 16 participants were cohabiting in domestic partnership and the remaining 17 were married.

#### **5.2.1.5 Focus Group Events**

The focus groups took place in Birmingham over three days in July 2015. They were conducted at QED Studios, a dedicated focus group facility used by market research firms. I had initially considered hiring a hotel meeting room, however, a studio like QED would video record the focus groups (with overhead CCTV-like cameras), which would aid the

transcription process; in groups it can be challenging to keep track of who is speaking based on audio alone. In addition, QED is conveniently located for participants; it is near a train station, directly outside a bus stop and has plenty of parking. I visited the QED venue in March 2015 (at the time of the interviews) and met with the studio manager, Karen, to see room options and explore set-up configurations.

With many years of experience in hosting and moderating focus groups, Karen provided a number of operational insights on timing and room set up. We discussed how seating individuals in a circle facilitates a more even power dynamic and promotes participation (e.g. Hennink, 2014; Rodriguez *et al.*, 2011). The circular seating could be arranged with or without a central table. The table could either be low (coffee-table height) or regular height. I opted for a quiet room away from the main road, and a regular height oval table. I sensed that discussions on romance and relationships could make people feel exposed or vulnerable so I thought that a regular height table might feel more protective for some and help people to relax. The focus group rooms all came with a viewing facility; a further room separated by a window disguised as a mirror, from where participants could be observed. For my purposes, the viewing facility was not used; it might represent a further power imbalance between researcher and participant. To mitigate the risk that they might sense they were being covertly observed, participants were shown the vacant room as they arrived.

Karen, the studio manager, agreed with my 1.5 hour allocation for the session. I had initially considered 2 hour sessions but decided against it when I found a prevalence of 1-1.5 hour focus groups. Indeed, there appears to be some evidence of participant fatigue in longer sessions (e.g. Brown, 1999; Hennink, 2014). Karen concurred that during 2 hours participants can get restless and conversations peter out. See Table 5-3 for the finalised schedule of focus groups.

Table 5-3: Schedule of Focus Group Events

Date	Timing	Gender	Ipsos social grade
Jul 20	4-5.30pm	Males	C2/D
Jul 20	6-7.30pm	Males	C1/C2
Jul 21	4-5.30pm	Females	C2/D
Jul 22	6-7.30pm	Females	C1/C2
Jul 21	6-7.30pm	Males/Females	C1/C2

I would have preferred a longer break between same day focus groups, for example a session at 12pm then another 6pm would allow greater reflection and preparation time. However, this would have considerably increased studio fees, so I elected for the more efficient and economical arrangement, as shown above. With only a 30-minute turn around time between

focus groups, I was pleased to have my assistant, Linda on hand to assist with arrivals, keep track of paperwork, provide refreshments and issue payment.<sup>31</sup> As per the pilot, I used the protocol for practical considerations as set out in Wilkinson (2008) as a checklist to ensure that Linda and I covered the numerous admin and comfort factors – from offering thanks and welcome through to inviting questions and completing consent forms to setting out ground rules, reiterating confidentiality and so forth. (See Appendix 9: Focus Group Administration.)

Next, I offer key reflections from each of five focus group sessions. Despite having piloted the format, I felt that I learnt an enormous amount from each focus group session.

Across the board, it somewhat puzzled me that participants assumed that I wanted to hear positive stories of romance. Many of the females would apologise for not having such stories, while the men were eager to furnish me with their romantic antics. This divide likely reflects considerable gender differences in the construction of romance (e.g. Giddens, 1992; Shumway, 2003). In addition, it emphasises the need to be cognisant of what I may have embodied and introduced as a female facilitator. Rodriguez *et al.* (2011) ask facilitators to consider how their own social identities may change the experience for the participants. As a fairly attractive woman—slim, blond and tall—who is engaging and encouraging them on the topic of romance, it could be plausible that some men wanted to impress me with demonstrations of both their manliness and romantic sensitivity. Conversely, some women might have felt uncomfortable or challenged by my appearance, given the subject of love. Based on my initial reflections on the discourses, it would seem that the men were more invested in being romantic. Indeed, it became apparent in the mixed group that the onus is on men to provide the romance in the relationship.

With five focus groups in three days, it was always going to be an intense experience, but I was surprised at how it felt like a roller coaster. It started on an enjoyable footing with the male groups who were fun and straightforward to facilitate, so with the two male groups on day one, I was feeling relaxed and confident for day two. However, my subsequent female sessions were more turbulent: demanding tighter facilitation and emotional sensitivity. Yet, upon finishing the fifth and final session, I was eager to do more as I felt like I had rapidly matured as a facilitator. In this respect I am pleased that I opted for five groups and not the three that was originally mooted. Below, I offer a notable reflection or learning from each of the sessions.

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<sup>31</sup> Linda had signed a confidentiality disclosure see Appendix 12. In addition, her presence was indicated to participants on the consent form, see Appendix 13.

*Session 1, 8 men: Table size implications*

In this session, the men seemed to be enjoying themselves and interacting well with each other to discuss the topic of romance. However, on occasion concurrent conversations would arise, which required that I intervene and ask that they attend to a single discussion at a time. I was aware of my interruption and command of attention as an exertion of control; a power dynamic between the researcher and the researched (e.g. Rodriguez *et al.*, 2011; Wilkinson, 1999) that I was trying to avoid in my focus groups. However, the practical reality of transcription and gaining audible data for analysis required that I intervene and be active in managing the group. To lessen the chance of this happening in the next focus groups I reduced the size of the table, sensing that the wider physical spread of participants invited separate conversations. A central section of the table was removed, and the small table size was used for the remaining groups in order to promote eye contact between all participants and contain the conversation. (For more on focus group seating see Hennink, 2014.)

*Session 2, 6 men: Age and identification*

In this session, I noticed an age split between participants: half were aged 49-55 and the others were in their 30s. It was fascinating to watch how the men with longstanding relationships and adult children began coaching and encouraging the younger men who had small children. Here it would seem that despite the age difference that there was strong identification between the participants.

*Session 3, 7 women: Distressed participant*

Early on in this all-female focus group, I noticed that one woman was behaving in an errant fashion: making side comments to her neighbours and avoiding addressing the group. To stem this distraction, I made a general comment to the group about keeping to a single conversation, yet she persisted in the above manner. So I asked her directly to share her views with us all. And she did. On the verge of tears, she shared her disappointment with her husband who she thought was depressed. In that moment, I found myself offering concerned body language—soft eye contact and grave nodding—and wanting to let her have the space to speak. The other participants rallied to empathise with her and divulged further stories of how depression had affected relationships and romance. As we continued our session, I was pleased to see that the distressed participant was visibly more relaxed. At the end of the focus group, after the debrief, I asked that she stay for a moment so that I could extend support for her wellbeing (e.g. Wilkinson, 2008). Thankfully, I was equipped with the list of counselling service providers in the area (Appendix 11: Birmingham Referrals for Counselling and Health) and could discuss with her the options that were accessible and suited her timetable. She seemed most grateful, perhaps she just needed to be heard.

*Session 4, 6 women: Domineering participant*

At the start of this focus group session we had two participants who were delayed in traffic. I was relieved that the latecomers persisted with the traffic and joined us, as four persons might have been too small, especially when contending with one particularly vociferous member. Bloor *et al.* (2001) acknowledge that a domineering participant will wield a greater impact on the discussion of a small group. In our session, this outspoken woman would over talk others and mock participants' ideas of romance. To compensate, I would positively acknowledge those views that had been disparaged and redirect discussion to other members (see Hennink, 2014, for strategies to deal with dominant voices). This resulted in many of the women looking to me for 'authorisation' to talk and I found myself calling upon participants to invite their views as a way of managing the impact of the dominant member. I was frustrated that the discussion had not been more group led, with higher levels of participant interaction. However, my supervisor latterly reassured me that this session could still be valuable as demonstrating opposing discourses.

*Session 5, 3 men and 3 women: Seating implications*

Given the mixed-sex composition, I was torn whether to assign seats at the table to break up the men and women, or whether to just let them choose their own position. The latter option might mean that the women sit on one side and the men on the other, which could feel a bit confrontational, therefore I decided to set places, alternating the men with the women. I felt that this session's subsequent interaction and discussion was quite 'polite', which might have been a product of my contriving the seating arrangement or it might be due to the men and women being respectful and looking for common ground. Hennink (2014) concedes that it remains unclear how mixed-sex groups affect participant participation.

#### **5.2.1.6 Informed Consent and Debriefing**

*See 5.1.1.6 for the informed consent procedures relating to focus groups.*

*See 5.1.1.7 for the debriefing procedures relating to focus groups.*

#### **5.2.1.7 Anonymity, Confidentiality and Storage of Data**

*See 5.1.1.8 for my general approach to anonymity, confidentiality and storage of data issues.*

*Specific confidentiality issues related to focus groups are detailed below.*

The nature of focus groups, whereby multiple persons are privy to individual disclosures, introduces well-documented confidentiality concerns (e.g. Bloor *et al.*, 2001; Wilkinson, 2008). I tried to preserve confidentiality, and limit the impact of 'over-sharing', in a number of ways:

- The participants were asked in the information sheet to keep the content shared by others confidential;

- At the start of each focus group, I verbally reminded everyone that the discussion was to remain confidential;
- I designed purpose-constructed focus groups. I had originally considered using pre-existing friendship groups, but this introduces the concern of people ‘over-sharing’ and there being a negative shadow of these disclosures within their social group;
- Strangers were recruited for each group. Potential participants were asked by Angelfish if they knew of others taking part in the research. If they did know a fellow participant, they were either allocated to different groups where possible or excluded; and
- I selected the large city of Birmingham to draw participants. Originally I had considered a smaller town, but there would have been a higher chance of people knowing other participants.

#### **5.2.1.8 Additional Ethical Considerations**

*See 5.1.1.9 for my general approach to ethical considerations. Issues specific to the focus groups, namely the video recording of the groups, the viewing facility, and the film clip shown to participants, are detailed below.*

As mentioned earlier, City University’s Psychology Research Ethics Committee granted ethical approvals for this research in February 2015 (Appendix 15: University Ethical Approval).

The focus groups were video and audio recorded to aid transcription. Obtaining a video record is common practice when conducting focus groups as it helps the transcriber keep track of which participant is talking at any point in time. It was considered that some participants might have ethical concerns that this video might end up elsewhere—on YouTube for example. In order to pre-empt any apprehension of the sort, people were informed of the nature of recording before agreeing to participate. The information sheet (Appendix 10) issued in advance, advised that the focus group was to be video recorded. When participants showed up on the day, they were reminded via the consent form that the video was for transcription purposes only (Appendix 13). Furthermore, I verbally reassured people of the aforementioned points when they were seated in the room and made physically aware of the camera.

As mentioned earlier, the focus group rooms at QED studio came with viewing facilities; an adjoining room separated by a window disguised as a mirror, from where participants can be observed. While the viewing facility was not used in my research, if participants perceived that they were being surreptitiously watched it could create a greater power divide between the researcher and the researched. To mitigate this issue, participants were shown, upon arrival, that the observation area was vacant and not about to be utilised.

To sustain rich conversation and energise the room, I wanted to show a video clip midway through the session. Ideally, I would have liked to show the book trailer for *The Date Night Manifesto*; a five minute animation featuring many romantic clichés. However, I feared being recognised as the author and this could adversely impact participant responses, comfort and subsequent disclosures. I considered finding an alternative video from a television show or film to liven the conversation, however this introduces copyright issues. Eventually, I decided to use a one-minute slice of the book trailer, a portion that does not have any reference to the book, date nights or me. The voice in the animation is not my own so there was absolutely no way that the participants would associate it with me. City University's Psychology Research Ethics Committee received this movie clip as part of the submission, which was granted ethical approval.

#### **5.2.1.9 Transcription of the Focus Groups**

In preparation for the analysis, the five focus groups were transcribed by Take Note; the provider who had undertaken the earlier transcriptions of the interviews. I uploaded anonymised digital audio and video recordings of the focus groups to a protected area of Take Note's portal. A seating plan for each focus group was also uploaded, with seats reflecting the assigned pseudonyms. In this way, the transcripts returned with pseudonyms in place.

As per the interviews, the resultant full verbatim transcripts reflected everything uttered that included 'ums', grammatical errors and false starts. For the focus groups, I additionally asked that incidences of participants talking in union, or over each other were highlighted and that all extended silences, beyond two seconds were timed. Prolonged pauses in one-to-one interview contexts typically indicate reflection, or a pause for thought, on the part of the interviewee or interviewer. By contrast, in a group setting when someone is pausing for thought another participant often fills the void. In this way, a prolonged silence in a focus group could carry extra significance and communicate discursive tension. (See Appendix 16: Transcription Conventions.)

The transcription service, Take Note, had difficulty transcribing focus group 5. In this group there was a participant, a frequent contributor to the discussion, who had a particularly strong Birmingham accent. I revisited the audio and also found it difficult to decipher. In this case, I recruited the assistance of a friend who is native to Birmingham, to translate the commentary. In line with privacy considerations, a confidentiality statement was signed before she approached the transcript or recording. (See Appendix 12: Confidentiality Agreements.)

## **5.2.2 The Analysis - FDA**

### **5.2.2.1 Building Confidence**

As a novice in FDA, I was apprehensive about my ability to grasp this style of discourse analysis. In order to build confidence and competence, I practiced identifying romantic love constructions and associated discourses during my volunteering work at the Juliet Club in Verona (September 2015 and August 2016, see Appendix 3: Juliet Secretary Report). As I read the letters addressed to Juliet, I would consider how the authors are constructing romantic love and its implication for practice. For example, some writers desperately waiting for their 'Romeo', constructed romance as an act of destiny, in which case they were not being proactive in finding love. I also found myself reflecting on the various and often conflicting constructions presented in the discourse of fellow Juliet Secretaries. The male secretary's advice would come from the 'intimacy' discourse whereas fellow female secretaries were frequently speaking from the 'romantic love' discourse.

In order to practice further, I attended an FDA workshop organised by my first supervisor for research students. In this workshop, I was able to trial conducting FDA using Willig's (2008; 2013) six stage process, on a few pages of focus group transcript. This approach covers: Discursive constructions; Discourses; Action orientation; Positionings, Practice; and Subjectivity. During the workshop, I realised the importance of having intimate knowledge of established discourses, in order to be able to confidently locate constructions and build upon prior research. To prepare for the FDA I would need to review the literature for recognised discourses that might be appropriate to the topic of romantic love.

### **5.2.2.2 Compiling a Discourse List**

Unfortunately, there is no official dictionary of discourses, so it was a matter of sieving through material to identify the relevant discourses that have been named to date. In this way, I was able to draw on the work of others, rather than recreate or reproduce discourses that currently exist. I generated a list of discourses as evident in the literature and other doctoral theses, with associated notes that would then help in the process of identifying them in the transcripts. (See Appendix 26: List of Discourses.)

Many researchers use the terms 'discourse' and 'repertoire' interchangeably (e.g. Gough, 2001) and others reflect them as distinct. For the purpose of my research, I adopted Burr's (2015) view that they are different: that a repertoire is a way of understanding the linguistic resources that a speaker uses in their constructions, whereas a discourse is larger and contains constructions and subject positions.

I also observed that Nicholls (2009) peppered her thesis with numerous specific discourses while others, like Colahan (2014) would present fewer but larger, more encompassing,

discourses. The journal articles also tended to show more restraint in the number of discourses presented (which could be a result of word count restrictions). It could also be seen that for some discourses there appeared to be much overlap – like Hollway’s (1984) Have/Hold discourse with Lawes’ (1999) Romantic repertoire and Kippax’s (2002, cited in Nicholls, 2009) Love/coupledness discourse.<sup>32</sup>

These observations prompted me to consider the granularity of discourses that I would deploy in my FDA. Guided by the concept of a discourse being fairly big, as mentioned above, and able to contain several subject positions and a multitude of constructions (e.g. Burr, 2015), I elected for fewer but more embracing discourses. In this way, text that might be read as belonging to the Have/Hold discourse, or ‘the Only One’ discourse, could be gathered in the generic ‘Romantic Love’ discourse; which sees love inextricably linked with marriage and monogamy (Willig, 2008).

The compiled list represented dozens of discourses from the highly recognised attachment discourse to the less known intimate confessional discourse and everything in between. The list was organised in terms of perceived relevance to my study and then re-organised after the analysis of two focus groups, when the actual constructions that participants deployed and discursive resources accessed became evident. (See Appendix 26: List of Discourses.)

The process of establishing the list of discourses, and attempting to define them with notes, helped to create in my mind an expectation of the kind of material within the transcripts to pursue.

### **5.2.2.3 Developing a Coding Protocol**

Albeit armed with the list of discourses, before approaching the transcripts, I spent time developing a coding protocol that would guide a thorough analysis of the five focus groups.

There is no recipe for conducting FDA; it is an analysis of discourse undertaken in the Foucauldian spirit of unpacking the taken-for-granted to reveal insights to broader social tensions and underlying power dynamics. Yet, practiced discourse analysts of the Foucauldian style, do offer some guidance for the novice practitioner (e.g. Arribas-Ayllan & Walkerdine, 2008, Parker, 1992; Willig, 2008; Willig, 2013). While I was familiar with Willig’s (2008) six stages, from the FDA workshop and my practice at the Juliet Club, I did consider whether a closer alignment with an alternative approach would benefit the research; Parker (1992) comprehensively lays out 20 considerations to guide the discourse analyst, while Arribas-

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<sup>32</sup> This is not to say that I am trying to find a ‘true’ discourse or make them fit together. These discourses are produced by authors who, drawing on similar linguistic data (and resources themselves) may well produce similar readings.

Ayllon and Walkerdine (2008) also offers a robust framework for FDA. On review, I felt that the output from the Willig (2008) six stages approach would be rich—and soundly speak to the Foucauldian intention of the analysis. The obvious limitation of this approach is that it does not address Foucault’s concern with discourse being historically situated (Willig, 2013). However, my history of romantic love, presented in Chapter 3, already demonstrates how the discourse has changed over time. In this way, the six stages, supported by the genealogy, represents a comprehensive analysis in the Foucauldian sense.

Thus, I based my coding protocol on Willig’s (2008) six stages, elucidated with reference to Burr (2015). The protocol is organised in a way that incorporates guidance from the aforementioned FDA workshop, as well as insights gained from my second supervisor. (See Appendix 27: FDA Coding Protocol.) It is designed to operate as a functional guide for analysing the transcripts. Indeed, alongside developing the protocol I began to think about the physical act of coding. At this point, I was no doubt influenced by my extensive IPA coding, which involved the transcript being flanked by two columns, to create a three-column table for coding. For the FDA, I initially considered a seven-column table to account for the six stages and the transcript, however this proved unwieldy. I eventually designed a five-column table (see Appendix 28: FDA Coding Example), which combined three stages: positions, practice and subjectivity into the final column. This amalgamation was influenced by Davies and Harré’s (1999) theory on positioning, which offers that in taking up a position, there are resultant implications for practice and subjectivity.

I believe that the above processes helped me to transition from the IPA to FDA. They served as something like a mind cleanser, preparing my head space for the FDA after being intensely immersed in IPA for months. (See Appendix 2: Reflexivity Log Extract for an account of my thoughts during this period.)

#### **5.2.2.4 Key Analytic Concepts**

On my journey into FDA, I found myself drawing on two key analytic sources in the coding process: Rom Harré and colleagues’ theory of positioning (mentioned above); and Jennifer Coates for her vast body of work on linguistic features and the construction of everyday conversations. These analytic perspectives proved complementary and mutually reinforcing as the conversational dynamics stemmed from power issues and positioning.

Harré’s (1999) theoretical perspectives on positioning assisted on several fronts and resolved some major dilemmas. Obviously, given the topic of romantic love, participants talked about their spouses or partners who were neither participating nor in the room. This situation proved something of a quandary as analyses of positioning interactions are generally focused on those happening in the room (e.g. discursive psychology and conversation analysis take

talk-in-interaction as their primary data). Van Langenhove and Harré (1999) proved valuable to this end; they offer that there are different modes of positioning: performative and accountive. Talk-in-interaction can be seen as performative, whereas the retelling of a story or event is accountive; and recognises that the speaker, in this recount, is still positioning themselves and their not-present (romantic) partner. Furthermore, in its disclosure and people's reaction to it, it becomes performative.

Correspondingly, Davies and Harré (1999) assert that in speaking from a particular position, the conversant is bringing their history as they see it; that is the discourses and positions they have occupied in the past. The choices between different subject positions will be mediated by the emotional meaning they associate to those positions based on self or other experiences (as well as the degree of moral alignment). They also point to contradictions, and a person's occupation of competing subject positions in a conversation, as being important sites for analysis and understanding.

On matters relating to the practical events in the focus groups, Harré and colleagues also offered insights. For example, van Langenhove and Harré (1999) suggest that early seizure of a dominant role in a conversation can force others to take up positions that they would not have chosen otherwise, while Davies and Harré (1999) write that not contributing to a conversation can, at times, be a sign of anger, oppression or being affronted.

It was primarily Jennifer Coates' understanding of conversational devices, deployed by women and men, that informed my awareness of the power issues and dynamics at play in the focus group sessions. From her 30 years of research, Coates shows that speakers who command power are those who: direct questions to others (as this requires a response); interrupt in order to dominate the floor; and curiously, can be found to pay compliments (whereas lower status people accept compliments). She also shows that gossiping or talking negatively together about an outside party, can have a bonding impact on people—as does eliciting group laughter (mentioned next). Compellingly, Coates (e.g. 2004b, 2013b) provides a solid and balanced reference for linguistic features, for example she cautions that hedges—'like' and 'you know'—are not merely signs of being unassertive, but have multifunctional roles: they can be facilitative and be used to soften a message and so can be more evident with sensitive topics. Conversely, hedges can also be used to assert and strengthen a message.

Furthermore, my heteronormative study and use of same-sex focus groups mirrors much of Coates' work; she has primarily focused her research on single-sex friendship groups (2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2013a, 2013b). In this way, she offers valuable material on the privileging of heterosexuality and the discursive resources deployed to sustain it.

### 5.2.2.5 First Focus Group

In preparation for the line-by-line analysis, the transcript was prepared into the five-column table as described in 5.2.2.3 *Developing the Coding Protocol* (see Appendix 28: FDA Coding Example).

#### 5.2.2.5.a Listening First

Before beginning the line-by-line reading, I re-listened to the audio recording; this enabled a check on the transcription accuracy, and also allowed me to note verbal emphasis or other aural information. For example, in the first male group, I was struck by the group's considerable use of humour; listening to the focus group was like listening to a sitcom, with a regular rise and fall of laughter. I was curious by their deployment of humour and wondered if it was something to do with masculinity and/or a reaction to being asked to talk about romance. I then found myself looking into the research by Nigel Edley and reaching out to Brendon Gough (both prolific researchers of masculinity) to see if they have any insights into male behaviours in groups. It was Brendon Gough who suggested I consult the published works of Jennifer Coates. Insightfully, Coates (2007) describes this kind of talk as play; she points out that collaboration is at the core of playful talk and this creates solidarity; it can be seen that even the men in the focus group who are not frequent speakers are collaborating through laughter.

This deviation into theory and literature at the outset of the FDA, remained a common feature of the analytic process, it helped me to paint a picture of the wider issues that were producing the discursive content of the group.

#### 5.2.2.5.b Line-by-line Reading

On the first reading of the transcript, I would write comprehensive discursive notes (in column 2). As per the coding protocol, these comments would include constructions of romance and any images or questions that come to mind. I would also register any text of linguistic interest, where there might be repetition, hesitant speech or prolonged silences for example. As shown in Appendix 28: Focus Group Coding Example, I have noted in column 2, that romance is constructed as a sexual pleasure and there is also reference to the silence in Greg's dialogue.

During the second reading I would attempt to complete the remaining elements of the table, as clues to subject positions and wider discourses. My first supervisor had cautioned against following the six stages as discrete linear steps, but rather use the stages as providing insights to the nature of the discourse; Parker (1992) also reiterates the cyclical feature of discourse analysis. In which case, not all stages were completed in order, or in full, for a particular slice of discussion. In some instances, the discourse and position would be evident, a romantic practice might be detailed by the speaker, which points directly to a particular discourse and

subject position. For example, Greg's privileging and practice of emotional intimacy, 'we've got a really good relationship, we can we can talk about everything and anything we worry about' points to the 'intimacy' discourse and the 'Best Friend Romantic' position.

In this way, I approached the FDA as a puzzle, finding enough pieces to warrant a subject position or discourse. In the same pursuit, Willig (2012) describes discourse analysis as the satisfying process of combing through tangled hair, repeatedly going over the tangles and knots with her analytic comb. For me, this analytic detangling or puzzle solving, often required returning to the literature to understand what a particular discursive feature might amount to in the context of this focus group.

#### **5.2.2.5.c Final Reading**

Based on my initial coding of the transcript, it could be seen that the discursive resources accessed by my participants might not be overly far-reaching or radical. Accordingly, my supervisors encouraged that I focus on discursive dynamics: how the participants deploy the discursive resources that they have at their means. My supervisors reminded me that this is likely to be 'messy', that there will be contested space and evident contradictions.

On a separate piece of paper, during the third reading, I would bring together observable discursive dynamics and try to build an understanding of what the group was trying to achieve. Helpful to this end was considering the tensions and challenges as presented by the focus group members. This included conflict between members, which signposted that the speakers were located in competing discourses. For example (as shown in Appendix 28) Greg and Chris could be seen to regularly challenge each other; Greg would typically be located in the 'intimacy' discourse whereas Chris would be in the traditional 'romantic love' discourse.

Furthermore, participants frequently countered themselves, which invariably suggested that they were speaking from different discursive locations (Davies & Harré, 1999). In Appendix 28 we can see Greg speaking from competing subject positions in the same breath. The action orientation notes (as seen in column 3 Appendix 28) provided crucial insights as to why someone might switch subject positions; it considered what a participant might seek to gain from speaking in a certain way—what might be achieved by these constructions and what effects they have for the speaker and for others in the room. As such, these action orientation notes helped to unpack contradictions and also proved fruitful for understanding the project of the group. For example, Greg was found to emphasise his sexual prowess with frequent references to having fun in the jacuzzi. In this way, we learn something of the male imperative in the focus group to preserve hegemonic masculinity.

#### 5.2.2.5.d Producing a Discursive Reading

After coding the transcript and considering the dynamics, I spent time producing a coherent discursive reading of the focus group, before moving onto the next. The discursive reading brought insight from the literature and summarised each focus group in terms of answering the following questions:

- What discursive resources are available and drawn on by focus group 1?
- What are the men in group 1 doing with their discursive resources?
  - What is the project of the men in this session?
  - What tensions are presented and challenges encountered?

The discursive readings, presented as comprehensive summary papers, for all five focus groups can be found in Appendix 29: FDA Summary Papers.

On a related note, the order of the analysis of the five groups was approached in the same sequence that the sessions were held: the two male focus groups were undertaken back to back, followed by the all-female focus groups and finally the mixed. This worked well, as during the analysis of the first male group, I found myself delving into a lot of research into masculinity and so having another male focus group to analyse immediately thereafter capitalised on those insights.

#### 5.2.2.6 Consolidating the FDA Analysis

Having completed the analysis of all five focus groups, it was then necessary to consolidate the readings into a single Foucauldian inspired analysis that outlined the discursive resources of the participants and also reflected the contextual issues that affected group dynamics.

Based largely on the same format as the individual focus group summary papers (Appendix 29: FDA Summary Papers) I firstly outlined the discursive economy, which showed my interpretation of the available wider discourses and accessible subject positions. This indicated, for example, that men and women occupy different positions in the 'romantic love' discourse. I introduced the subject positions with tables showing romantic practice and implications for subjectivity. These tables were developed from a systematic exploration of the ways in which the discursive constructions were operationalised during the focus groups.

Secondly, in this consolidated analysis, I set out the context under which each subject position may be mobilised. This also explored how the subject positions may interact with each other. Here I was able to discuss any differences in subject position take up observed across the mixed-sex and same-sex groups. Rather than start this section with the most commonly expressed subject positions, in the Foucauldian spirit of the analysis, I began with the forces

that might marginalise the less popular subject positions and hinder their mobilisation. (See Chapter 6: Romantic Discursive Terrain.)

### **5.3 Presenting the IPA and FDA Analyses**

As shown in this chapter, the order of conducted analyses was firstly the IPA of interviews followed by FDA of focus groups. This sequencing respected hermeneutic differences and the need to move from an empathic to a 'suspicious' approach. However, my language-dominant theorising of the relationship between discourse and experience for this research, whereby discourse produces experience, leads to the analysis chapters being presented in the reverse order: the FDA's discursive terrain followed by the IPA's insider perspective (as constructed by discourse). (For more details on the theorising taken see Appendix 1: Reflexive Account for Language-Dominant Conceptualisation.)

Therefore, the consolidated reading from the FDA of the focus groups is next in Chapter 6: Romantic Discursive Terrain. This is followed by the experiential themes that I identified from the IPA, Chapter 7: The Insider Perspective of Romantic Realities. The latter part of Chapter 7 presents the *enlivened* research that integrates the IPA reading with the FDA and provides us with a view to the discursive production of romantic realities. In addition, a further chapter is presented, Chapter 8: Discursive Emotional Dynamics, which details an original theoretical offering as resulting from the combination of methodologies.

## **Chapter 6**

# **Romantic Discursive Terrain**

This chapter presents my reading of the romantic discursive terrain of the participants in the focus groups. It gives us a view as to how women and men in established relationships construct romance and are positioned by ready-made or historically given discourses. This reading of the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) attempts to answer two questions:

- What discursive resources are available and drawn on?
- How does available discourse and relational context construct the ways in which people can experience themselves in their relationships?

The chapter begins with an outline of the analytic journey; it uses an all-female focus group as an example of the approach taken. Rather than speak to the coding process that is fully described in *5.2.2 The Analysis – FDA*, this section elaborates on my process of producing a discursive reading. Then in the latter two sections we see the combined discursive reading. In section *6.2 Discursive Economy* this chapter seeks to address the first question, it describes my understanding of the participants' discursive terrain and introduces constructions of romantic love and the expressed subject positions, while the next section *6.3 Subject Position Mobilisation* attends to the second question and considers the role of context in choice of discourse and subject position.

### **6.1 Producing the Discursive Reading**

This section is designed to enable the reader to connect with my analytic journey. It illustrates the process referenced in *5.2.2.5.d Producing a Discursive Reading* that resulted in the papers for each of the five focus groups as found in Appendix 29: FDA Summary Papers.

In this section I refer to the first female group, and use excerpts from the associated FDA Summary Paper – Female Group 1, as an example of this analytic work. The reader should note that a full appreciation of the content contained in the excerpts is not expected at this point and is only possible once subject positions and discourses are explained in *6.2 Discursive Economy* and *6.3 Subject Position Mobilisation*. Rather this section serves to illustrate the process of my interpretation and reveals that it is my pursuit of answers to the following questions that shapes the discursive reading:

- 1) What discursive resources are available and drawn on by this female group?
- 2) What are the tensions and challenges presented?

3) What is the project of the participants in the session?

### 6.1.1 What Discursive Resources are Drawn On?

Once I had completed the coding of the transcript, based on Willig's (2008) six stage process, I was able to distil the various constructions of romance and the discourses from which they might stem (see Appendix 28 for an example of my FDA coding). I then considered how these discursive resources might be different to the earlier groups that I analysed; in this case I had already analysed two male groups. Here is an extract from Appendix 29: FDA Summary Paper, Female Group 1.

It seemed that romance is constructed by this female group as caring and relationship warmth; grand gestures and special times; exclusive physical intimacy and affection; as pleasing her; and as a transaction. It would seem that the discursive economy for romance is similar for men and women, however how they make use of these resources appears to vary considerably between them.

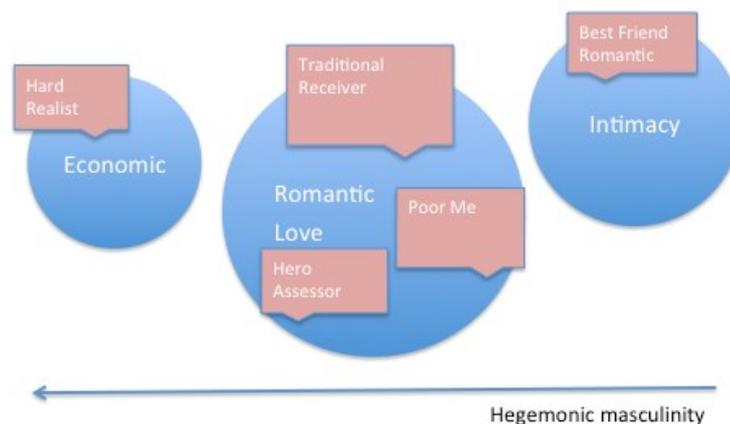


Diagram 1: A map of the available discursive economy of romance, as illustrated by wider discourses and subject positions. The relative size of the discourse and subject positions represent frequently occupied discourses and positions. Hegemonic masculinity is the term given to a set of gender expectations for males that are culturally privileged.

The men did not appear to make a noticeable distinction from romance being caring, relationship warmth and special times. For the men, I grouped these together as: romance is constructed as something that provides relationship warmth and special times. However, for the women there appears to be considerable conflict between romance being constructed as special times (and also representing heroic efforts) versus every day caring. This conflict speaks to a clash in masculine ideals, which I explain more in Section 3, the project of the group. While 'new man' and 'retributive

man' are the two dominant masculine images that generally inform male identity (as discussed in FDA Summary Paper - Male Group 1), the knight/hero, which is 'retributive man' taken to an idealised level: a James Bond type - legitimised by television and movies – was used by females to judge men as failing in their romantic efforts.

Below you will find examples of these constructions from the text. It can be seen that these are interrelated, for example 'relationship warmth and caring' and 'special times' can be presented as / mobilised as ways of 'pleasing her'. Also 'pleasing her' and 'physical intimacy' may be seen as different parts of the 'transaction'.

Romance is constructed as caring and relationship warmth (Extract A)

Sharon: But I don't think romance has in terms of both-, you don't have to set aside a massive amount of time with each other to be romantic with one another. I think it can just be a couple of minutes, five minutes, here and there and it just makes you, kind of, I think, feel good about yourself in terms of-,

Julie: Words. Just nice words.

Romance is constructed as grand gestures and special times. (Extract B)

Nicky: I'd like, err, like a surprise weekend (silence 01.03.44-01.33.48). Yeah, so okay I've booked this, I've got a sitter sorted, we're going for this meal, we're going on this train, here's your itinerary, here's your timetable, you know, you've got like, you know-, obviously we've got to get up at seven o'clock tomorrow, and that's it, it's all planned. That's more my thing that is.

Romance is constructed as something that involves exclusive physical intimacy (Extract C)

Nicky: But, yeah, that has a massive-, obviously if somebody upsets you or upsets your children, the last thing you want to do is spend the rest of the night with him being affectionate.

Yeah (x2).

Nicky: Yeah, he just-, you know, and to be honest, I avoid going to bed at the same time just because, I just think, 'Do you know what? You can do one.' You know? It's sad about, like, nineteen years, eighteen years of marriage.

Romance is constructed as something that focuses on pleasing her (Extract D)

Julie: [...] he doesn't have to buy me wine but he does and it's, you know, he does tend to say, 'Do you want any wine?' [spoken in a high pitched voice] And he's-, you know, I wouldn't go, 'Oh, do you want any beer?' (Laughter). We-, you know, it sounds really spiteful but I don't...

Romance is constructed as a transaction (Extract E)

Maggie: I find it quite romantic when he's, like, really nice with George.

**Your son?**

Maggie: I find it-, yeah, really attractive. And, like, that he'll, like, he takes him to football on every Saturday. He makes a big thing about it and takes him for breakfast and things and I think that, because he loves him so much it's like-,

Carol: Yeah. He's a good dad (general agreement).

Maggie: Whether-,

**So what do you find that-, what about that is romantic for you?**

Maggie: I can sit at home and watch telly. (Laughter)

A gendered dimension can be acknowledged at this point, as it is apparent in that these extracts speak to gendered stereotypes. For example, men preferring beer over wine; men wanting sex and going to the football. The heavy draw on dominant 'heterosexual' discourses, which also encompasses gender differences—and clearly informs the 'romantic love' discourse—I have reflected as the group's effort to preserve heteronormative order. We can see a gendered element at the construction level—particularly in respect to romance as pleasing her. It seems that consistently questions of romance are answered by the women in the group as something that the man does for her. Indeed, Edley and Wetherall (1995) write that women are typically represented as supposed to want romance, with men represented as the initiators and women the receivers.

A construction of romance as pleasing her, could invoke an assumption that women are less secure in their relationships and need constant reassurance that they are indeed wanted/loved. As shown later when outlining the subject positions, on page 8, this places the man in a more powerful position, as this reassurance is his to give or to withhold. Yet what also unfolds in the analysis is that some of the women, located in the 'Hero Assessor' position, can mock men and rebuff their attempts to please.

In writing the FDA Summary Papers, I spent time considering the discursive variations between my reading of the current focus group and my readings of the previous groups. Here is another example from the same female focus group:

When compared to the male focus groups the female participants were prone to expression of discontent - an example is shown in Extract F. The women seemed to be frequently moaning about their partners while the men were by-in-large jolly and content. As an aside, the number of reported incidences of laughter during the female focus group were comparable to the men's, however the laughter was largely skewed to self-laughter added as part of a disclosure (for example, *well I don't get*

*that, but (laughter); Can't be bothered [with sex] anymore (laughter); But again, it's just (laughter). He doesn't, he doesn't notice (laughter) and less oriented towards shared laughter.*

Extract F

Nicky: So, you know, you just think, well (talking over each other 13.33-13.37). You just think, well, what's the point? I mean, I love him desperately. I just want to shake him, and think, you know, 'You're 52, you're old before you time. All you do is say we've got no money, and that you're tired. Well, I'm tired.' You know. And we have got a bit-

Annie: I've got that one.

Nicky: Drives me mad. You know-

Annie: The thing is, if you don't, you're a long time dead.

Nicky: Yeah.

Annie: So, you know.

Nicky: Well, I always say, sorry, you're a long time growing up, I said for God's sake,

Nicky, you're 50 this year. Why don't you grow up? (Laughter).

A straightforward explanation for this expression of disappointment with their male partners is the asymmetry that still exists in heterosexual relationships. In mainstream research of couples in the United Kingdom (e.g. Dryden 1999, cited in Crawford, 2004) women consistently reported concerns about relationship inequality. Research suggests that when women require or expect equality in the couple dyad, this introduces monitoring which ironically can serve to magnify any small disparity and lead to higher levels of dissatisfaction (e.g. Levinger, 1994). The continuing asymmetry in relationships can be linked to numerous issues, including men's access to material resources - higher salaries - and persistent masculine norms that privileges their status in marriage.

This situation then informs a construction of men as 'owing women something' which leads to women expecting men to engage in 'grand gestures' in order to compensate for women's lower status. So in a way, the 'grand gesture' and 'putting the lady on a pedestal' is actually a way of acknowledging that as a woman she is, in fact, less highly valued in society. Researchers Rugimbana *et al.* (2002) concur and show that romantic gift-giving rituals that see men buying women luxury items are governed by mutual social power exchanges between the giver and the receiver.

The subject positions were identified during the coding of the transcript (see Appendix 27: FDA Coding Protocol) as implied positions taken up in discourse that provide the basis of the participant's romantic experience and determines their outlook (e.g. Burr, 2015). Tensions and contradictions were clues that people were speaking from different subject positions.

Here is a further excerpt from the FDA Summary Paper - Female Group 1 that shows my evolving thoughts on the subject positions that might be available in the romantic discursive terrain:

To introduce my understanding of the subject positions and show the interaction between them see Extract G below. It speaks to receiving a gift of flowers as a gesture that they might find romantic.

#### Extract G

Sharon: See, I don't know. I, err, when I was listening to you [referring to the group] about romance and flowers, romance, flowers just doesn't do it for me. That's not my kind of thing, it doesn't, I'm just kind of like, mmm, it's not really. I'd rather, err, him coming in and just saying, 'Thanks for looking after us.'

Annie: I always feel-, yeah, I always feel flowers make me ill.

Sharon: Yeah. Not-, no, I don't-, it doesn't mean. (Talking over each other)

#### **[...] Tina, now what were you saying?**

Tina: No, I was just saying I like flowers, 'cause it's not very often I get them. I think if you were getting them every week then it's nothing is it, but, err, you know, sometimes he remembers on our anniversary and occasionally he'll buy me a bunch. But not really, no.

#### **Okay.**

Tina: I don't get them often. So I'd think that would be really nice. I'd think that he was-,

Carol: Thinking about you.

Tina: (Talking over each other 06.17-06.24). I would like that (laughter).

#### **Has there been occasion in the past where you've found flowers romantic?**

Sharon: Err, I-, no. Err, possibly, no, no, no. I mean, I've had flowers in the past and he does buy me flowers. Err, I just don't find them-, I don't know. Err.

Julie: I'm not a fan personally.

Sharon: No, I'm not, no.

Julie: And if he buys them it's great (general agreement).

Sharon: Yes, it's 'Thanks ever so much.'

Julie: But it's just not-, it doesn't do anything for me, so. You know. And I'll say, 'What you bought me them for?' (Laughter). Probably 'cause I'm-, and then he goes, 'I won't buy them anymore.'

#### **Yeah. So think you might not get them any-,**

Julie: No. But I'm not fussed 'cause I'm not into flowers. I've told him that.

...

Maggie: [...] I've only had one bunch of flowers in eight years.

#### **Okay. And you'd like more, would you?**

Maggie: I would like flowers, yeah. I don't get them.

### Best Friend Romantic

In the first part of the extract we can find Sharon apparently speaking from the 'Best Friend Romantic' position and suggesting that words of appreciation are more important to her than flowers. The 'Best Friend Romantic' position draws from the 'intimacy' discourse which privileges talking and communication over traditional romantic gestures. In this way she may be challenging 'romantic love' discourses. Yet from the 'Best Friend Romantic' position it appears to be unsettling to witness others openly snub /reject the gesture of being given flowers. Within the 'intimacy' discourse being sensitive to each other's feelings (in this case the flower bearer) seems to be prized.

### Hero Assessor

Annie builds on Sharon's dislike of flowers and appears to take up the 'Hero Assessor' position. From the 'Hero Assessor' position, gestures can be openly rebuffed; Annie rejects flowers with the comment: *flowers make me ill*. The association to sickness evokes an image of repulsion. Annie's use of this statement has strong emotional loading and it is ambiguous. It is Annie's supporting narrative that provides clues to the position being taken. This response could be seen as the antithesis of 'pleasing her' constructions associated with 'romantic love' discourses. Yet it should be noted that the 'Hero Assessor' is constructing men, or their man, as deficient—and not the 'romantic love' discourses.

### Hard Realist

Julie appears to take up the position of 'Hard Realist' *I'm not fussed 'cause I'm not into flowers. I've told him that*. Flowers for the 'Hard Realist' could be a metaphor for romance, in which case Julie really means *I'm not into romance*. When occupying the 'Hard Realist' position, women seem to be mocking romance and belittling all (men and women) who are located in the 'romantic love' or 'intimacy' discourses, from this position they are not constructing their men as failures, but are turning down romance as not for them. See also Extract D.

### Traditional Receiver

Tina appears to speak exclusively, in Extract G, from the 'Traditional Receiver' position, which draws on 'romantic love' discourses. Here Tina constructs the gift of flowers as something she welcomes; she recognises flowers as special because they are not an every day occurrence. In this way, the gesture of flowers is indeed 'pleasing her'.

### Poor Me

Maggie appears to occupy the 'Poor Me' position in this extract. Unlike the 'Traditional Receiver' position which applauds the rarity of gestures (as making them special). Here she moans that she has only received flowers once in eight years. Like the 'Traditional Receiver' position, the 'Poor Me' position draws from 'romantic love' discourses, and puts men in a powerful position of 'pleasing her'.

To clarify my understanding of identified subject positions, I then created a table for each based on a systematic exploration of the ways in which the discursive constructions emerged during the session. These tables attempted to detail the associated speaking rights, romantic practices and implications for subjectivity. My notes from the Positions: Practice and Subjectivity column on the coded transcript, as shown in Appendix 28: FDA Coding Protocol, helped provide much of the content. See Tables 6-1 to 6-9 for the complete view of my understanding of the subject positions accessed by participants across all the focus groups.

### **6.1.2 What are the Tensions and Challenges?**

As mentioned above the tensions and challenges that emerged in the group aided my ability to differentiate the subject positions that feature in the romantic discursive terrain. Furthermore, attending to the tensions and challenges also helped me to consider the context under which each subject position may be mobilised and how they interact with each other. These are comprehensively detailed in *6.3 Subject Position Mobilisation*. Below is an excerpt from the FDA Summary Paper - Female Group 1, showing my exploration of some of the tensions between the 'Poor Me' and 'Best Friend Romantic' positions.

#### Poor Me vs. Best Friend Romantic.

Given the available discursive resources it might make sense for women to move from a 'Poor Me' position, where men have power, to the 'Best Friend Romantic' position, where the power is more equitable. However, there appears to be resistance in making this transition. In Extract H Nicky and Julie seem to speak from the 'Poor Me' position, and advocate that if they had more money then there would be more romance—and happiness. See how Nicky and Julie, located in the 'romantic love' discourse, talk over and thereby appear to dismiss the 'intimacy' discourse.

#### Extract H

Nicky: I personally think, if you had more money, and I know money is not the-, if you had more money, it would make things a lot easier. You could treat each other, you could do more, but when (talking over each other 01.21.41).

Sharon: Shows affection or a walk in the park, and just holding-

Nicky: You see, I think, if we had money, we could get the spark back because we could, perhaps-,

No x 2

Carol: No, I don't think (talking over each other 01.21.57).

Julie: Both of them have got money and they are really-, when, how I see them, I'm, I'm, I'm sure I am right. I, I don't think they're covering it up. They're really happy. They're, that couple haven't got any children yet. They're getting married and they go away lots, and they've had money left. He's had money left to him, and they go away lots together, and it's all-, okay, it's on Facebook occasionally, not loads, but anyway, 'Ooh, we're at the beach,' and it's not, like-, you know, they don't go to Spain or anywhere exotic. It's just local seaside. I, I mean, I think that's nice, but my other half won't do that. Not-, 'Oh, what do you want to go to the beach for?' but I want to. I want to run my dog along the beach with the kids and be-, oh, maybe, you know-, with a little flow-y dress, like you see on the telly. That sort of thing I would like, for me, and then, most of the other friends that we've got, they have got money. Yes, they have got children, two newborns, and they are-, she does all the cooking and she's a-, she's a fantastic mum, a fantastic cook, I mean, she is, and they're-, they're just happy and-,

### 6.1.3 Project of the Group

In writing the FDA Summary Papers I also considered the project of the group; essentially I asked myself, what is this group trying to achieve? Attending to the project of the group was aided by my notes from the Action Orientation column on the coded transcript. As shown in Appendix 27: FDA Coding Protocol, the Action Orientation stage of the analytic process considers what is potentially gained or achieved by constructing romance in this way. Here is an excerpt from the FDA Summary Paper – Female Group 1:

It appears that the project of the eight women in the group was to support each other—while preserving heteronormative order.

The frequent disclosures of discontent, as mentioned on pages 6 and 7, were met by the group in a warm and supportive way; the participants in the group showed empathy, interest and encouragement. As an example Nicky's disclosure of her husband being angry and depressed was met with Annie sharing her own story with depression. In general, the participants appeared to be keen to help each other and seemed ready to offer suggestions.

Where there was intra-group tension it was around the occupation of the 'Best Friend Romantic' position, which draws from the 'intimacy' discourse. As mentioned throughout this document, the women in the focus group appeared to go to great effort to distinguish between romance being constructed as special times (and heroic

efforts) versus caring, which represent the wider discourses of 'romantic love' and 'intimacy' respectively.

Then later in that paper I expand on the previously observed commitment to heteronormative order. Here is an excerpt from the beginning of that discussion:

The females seemed to identify themselves as committed to heteronormative order with frequent references to relationship length, status (married or engaged) and children. Heteronormativity favours monogamy and values traditional gender norms - in masculinity the image of 'retributive' man is thereby privileged - and in femininity: showing care and being a good mother is valued (Cameron and Kulick, 2006, cited in Coates, 2013). These feminine attributes, along with subscribing to traditional gender norms, can be considered as markers of being a 'proper wife'. An exemplar of reverence to traditional gender norms can be seen in Extract H, with Julie voicing: *Yes, they have got children, two newborns, and they are-, she does all the cooking and she's a-, she's a fantastic mum, a fantastic cook, I mean, she is, and they're-, they're just happy and-.* Julie even wants to wear *a little flow-y dress, like you see on the telly.*

The participants' casual references to everyday life, along with their romantic activities, serve to construct traditional gender roles and in doing so construct and maintain heteronormativity.

Indeed commitment to heteronormativity was observed as a key project of all the groups and as such is a prominent feature of the combined discursive reading, as seen in 6.2.2 *Observing the Heteronormative Space.*

#### **6.1.4 Reflections of a Female Researcher**

In writing the summary papers, I also considered my impact on the group's dynamics and on the analysis and also reflected on my thinking at that point in the process. Here is an excerpt from the FDA Summary Paper – Female Group 1:

As I initially reacquainted myself with the audio/transcript, and faced the female dialogue of romantic hardships—after listening to the men's upbeat stories—I wanted to be careful that my reading of this difference did not (re)produce gender discourse or sexist assumptions that women are needy, while men are normal.

What I have observed is that the women in the group, who appeared to be located in the 'romantic love' discourses, seem to be defining for themselves what might

constitute as satisfactory evidence of romance. They are apparently choosing to be critical or insistent that caring, listening or a look doesn't count—and that flowers are not always enough. They would rather be taken out, whisked away or surprised with a grand gesture.

Is pleasing her—in an idealised James Bond way—necessary for men to preserve their male privilege?

The women who appear to take up the 'Hero Assessor' position are monitoring and criticising their partner's less-than-heroic behaviours. They seem to be presenting from this position, that they are holding men responsible for their actions; these women are likely making men aware that failure to attend to them—please her—may be costly. Thereby resulting in the women leaving, going on holidays without them, withholding affection and privileging others over their husband.

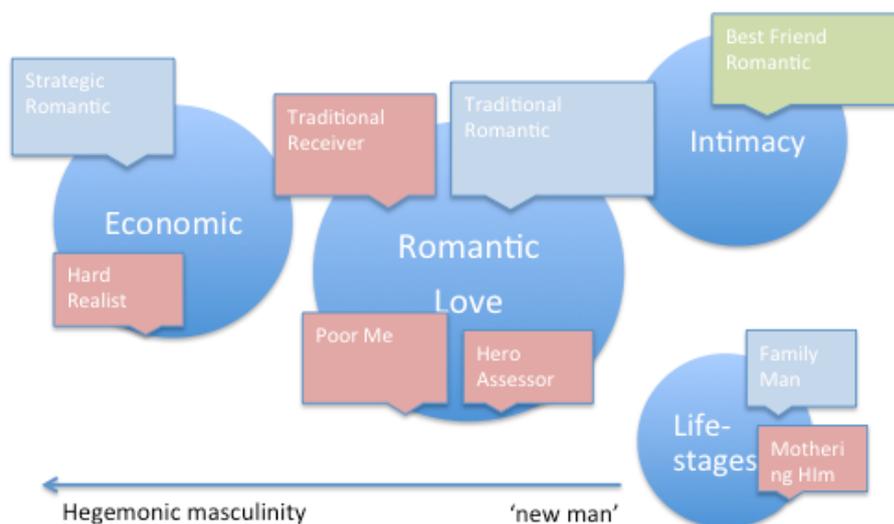
Rather than women being needy, my reading is that it is may be men who are vulnerable. And that women are colluding in the reproduction of the male 'retributive man' by desiring an idealised James Bond masculine form. Hollway (1983) exposed male vulnerability, in a feminist book on sexual and love politics, and wrote that making political the knowledge that men are vulnerable, gives us a different view of men's displays of masculinity.

The above excerpts from the FDA Summary Paper – Female Group 1, as found in Appendix 29, illustrate that the process of producing my discursive readings, drew from my line-by-line analysis of the transcript, information from the literature as well as my earlier readings of the two male focus groups. In this way, over the course of analysing the five focus groups I was able to build up my picture of the discursive resources that women and men access when talking about romance.

## 6.2 Discursive Economy

It would seem that the discursive economy – availability of discourses and constructions – for romance is similar for men and women, however how they make use of these resources would appear to vary considerably between them. The women I observed showing more complexity, as shown in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain, and appear to have mobilised six subject positions, while the men seem to have mobilised four subject positions. See 6.2.4 *Subject Positions and Romantic Practice* for more detailed tables and further explanations of the subject positions.

Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain



The figure above presents my understanding of the romantic discursive terrain of participants. It attempts to map out the available discursive economy of romance as illustrated by discourses and subject positions. The relative size of the discourse and subject positions represents the frequency of use of discourses and positions, so that commonly expressed discourses and positions are larger than those articulated less often. Red indicates positions from which females speak, whereas blue positions are taken up by males. There is one green position, from which both males and females speak. Hegemonic masculinity is the term given to a set of gender expectations for males that are culturally privileged; this can be seen increasingly present as individuals take up positions in the 'romantic love' or 'economic' discourses.

This following reading from the FDA of the focus groups is illustrated with numerous extracts from those sessions. To aid the reader's review, next to each extract is a reference as to which focus group it was drawn from: all-male 1, all-male 2, all-female 1, all-female 2 or mixed. Furthermore, the protocol taken in creating the transcripts can be seen in Appendix 16: Transcription Conventions.

### 6.2.1 Romantic Love Constructions

As described in Chapter 5: Methods, a discourse contains a number of constructions and subject positions (e.g. Burr, 2015). The discourses and subject positions, outlined in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain, I have sought to differentiate by the ways in which they construct romantic love. In the focus groups it would appear that participants consistently constructed romantic love as: 'thoughtfulness and relationship warmth'; 'grand gestures and special occasions'; exclusive 'physical intimacy and affection'; as 'pleasing her'; and as 'a

transaction'. Some women seemed active in constructing romance as not existing in all established relationships (in this way romance was constructed as an absence; in these focus groups no participant deconstructed romance itself).

Below you will find examples of these constructions from the text. I see the constructions as interrelated, for example 'thoughtfulness and relationship warmth' and 'grand gestures' may be presented as / mobilised as ways of 'pleasing her'. Also 'pleasing her' and 'physical intimacy' may be seen as different parts of the 'transaction'. Furthermore, constructing romance as 'grand gestures' and/or 'physical intimacy' may lead to a construction of romance as 'not existing in many established relationships'.

### **6.2.1.1 Thoughtfulness and Relationship Warmth**

#### Romance is constructed as thoughtfulness and relationship warmth

Across the focus groups, it would appear that many participants described romance in their relationship as involving care for the other, thoughtfulness and intimate communication or 'nice words' that builds relationship warmth. This construction of romance I suggest resembles a close friendship; it requires both parties to be proactive and foster togetherness. As seen in Extract 1, this construction of romance does not involve large investments but rather revolves around small gestures—like sending loving text messages or buying their favourite chocolate bar.

Extract 1 (all-female 1)

Sharon: But I don't think romance has in terms of both-, you don't have to set aside a massive amount of time with each other to be romantic with one another. I think it can just be a couple of minutes, five minutes, here and there and it just makes you, kind of, I think, feel good about yourself in terms of-,

Julie: Words. Just nice words.

### **6.2.1.2 Grand Gestures and Special Occasions**

#### Romance is constructed as grand gestures and special occasions

I observed that participants in all the focus groups accounted for romance with reference to grand gestures, gifts or memorable occasions. Whether it be an elaborate proposal of marriage, surprise vacation or lavish gift—like 'a Louis Vuitton handbag'. This construction of romance seems to involve expenditure on the part of the male with the female being the recipient (ref. Extract 2). Participants tended to applaud gestures that showed the male going the extra mile and expertly handling behind-the-scene details. This construction of romance I interpret as reflecting courtly love practices with the knight performing a heroic task in order to win the attentions of the princess.

Extract 2 (all-female 2)

Trisha: Yes. If he comes home with a Louis Vuitton handbag, that's very romantic.

**Okay. So, does that mean it has to be expensive then?**

Trisha: It has to be something that I really like.

**Okay.**

Trisha: I really like Chunky Kit Kats, but it's not romantic.

**So, help me out then. The Louis Vuitton handbag is more expensive and something-,**

Trisha: Yes. Much more expensive than a Chunky Kit Kat.

...

Gloria: He's gone out of his way to get it, hasn't he? It's not on his way home. He's had to go and look for that. He's had to find somewhere that sells it.

**Yes.**

Gloria: You know, it's not just on the aisle of the supermarket as he's walking round anyway.

Trisha: Also it's not, like, 45p is it? Do you know what I mean?

### 6.2.1.3 Sexual Desire and Physical Intimacy

#### Romance is constructed as something that involves exclusive physical intimacy

All participants appeared to construct romance as involving desire and sexual intimacy, whether that be the issuing of physical compliments, holding hands, cuddling, kissing or sex. Exclusivity seemed to be sanctioned in this construction of romance; expressions of affection appeared to be limited to the confines of couple dyad—as expressed through references to monogamy and trust. Within this construction, men tended to be represented as more interested in sex than women; with some females finding it an obligation of the romantic marriage, as seen in Extract 3.

Extract 3 (all-female 1)

Nicky: But, yeah, that has a massive-, obviously if somebody upsets you or upsets your children, the last thing you want to do is spend the rest of the night with him being affectionate.

Yeah (x2).

Nicky: Yeah, he just-, you know, and to be honest, I avoid going to bed at the same time just because, I just think, 'Do you know what? You can do one.' You know? It's sad about, like, nineteen years, eighteen years of marriage.

### 6.2.1.4 Pleasing Her

#### Romance is constructed as something that focuses on pleasing her

The language deployed by the participants tended to show that romance revolves around 'pleasing her'; it seems to be an act that a man does for a woman's pleasure. I suggest that implicit in this construction is an enactment of courtly love and 'putting the lady on a pedestal', as seen in Extract 4, whereby the men joke about pleasing themselves and taking her to a football game and buying her a pint. It would appear that a construction of romance which

always requires satisfying a woman's desires first, means that romantic gestures—like going to the theatre or fancy dining—are not always enjoyable for men. Such a construction may make romance feel like a chore for some men, but to others it may be an intrinsic practice of self. Foucault (1984/1990) referred to practices of the self as modes of action that individuals exercised upon themselves, like the observance of monogamy or in this case 'pleasing her'.

Extract 4 (all-male 1)

**[...] what would make something not romantic?**

Wayne: Maybe something you booked, with, you know, for yourself, selfishly but they have to, kind of, tag along. So, it's something that you've, er, I dunno, you say like, 'I've booked you two tickets for the football.' (Laughter 58.07-58.10) You're gonna love it, you're gonna love it, yeah.

Ian: Just sit there, you'll get used to it. (Laughter)

Wayne: Yeah, you'll get used to it, yeah, I'll buy you a pint. (Laughter) So it's something that you've booked as a pretence to being romantic but it's really something that you want to do yourself, yeah, so, something like that.

#### **6.2.1.5 A Transaction**

##### Romance is constructed as a transaction

Throughout the focus groups, the participants appeared to refer to romance in established relationships as a transaction. I suggest that this construction of romance reveals gender-based expectations, as shown in Extracts 5 and 6, whereby the men seek to 'please her' with champagne and presents and receive physical attention in return. As such, this construction may set out an obligation to respond positively and give back. Again, I think that this construction of romance mirrors courtly love practices, with the idea that the knight 'win the favour' of the princess.

Extract 5 (mixed group)

George: Yes, like Valentine's, sort of, chocolates, flowers, maybe some underwear, you know, a bottle of champagne, perfume. What else? Or take them away. You run out of things to choose then, don't you? If you buy underwear they think you're only after one thing. (Laughter)

**Then it backfires?**

George: They do though, don't they? It's true.

Jimmy: It might have been true actually (Laughter).

Or Extract 6 (mixed group)

George: (Laughter) It's funny how the women, yeah, get a present or breakfast in bed; blokes get a massage and other stuff.

Jimmy: But it works. (Laughter)

### **6.2.1.6 Not Always Existing**

#### Romance is constructed as not existing in all established relationships

Some participants were seen to describe romance as not always present in relationships. It was explained as absent. In this way, romance appeared to be acknowledged as existing and not deconstructed. The construction seems to identify romance as physical desire, sex and grand gestures, which may be recognised as courtly love practices.

Extract 7 (all-female 2)

Ruth: Just, it doesn't exist in my life. (Laughter). Yeah. Perhaps, I think, youth.

**Youth?**

Ruth: Yeah. Not an old, err, not, no.

**Okay.**

Ruth: Yeah. Youth, young people, romance, you know. Not somebody my age. Yeah, it's just, we just become mundane. We live together, and, what's romance?

It is thus my reading that romance is constructed as 'thoughtfulness and relationship warmth'; 'grand gestures and special occasions'; exclusive 'physical intimacy and affection'; as 'pleasing her'; and as 'a transaction'. For the most part, these romantic love constructions may be seen as mirroring courtly love. However, romantic love also appeared to be constructed as resembling a close friendship with small deeds of kindness fostering relationship warmth. These differing constructions I suggest reflect alternate discursive locations, which are outlined in 6.2.3 *Discourses*. At this stage, it is worth highlighting the heteronormative bias that appeared to feature in almost all of the participants' constructions of romance.

## **6.2.2 Observing the Heteronormative Space**

Consistently, questions of romance seemed to be answered as something that the man does for her—and by implication he might expect physical attention in return (ref. Extracts 3, 5 & 6). Edley and Wetherall (1995) write that women are typically represented as supposed to want romance, with men represented as the initiators and women the receivers. Indeed, it appeared that focus group participants spent a lot of energy in constructing masculinity and femininity. This should come as no surprise, given that gender is considered as a central organising principle to social life (Coates, 2004a). As such we might consider that the discursive resources at the focus groups' disposal as governed by dominant 'heterosexual' discourses. Indeed, I observed that there was heavy use of the 'gender differences' repertoire<sup>33</sup> (as seen in Extracts 4, 5 & 6), which is drawn from 'heterosexual' discourses (e.g. Sunderland, 2004) and reflects respect of the heteronormative order.

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<sup>33</sup> Sunderland (2004) refers to this repertoire as a discourse. Many researchers use the terms repertoire and discourse interchangeably (e.g. Gough, 2001). For the purpose of my research, I have adopted Burr's (2015) view that they are different: discourses are able to contain numerous constructions and offer an array of subject positions, while a repertoire is a way of understanding the linguistic resources that a

The concept of the heteronormative hierarchy, derived from the work of Cameron and Kulick (2003, cited in Coates, 2013), suggests that people aligning themselves with heterosexual norms – adopting traditional gender roles, prizing monogamy and raising children – are privileged and enjoy a higher status than others. Coates (2013) demonstrates that within everyday conversations speakers use a considerable amount of discursive resources to position themselves in the heteronormative space and align themselves with hegemonic or dominant norms of femininity or masculinity. The masculine norm, hegemonic masculinity, is typically associated with heterosexuality, toughness, power and competitiveness (e.g. Frosh *et al.*, 2001). Meanwhile Coates (2004b) writes that ‘Dominant versions of femininity in play today position women as gentle, caring, maternal, attentive to their appearance and above all *nice*’ (p. 139).

In Extract 8, I observed masculinity being constructed in direct opposition to women in terms of romance.

Extract 8 (all-male 1)

Wayne: Yes. It doesn't have to be anything monetary, does it? You know, you don't have to spend money all the time. Sometimes, you know, it is just the, the, the free things in life that you can do that make, make a difference. I think women expect shows of affection, a lot more than we would. We're less needy, I think. Women are a little bit more needy. They need to be reminded a bit more often than we do.

Greg: That's what I was saying, really. It's in a different way.

Wayne: Yes, it's in a different way.

In his analysis of masculine representations, Rutherford (1988, cited in Edley & Wetherall, 1997) distinguished ‘retributive man’ from the ‘new man’. The ‘retributive man’ can be thought of as the hegemonic masculine norm described above: tough, authoritative and independent. The label ‘new man’ denotes someone who engages with housework, child care and seeks to get in touch with his emotional side (e.g. Whannel, 2005). In many ways the ‘new man’ is a feminised male, indeed the fashion world saw the ‘new man’ as a lucrative market, being more body and fashion conscious. Edley and Wetherall (1997) suggested that the lives of men in the middle classes were more affected by feminism and were therefore more likely to be positioned into the ‘new man’ frame. A review of the talk from the focus groups seems to show that the working-class participants were also navigating ‘new man’ and ‘retributive

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speaker uses in their constructions. Burr (2015) writes that in addition to scale, the difference is to do with personal agency: ‘Interpretative repertoires are conceptualised as existing on a smaller scale and are resources for speakers rather than structures that impose a certain kind of subjectivity upon them’ (p. 188).

man'. I suggest that these masculine ideals manifest in the subject positions, as shown in 6.2.4 *Subject Positions and Romantic Practice* (Tables 1-9).

This navigation of masculine ideals also appeared to be played out among the women, where there was expressed conflict between romance being constructed as every day relationship warmth and thoughtfulness versus grand gestures (and also representing heroic efforts); as seen in Extract 2 with the yearning for a Louis Vuitton handbag. This conflict seems to speak to a clash in masculine ideals: 'new man' versus 'retributive man'; the knight/hero may be seen as 'retributive man' taken to an idealised level: a James Bond type – legitimised by television and movies – and potentially used by females to judge men in their romantic efforts.

Rugimbana *et al.* (2002) offer that romantic gift-giving rituals that see men buying women luxury items are governed by mutual social power exchanges between the giver and the receiver. This suggests a construction of men as 'owing women something' which leads to women expecting men to engage in 'grand gestures' in order to compensate for women's lower status. Women, who are typically conceived as having less power than men, 'choose mates on the basis of their social power (as a means of elevating social position), whereas men, as the sex with greater social power, select mates more on the basis of attractiveness' write Burton *et al.* (1995, p.61). Key to sustaining this exchange in a relationship is some kind of material compensation for being a 'proper wife' and subscribing to dominant norms of femininity. For example, institutionalised in the traditional marriage, reciprocity would see a woman receiving a home, income and security, and in exchange a husband would expect sex and care (Braun *et al.*, 2003). The construction of women 'giving their bodies' to men after marriage, as a gift exchange, assumes that women do not enjoy sex but give their bodies to men as a kind of gift (see Gilfoyle *et al.*, 1992). Again, for this they need to be compensated and depending on the asymmetry of power in the relationship, it could involve 'grand gestures'. The practice of gift exchange appears to embed an obligation to respond positively and give in turn.

So, letting-men-off-the-hook from grand gestures or heroic efforts and being easily 'pleased by' men might dilute female power and amplify male privilege. In a way, the 'grand gesture' and 'putting the lady on a pedestal' can be read as actually acknowledging that as a woman she is in fact, less highly valued in society.

A construction of romance as 'pleasing her', could invoke an assumption that women are less secure in their relationships and need constant reassurance that they are indeed wanted/loved; as seen in Extract 8 whereby Wayne constructed women as 'needy'. This seems to place the man in a more powerful position as this reassurance is his to give or to withhold (and is depicted in the 'Poor Me' and 'Traditional Receiver' subject positions). However, the

all-female focus groups showed women mocking romance<sup>34</sup> and/or men and rebuffing male attempts to 'please'. In these practices, the women may be understood as claiming power in the relationship. For the women it is almost as if they are the princess being courted by a jester offering a Kit Kat, where they are looking to be pleased by a knight in shining armour who presents her with a Louis Vuitton bag. In this way, women might construct their men as failures.

The construction of romance as not existing in a relationship (ref. Extract 7) seems to reveal further evidence of romance representing an enactment of courtly love by positioning the woman as a princess. While most participants tended to endorse a form of courtly love, some women appeared quick to judge such people as delusional; that they did not recognise the reality of their (less than regal) social position. Accordingly, the cynics seemed to view romance as a fool's game, in this way they appeared to laud power over women invested in romance and stripped power from men by rejecting their gestures (see 'Hard Realist' and 'Hero Assessor' subject positions).

Interestingly, the women in the mixed-sex focus group tended to exhibit more deference to men. Indeed, it was observed that if the women in this focus group expressed having declined, or failed to engage with a romantic gesture, the men were demonstrative in showing their surprise and displeasure. Arguably, the rebuffing behaviour may be seen by the men as *not nice*, and in this way the men are potentially upholding feminine ideals. The women in the group meanwhile, did not appear to challenge the men when they admitted to romantic faults; potentially because these romantic failings invariably reinforced 'retributive man'. Widespread observance to heteronormative order will be further evidenced in 6.3 *Subject Position Mobilisation*.

### 6.2.3 Discourses

Below is a brief outline of the four discourses that I understand the participants to be drawing on when speaking about romance. As depicted in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain, they are the 'romantic love' discourse, the 'intimacy' discourse, the 'economic' discourse and the 'life-stages' discourse. These accessible, ready-made discourses suggest the socio-cultural context and the means by which romance in the established relationship may be understood by participants.

Of these discourses, I identified the dominant to be the 'romantic love' discourse, which tends to involve chivalric acts in the form of traditional gestures—flowers, gifts and dinners out. As discussed in 6.2.2 *Observing the Heteronormative Space* the participants appeared heavily

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<sup>34</sup> As it is practiced by their men in real life rather than the ideal of romance itself (as pointed out above).

invested in aligning themselves with heterosexual norms; the 'romantic love' discourse seems to uphold hegemonic norms of femininity and masculinity whereas the other discourses are sub-ordinate in that they do not seem to offer speaking positions that provide both women and men the same privileged versions of heterosexuality. The 'intimacy' and 'life-stages' discourse require a 'new man', while the 'economic' discourse offers a female subject position that is neither gentle nor caring. The power of the 'romantic love' discourse may be observed when participants who speak from the sub-ordinate discourses, readily return to the 'romantic love' discourse as a way to sustain their place on the heteronormative hierarchy (Ref. Extracts 17, 21, 22, 31 and 45). Furthermore, talk from the 'romantic love' discourse could be seen to draw a consensus. In this way, the 'romantic love' discourse appeared to offer participants additional leverage over the other discourses. In addition, expressions of the 'romantic love' discourse could be heard voiced at the start of the focus groups, or as the immediate response to a question, which suggests that its constructions of romance are the most accessible; they are after all prevalent in the media—television, movies and songs.

The four discourses that I present as making up the romantic discursive terrain are part of the broader 'humanist' discourse. The 'humanist' discourse taps into the humanistic notions of an ontologically innate self, constructed as achieving its true potential through a process of self-actualisation (Prager & Roberts, 2004, cited in Colahan, 2014). It paints a picture in which everyone has a claim to happiness. Indeed, in the focus groups I observed participants' talk frequently constructing the centrality of romantic love and coupledness to happiness, as shown in Extracts 9 and 10.

Extract 9 (mixed group)

Sandra: It makes you happy. Romance makes you happy; you feel appreciated and loved, so you're usually happy then in yourself, yes.

Extract 10 (all-male 2)

Eric: Well, when you're both happy, if, if things are good, and you're trying to be romantic, it means that you're feeling good in yourself. You're doing okay. And if they're accepting, your partner, then they're doing okay, which makes life good, and it makes you feel that you're getting somewhere.

Also reflecting 'humanist' discourses—that everyone has a right to self-fulfilment—the men in Extract 11 suggest that if your romantic needs are not being met then you do not need to 'stick it out'. You can move on and 'get on with your life'. Indeed, a lack of affection in the relationship can permit an affair or divorce. This talk might be regarded as an expression of the self-orientation and individualism (as described in Chapter 3: A History of Romantic Love) that is produced by 'humanistic' discourses.

Extract 11 (all-male 1)

Tommy: 'Course I do. I mean, if you're with someone and even though you haven't got romance, and you're going somewhere else [having an affair], why are you staying with that person?

**Yeah.**

Tommy: Just get on with your life.

...

Greg: If it didn't work, it didn't work. What are you stopping for?

Ian: If it didn't have the romance, just means you're gonna play away.

Greg: Yeah, because-,

Ian: At the end of the day, you're just gonna play away. If someone flatters you, you-, (Talking over each other 01.25.58-01.26.01) and you're not getting it from the relationship you're supposed to get it off, you, you, that's when, well you play away. When you don't get affection off someone, it's the same for a bloke, don't you get affection off a woman or get feelings off a woman, eventually, he's gonna play away. Perhaps some will, some probably won't, he'll just stick there and stick it out. Same for a woman, if a woman don't get affection she'll go elsewhere for that affection.

...

Ian: Well that's where you should have give her that affection, then. That's where people go wrong (talking over each other 01.30.25).

Greg: Yeah, no, I, I agree with what you're saying, that's what I'm saying.

Ian: If you show her, you show the affection she wouldn't have to [have an affair].

M: You'd have to take a good portion of the blame for that.

### 6.2.3.1 Romantic Love Discourse

The dominant 'romantic love' discourse was also the most commonly expressed by the participants (as represented by the larger circle in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain). This discourse is thought to inextricably link love, marriage and monogamy with each other (Willig, 2008). In Extract 12 we can see these links and attend to some of the taken-for-granted assumptions of the 'romantic love' discourse. The bracketed text is included to highlight my reading of the common understanding being (re)produced.

Extract 12 (mixed group)

Jimmy: Without trust [commitment to monogamy], you don't want to keep them [remain together or married] I suppose.

Lynn: Yes.

Marion: Yes, I couldn't be romantic [love and have sex] with somebody I didn't trust [to be monogamous].

As mentioned earlier, it is my understanding that the 'romantic love' discourse upholds hegemonic ideals, with masculine men being privileged and an expectation of women being

feminine. Constructions of romantic love associated with this discourse appear to largely reinforce courtly love. Romance is seen to be constructed as grand gestures and special occasions, whether it be an elaborate proposal of marriage, surprise vacation or lavish gift. This construction tends to involve expenditure and effort on the part of the male, which can be read to reflect chivalric gestures with the knight performing a heroic task in order to win the attentions of the princess. In this way, romantic love is also constructed as something that focuses on 'pleasing her'. Indeed, the language deployed by the participants tended to show that romance is an act that a man does for a woman's pleasure. Implicit in the 'romantic love' discourse appears to be an enactment of courtly love and 'putting the lady on a pedestal.'

The popular 'romantic love' discourse has come under scrutiny from scholars: according to Burr (2015) within this discourse, whereby love is the foundation for marriage, sex is given freely and it also involves caring for each other's welfare. In Extract 13 we can see that Ruth has separated herself from sex, which tends to suggest that she has opted out of the 'romantic love' discourse. (See also 6.3.1 *Hard Realist* for a discussion of Ruth's location in the 'economic' discourse and implications for romance.)

Extract 13 (all-female 2)

Ruth: I just don't think about it [sex]. (Laughter). Just don't like it. Yeah, no.

**So it's not romantic for you?**

Ruth: No, no. No, not for me. (Silence 41.23-41.25).

...

Rita: Did you have it, if you don't mind me asking?

Ruth: Yeah

Rita: How long have you been together?

Ruth: About seven years.

Trisha: Oh, so not even that long, really?,

Ruth: No. I've had a previous relationship, I've got three grandchildren. He's got grandchildren.

We're just in the real world, you know? We've been there, done it and then the kids are doing it and we're not, you know? (Laughter)

As shown in Chapter 2: Literature Review, relationship researchers are also quick to voice concern that the 'romantic love' discourse weds an emotional woman to an emotionally inexpressive man (e.g. Burns, 2002; Duncombe & Marsden, 1993). Implicitly, there is a tension between the characterisation of the 'romantic love' discourse (as involving mutual love and care) and the reference to the emotionally inexpressive man. There was a tendency in the focus groups for the females to express desire for 'retributive man' and dismiss the more emotionally versed 'new man' within the 'romantic love' discourses (ref. Extracts 20, 28, 29 & 47). The women also appeared to fall into a pattern of moaning about their men; yet the negative comments about their men would be supplemented with pockets of warm regard.

Coates (2013) attributes this curious discursive feature as 'women struggling to reconcile their perceptions of men's deficiencies with their unquestioning acceptance of the heteronormative order' (p. 549).

### **6.2.3.2 Intimacy Discourse**

In contrast to the 'romantic love' discourse, it is my reading that the 'intimacy' discourse uses the language of therapy, whereby talk and the sharing of confidences are privileged and demands of partners an emotional closeness. As shown in Extract 1, Sharon and Julie are cherishing 'nice words' from their partner and thereby might be articulating location in the 'intimacy' discourse. It also replaces 'retributive man' with 'new man' as it calls for a relatively ungendered relationship, with partners describing the other as their best friend. The 'intimacy' discourse described here differs from Giddens' (1992) view of the discourse, which he explained as not privileging sexual exclusivity. The discourse that I refer to continues to assume the marital dyad and monogamy as its norm but unlike 'romantic love' discourses it places a higher value of mutual relatedness in the intimate sphere (Shumway, 2003). While the 'intimacy' discourse does not expect marriage to be a romantic fairy tale, Shumway (2003) warns that it does demand of partners a closeness that may be unrealistic. The 'intimacy' and 'romantic love' discourses both privilege the couple dyad and may be recognised as different ways of being romantic. Some participants in the focus groups can be seen to construct romantic love as not always existing, this talk I interpret as coming from location in the 'economic' and 'life-stages' discourses.

### **6.2.3.3 Economic Discourse**

I understand this discourse as one where romantic love is not the primary objective of the relationship. Instead there is a conscious acceptance that this relationship is to serve other purposes than love, as shown with Ruth in Extract 14. Location in the 'economic' discourse promotes a sense of being wise to the reality of life (which is less than regal for the working-class participants) and therefore constructs romance as naïve and foolish. This moral order appears to be reminiscent of prevailing attitudes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; at that time individuals could have a say in their choice of spouse, yet it was generally thought that a marriage based on romantic love was foolish, and would inevitably be problematic. Consistent with the tradition of the past, marriage was deemed to serve more practical considerations (Stone, 1977). Recognising that romantic love has become the predominant way of conceiving marriage, the Interdependence Theory offers a relationship paradigm to account for modern day couples who stay together even when there might not be romantic love motives, or even relationship happiness. It draws on Social Exchange Theories, which argue that a trade underpins all social interactions (e.g. Colahan, 2014). In this way, it sees relationships as locations of conscious, rational and economic exchange. The 'economic' discourse therefore constructs relationship behaviours as hinging on perceived costs and

benefits. It can also be seen that the 'economic' discourse does not have the moral commitment to monogamy that the 'romantic love' and 'intimacy' discourses uphold.

#### **6.2.3.4 Life-stages Discourse**

It appears that this discourse is another where the couple-dyad or romantic love is not the primary objective of the relationship; here there is a privileging of family life, children and parenting over romance. The 'life-stages' discourse understands human behaviour—and fulfilment—as requiring passage through taken-for-granted phases. The plethora of established taxonomies range from childhood models like Piaget's stages of cognitive development to Kübler Ross's stages of grief. In the relationship sphere, for example, it is commonly understood, as shown in Extract 14, that love moves from an early stage of desire and passionate love to eventually settle on a companionate affection (e.g. Acevedo & Aron, 2009).

#### **Extract 14 (mixed group)**

George: It's a nice prospect, isn't it? I've been in a relationship for ten years, so I obviously am romantically involved, but it's more companionship as time goes on as well I think. The older you get and, you know-,

With reference to Extract 13, Rita's question of Ruth, 'how long have you been together?' reflects the assumption that a romantic spark can go with time. This supposition seems to suggest location in the 'life-stages' discourse. The 'life-stages' discourse constructs romance as changing over the duration of the relationship; its taken-for-granted assumptions about the ebbing of romance, given the arrival of children or the maturing of a relationship—would appear to license romantic apathy. The 'life stages' discourse may be powerful as it seems to be able to normalise all manner of behaviour, for example the Kübler Ross stages of grief model sanctions anger as a normal part of the grieving process.

In sum, the participants when discussing romance in the established relationship appear to draw from the 'romantic love', 'intimacy', 'economic' and 'life-stages' discourses, which stem from the wider 'humanist' discourse. I propose that these four discourses represent the available discursive resources and make up the romantic discursive terrain of the participants as shown in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain.

#### **6.2.4 Subject Positions and Romantic Practice**

Within the accessible discursive terrain, it is theorised that individuals take up subject positions which provide the basis for their identity and experience (e.g. Burr, 2015). The FDA can therefore deduce from the various subject positions, an occupant's romantic practice—rights and wrongs—and its implication for subjectivity. As described in 5.2.2.5 *First Focus*

*Group*, my process of analysis paid attention to conflict in the focus group discussion as a lens to people speaking from different discursive locations and subject positions. I also attempted to note where individuals contradicted themselves as a further clue to the availability of alternative subject positions.

The analysis revealed that participants talk from a number of subject positions within this discursive terrain. As seen in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain there are three positions that women appear to take up in relation to 'romantic love' discourses; these I have termed 'Traditional Receiver', 'Poor Me' and 'Hero Assessor'. The men in the focus group seemed to occupy only one position, the 'Traditional Romantic' position when they expressed location in this discourse. In this way, it can be read that men and women occupy different positions in the 'romantic love' discourse. This pattern of gender specific subject positions was observed within the 'economic' discourse and the 'life-stages' discourses, with men appearing to occupy the 'Strategic Romantic' position and the 'Family Man' position respectively, while the women seemed to take up the 'Hard Realist' and the 'Mothering Him' positions.

Below are tables that address all of the subject positions that I identified in the romantic discursive terrain. The tables attempt to articulate a person's vantage point having taken up a specific position; they suggest what might be construed as right and wrong in terms of romantic practice. This content is based on a systematic exploration of the ways in which the discursive constructions were seen to be mobilised during the focus groups. Featuring in the second column of the tables are implications for subjectivity, this is partly drawn from the expressed feelings of participants and is also speculative based on what is seen as right or wrong from that subject position.

#### 6.2.4.1 Positions and the Practices they May Invoke

Table 6-1: Traditional Receiver

As shown in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain, the 'Traditional Receiver' is thought to be located in the 'romantic love' discourse; its gender is female and it appears to value 'retributive man' over 'new man'.

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Man is focused on pleasing her</li> <li>• To be treated like a lady</li> <li>• Gestures are expressions of ideals and traditions: flowers, holidays, special occasions</li> <li>• Men take the initiative to be romantic</li> <li>• Privileges the couple dyad</li> <li>• It's good practice to not question the motivation behind a man's gesture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May feel frustrated or disappointed if resources or opportunities are not available e.g. lack of money, energy or time</li> <li>• Men are in control and therefore women are less in control of romance</li> <li>• Source of value in the relationship. If a woman is not complimented - or provided with flowers - they could feel</li> </ul>

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognises Valentine’s day</li> <li>• It’s good practice to show appreciation ‘say thanks’ for the gesture</li> <li>• It can be good practice to have sex after being taken out</li> <li>• Good to be desired/ and confirmed as attractive</li> <li>• Unprompted gestures preferred</li> <li>• Privileges the couple dyad: does not include children</li> <li>• Represents a welcomed departure from daily life: gestures do not happen every day</li> </ul> <p>Wrongs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yearning for solitary television viewing over together time</li> <li>• Not to show appreciation</li> <li>• Romantic apathy</li> <li>• To expect sex without romance</li> <li>• Staying home isn’t romantic</li> <li>• To receive household items as gifts</li> <li>• To assume doing housework is romantic</li> <li>• To live like a brother and sister, no sex</li> <li>• Tick box exercise gestures</li> </ul>	<p>under appreciated or not as valued as other women who do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May feel jealous</li> </ul>

**Table 6-2: Traditional Romantic**

As shown in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain, the ‘Traditional Romantic’ is thought to be located in the ‘romantic love’ discourse; its gender is male and it appears to value ‘retributive man’ over ‘new man’.

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pleasing her, and in so doing, pleasing himself</li> <li>• To be a gentleman and treat her like a lady</li> <li>• To take romance seriously and think through gestures</li> <li>• A way of being, an intrinsic practice of self. Lacks the temporal element found in ‘Strategic Romantic’</li> <li>• Takes the initiative to be romantic</li> <li>• To provide hero moments e.g. whisk her off her feet</li> <li>• Duty to keep the peace</li> <li>• Being aware of her feelings</li> <li>• Need to be emotionally contained</li> <li>• Gestures are expressions of ideals and traditions: e.g. theatre and flowers</li> <li>• Privilege the couple dyad</li> <li>• High focus on getting the gesture right</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerable to partner feedback as can be highly invested in the gestures</li> <li>• Can feel hurt if gift not fully embraced</li> <li>• May feel inadequate, frustrated or anxious if resources or opportunities are not available e.g. lack of money, energy or time</li> <li>• Can feel unloved, or underappreciated if gestures are token</li> <li>• Can feel jealous</li> <li>• May at times feel like a servant</li> </ul>

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wants to make her feel wanted and desired</li> <li>• Privileges sex</li> </ul> <p>Wrongs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To think of another woman</li> <li>• To lose focus on the relationship</li> <li>• To forget important dates</li> <li>• To collect brownie points</li> <li>• To say things that might upset her</li> <li>• To give a token gesture</li> <li>• To do housework as a romantic gesture</li> </ul>	

**Table 6-3: Best Friend Romantic**

As shown in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain, the 'Best Friend Romantic' is thought to be located in the 'intimacy' discourse; it appears to be relatively ungendered and values 'new man' over 'retributive man'.

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively ungendered</li> <li>• Privileges the couple dyad</li> <li>• Taking a collaborative approach to romance</li> <li>• Pleasing both persons</li> <li>• Caring is valued</li> <li>• Share the same interests</li> <li>• Creating daily sparkle - small moments of happiness e.g. sending texts</li> <li>• Duty to show you're being thoughtful</li> <li>• High focus on emotional intimacy, privileges feelings</li> <li>• Having a good chat together</li> <li>• May question traditional gestures like weddings and marriage</li> <li>• Can always talk problems through</li> <li>• Prefers spending time with partner vs. friends</li> <li>• Together time and companionship is valued</li> <li>• Use of the <i>we</i> pronoun</li> <li>• Both partners initiate romantic gestures</li> <li>• Personality match is valued</li> <li>• Romance does not always lead to sex</li> <li>• Views friendship as affection</li> <li>• Duty to be transparent</li> <li>• It is okay to cry</li> <li>• Focused on supporting each other develop their own potential</li> </ul> <p>Wrongs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To privilege looks and physical desire</li> <li>• To privilege grand gestures</li> <li>• To engage in gestures with selfish intent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feels strong connection and friendship with partner</li> <li>• Has a sense of the couple working as a team</li> <li>• Being sensitive to each other's feelings</li> <li>• May have a limited life outside of the relationship</li> <li>• Could be particularly devastated if the relationship breaks down</li> <li>• Males may feel marginalised from traditional men</li> <li>• Males may need to prove masculinity in other ways</li> <li>• Feeling respected</li> <li>• Sense of gender equity in the relationship</li> </ul>

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaking negatively about your partner</li> <li>• Males being one of the lads</li> <li>• Being embarrassed to disclose feelings or vulnerability e.g. crying</li> <li>• To not communicate/discuss</li> <li>• To privilege social media over your partner</li> </ul>	

Table 6-4: Strategic Romantic

As shown in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain, the ‘Strategic Romantic’ is thought to be located in the ‘economic’ discourse; its gender is male and it appears to value ‘retributive man’ over ‘new man’.

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pleasing her for an easy life</li> <li>• Keen sense of the transaction: conscious of costs and reality</li> <li>• Being one of the lads</li> <li>• Earning brownie points</li> <li>• A means to an end, has a temporal element</li> <li>• The form of the gesture is open to negotiation</li> <li>• Takes shortcuts when they’re available</li> <li>• Acknowledging Valentine’s, and other official occasions as quick wins</li> <li>• Keep out of the ‘doghouse’ by doing enough</li> <li>• Take the blame if you get it wrong</li> <li>• Engages in laddish humour</li> </ul> <p>Wrongs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being too sentimental</li> <li>• Wasting money</li> <li>• Forgetting Valentine’s or other easy romantic transactions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Romantic gestures can feel like a job/chore</li> <li>• Less invested in their gestures, so more resilient to rejection or dismissal</li> <li>• Sensitive to personal expense/ personal sacrifices</li> <li>• Less likely to be jealous</li> <li>• Can experience romance as hard work</li> <li>• Tends to be defensive, and feel the need to justify the lack of a proper gesture: as ‘she’s happy anyway’</li> <li>• Can wrestle with what is enough e.g. asking for a gift list vs. giving her money so she can buy her own presents</li> </ul>

Table 6-5: Poor Me

As shown in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain, the ‘Poor Me’ is thought to be located in the ‘romantic love’ discourse; its gender is female and it appears to value ‘retributive man’ over ‘new man’.

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wanting to be treated like a lady</li> <li>• Seeking appreciation</li> <li>• Engages in wishful thinking</li> <li>• Looking for traditional gestures</li> <li>• Alert to gestures having reduced over time</li> <li>• Aware of last romantic gesture</li> <li>• Desiring a willing romantic partner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male in control</li> <li>• Can feel taken for granted</li> <li>• Can feel isolated i.e. missing out</li> <li>• Can feel rejected</li> <li>• Can feel jealous of other people’s relationships</li> <li>• May feel undesired</li> </ul>

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be seeking affection</li> <li>• Might fish for compliments or leave hints for gifts</li> <li>• Aware of their own efforts e.g. looking nice</li> <li>• May moan and express unhappiness</li> <li>• Might appear needy for attention</li> <li>• Might role model behaviours in the hope they get reciprocated</li> <li>• Engages in upward social comparison</li> </ul> <p>Wrongs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not doing your gender role e.g. being nice or looking after your family</li> </ul>	

**Table 6-6: Hero Assessor**

As shown in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain, the 'Hero Assessor' is thought to be located in the 'romantic love' discourse; its gender is female and it appears to value 'retributive man' over 'new man'.

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treats men/ or man as deficient</li> <li>• Views romance as heroic or idealist gestures</li> <li>• Stays together for reasons other than romance</li> <li>• Right to rebuff gestures</li> <li>• Open dislike of flowers and less significant gestures</li> <li>• Open dislike of gushy gesture</li> <li>• Questions motivation of token gestures</li> <li>• Privileges others over the couple e.g. children, friends</li> <li>• Might result in testing their man, leaving to get attention</li> <li>• Engages in upward social comparison – via TV, Facebook</li> <li>• May take caring gestures for granted</li> <li>• Harsh critic of romantic attempts</li> <li>• May joke about men and their gestures</li> <li>• Represents romantic apathy</li> <li>• Deploys relationship stage rhetoric or age discourse to facilitate position</li> </ul> <p>Wrongs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To initiate romance as a female</li> <li>• Token gestures</li> <li>• To privilege the caring or small daily gestures of kindness e.g. housework</li> <li>• To privilege affection like hand holding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Females are judge of romantic endeavours</li> <li>• Can be seen as 'hard'</li> </ul>

**Table 6-7: Hard Realist**

As shown in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain, the ‘Hard Realist’ is thought to be located in the ‘economic’ discourse; its gender is female and it appears to value ‘retributive man’ over ‘new man’.

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships serve other purposes than romance</li> <li>• Practicalities prevail over romance</li> <li>• Represents romantic apathy</li> <li>• Sees reality as black and white, categorical and knowable</li> <li>• Suspicious of romantic gesture as being given because they want something, self-serving</li> <li>• Quick to judge Traditional Receivers and Best Friend Romantics</li> <li>• Rebuffs romantic gestures</li> <li>• Privileges personal space and routines</li> <li>• Patronises those who engage in romance</li> <li>• Views romance as foolish</li> <li>• Can mock romantic activities</li> <li>• Uses assertive language</li> <li>• View romance as a fairy tale, not real life</li> <li>• Privileges others over the couple e.g. children, friends</li> <li>• Deploys relationship stage rhetoric or age discourse to facilitate position</li> </ul> <p>Wrongs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be slushy or engage in PDA (public displays of affection)</li> <li>• Moaning about a lack of romance</li> <li>• To dote on your husband</li> <li>• To want affection or physical intimacy</li> <li>• To allow for doubts or hesitations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See themselves as ‘cynical’</li> <li>• Can be seen as ‘hard’</li> <li>• View themselves as mature in years/wise to the world</li> </ul>

**Table 6-8: Mothering Him**

As shown in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain, the ‘Mothering Him’ is thought to be located in the ‘life-stages’ discourse; its gender is female and it appears to value ‘new man’ over ‘retributive man’.

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treats man like another child</li> <li>• Takes man for granted</li> <li>• Represents romantic apathy</li> <li>• Privileges children over husband</li> <li>• Too much effort to get dressed up to go out</li> <li>• Would rather be home watching TV, than think of conversation when out with husband</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can emasculate their husband</li> <li>• Woman is in control</li> <li>• Sense of not being bothered with romance</li> <li>• Strong sense of self as a mother</li> </ul>

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forgetful that he likes affection</li> <li>• Privileges being caring and nurturing</li> <li>• Deploys life stages repertoire to facilitate position</li> </ul> <p>Wrongs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To not focus on children</li> </ul>	

Table 6-9: Family Man

As shown in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain, the 'Family Man' is thought to be located in the 'life-stages' discourse; its gender is male and it appears to value 'new man' over 'retributive man'.

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on the family unit</li> <li>• To be hands on with children and help with practical domestic duties</li> <li>• To privilege doing things as a family</li> <li>• Focus on the family unit</li> <li>• To be sensible</li> <li>• Romance is a luxury that he cannot afford</li> <li>• Temporal element. Until the children are more independent</li> <li>• Being a team member with partner</li> <li>• Need to account for non-family focused actions to partner</li> </ul> <p>Wrongs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To privilege the couple dyad over the family</li> <li>• To spend money on lavish romantic gestures</li> <li>• To be spontaneous and take control e.g. book a romantic weekend away</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May have a satisfying team bond with partner</li> <li>• Can feel helpless /powerless</li> <li>• May feel emasculated</li> <li>• May feel bored</li> <li>• May feel guilty spending time away from the children</li> <li>• Might not know if his wife desires him</li> </ul>

It can be seen that section 6.2 *Discursive Economy* offers an answer to the research question: what discursive resources are available and drawn on? This section attempts to describe the romantic discursive terrain, as represented in Figure 6-1. While it outlines the discourses that I propose make up the terrain, it also strives to articulate the subject positions that may be embedded within. The tables above present each subject position and their potential implications for romantic behaviour and subjectivity. In this way, we might observe that occupation of the 'Family Man' position, for example, might dramatically curb expenditure on grand gestures.

## **6.3 Subject Position Mobilisation**

This section sets out the context under which each subject position may be mobilised and how they may interact with each other. It should be noted that not all relationships between subject positions are expanded upon; I feature those connections where there are seemingly noteworthy areas of alignment or conversely, tensions.<sup>35</sup> Rather than starting with the most commonly expressed subject positions, in the spirit of Foucault I will firstly touch on the forces that may marginalise and therefore silence the less frequently articulated subject positions ('Hard Realist', 'Hero Assessor', 'Family Man' and 'Mothering Him'). It is argued that they may be repressed by dominant heterosexual discourses and the apparent need to respect heteronormative order.

### **6.3.1 Hard Realist**

The first of the less commonly expressed subject positions is the 'Hard Realist' position, which is occupied by women and located in the 'economic' discourses. When articulating occupation of the 'Hard Realist' position, the women appear to be mocking romance and belittling all who are located in the 'romantic love' or 'intimacy' discourses; from this position it seems that they are turning down romance as not for them. In this way, the 'Hard Realist' position may allow for the rejection of gestures and for romantic apathy.

The 'Hard Realist' seems to consider themselves as grown up, living in the real world and that romance is for the naïve and foolish (see Extract 15 'I'm quite grounded'). Being located in the 'economic discourse', the moral order of the 'Hard Realist' appears to be reminiscent of prevailing attitudes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At that time individuals could have a say in their choice of spouse, yet it was generally thought that a marriage based on romantic love was foolish, and would inevitably be problematic. As mentioned earlier, marriage was deemed to serve more practical considerations.

It would seem that mobilising this position is at odds with dominant femininity discourses. As shown in Extract 13 whereby there is a protracted silence after Ruth, who appears to be speaking from the 'Hard Realist' position, admits that sex is not romantic for her. Yet in Extract 15 Ruth seems to be recognising dominant discourses when she describes herself as a 'hard-faced cow'. Ruth then launches into a critique of female subservience and appears to construct women who position themselves within the 'romantic love' or 'intimacy' discourse as insecure. She closes with a forceful 'No it's not'. When speaking from the 'Hard Realist' position, it is my reading that Ruth is challenging of femininity norms, critical of dominant constructions of

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<sup>35</sup> The usage of 'vs.' in the subheading is indicative of tension between the positions, for example Hard Realist vs. Traditional Receiver. Where there is alignment between subject positions the 'vs.' is changed to 'and'.

romance and experienced by the group as largely intimidating; as indicated by the reactions from the other members (as shown in 6.3.6 *Traditional Receiver*).

Extract 15 (all-female 2)

Ruth: I suppose so. I just-, I've got no expectation. I never had any expectation. I'm quite grounded. I don't need to be shown love and affection to-, I don't need to be told, 'I'm in love with you' or not. Yes.

**Do you think-, where does that come from? Have you always been like that?**

Ruth: I don't know. I don't know whether it's because I've been previously married and divorced and I'm a hard-faced cow. I don't know. I'm just like that. Yes, I listen to women at work and their husbands are phoning them up at lunchtimes and saying, 'What are you having for dinner, babe?' (Talking over each other 01.09.11) What's the point of that conversation? Or they'll phone up and say, 'Can you book me a doctor's appointment' because I get really like-, 'While he's phoning you, he could be phoning the doctors'. (Talking over each other 01.09.25) So, that's what you do when you love each other. No it's not.

#### Hard Realist and Hero Assessor

There appeared to be a degree of alignment in the moral code between the 'Hard Realist' and 'Hero Assessor' positions. Subject positions vary considerably in the language used and the moral judgments made (Davies & Harré, 1999); I observed that speakers from the 'Hard Realist' and 'Hero Assessor' positions employed sarcasm and were quick to make critical judgments, claim superiority and use inflammatory language (ref. Extract 16). Arguably, the contrary tone deployed may be reflective of them countering dominant positions and may suggest that they are constructing themselves as oppositional or rebellious through their choice of language and choice of expression.

It is likely that these positions were thereby mobilised to distance themselves from romance or 'sappy' notions of romance. For example, Ruth seemingly speaking from the 'Hard Realist' position condemned public affection, like hand holding as 'gross,' and Trisha below apparently in the 'Hero Assessor' position views sharing a coke as 'rank'. In Extract 16 below it would seem that Ruth is patronising drink sharers: 'I just think, 'Mmm''.

Extract 16 (all-female 2)

Ruth: Don't know. Just sitting in a cinema together, and you see people, don't you, drinking out the same cup, and it's all lovely, and just, no. Not for me. I'm drinking mine-

Trisha: Don't, with no-one else's germs on it.

Ruth: (Laughter). And I suppose that is romantic, isn't it? 'Cause you do see-,

Trisha: What, drinking out of each other's drinks? That's not romantic, it's rank.

Ruth: But they do, don't they? People do share, I went out with friends a few weeks ago, and they shared a big, well, Coke thing. I just think, 'Mmm.'

Trisha: I would just think he's too tight to buy his own. No, I don't share-,

...

Ruth: I'm too old for that, I think it's great when you see two 22-year-olds, you know, young, freshly in love, I think that's great. People don't wanna see me kissing somebody and holding hands, it's just always gross.

Trisha: No, it's, it's alright holding hands. They don't need to be, like, snogging in public and stuff.

Ruth: Oh, it's just gross.

See also Extract 32 whereby Ruth seemingly speaking from the position of 'Hard Realist' asks: 'are we blowing you [romantic love] out of the water', while Trisha appearing to talk from the 'Hero Assessor' describes herself and Ruth as 'cynical'; together they invoke hesitant responses from fellow participants.<sup>36</sup> It could be read that occupation of either position helped to mobilise the other. Indeed, in Extract 32 they both use the word 'we', thereby constructing themselves as aligned. Associated with the views of the 'Hard Realist' (and the 'Hero Assessor' position) that romance is a fool's game, they appear to be harnessing power over those women who are invested in romance.

#### Hard Realist vs. Traditional Receiver

While the 'Hard Realist' might be experienced as hard and intimidating, it is my understanding that the 'romantic love' discourses can marginalise this position, as shown in Extract 17 below. Here we see Nicky articulating the mobilisation of the 'Hard Realist' position by saying that she is staying in a relationship for practical and economic reasons. From this position she admits to not being troubled if her husband was unfaithful. Nicky appears to oscillate in location from the 'economic' to the 'romantic love' discourses. The moral code associated with the 'romantic love' discourse privileges monogamy and love as the basis of the relationship, and from this discourse it would seem that Nicky views the 'Hard Realist' position as 'sad', 'wrong' and 'not healthy'.

#### Extract 17 (all-female 1)

Nicky: If it wasn't for, like, the kids, school and the house, I'd quite easily walk away, which is really sad because one of my friends said, 'Well, you know, if he went off with someone, would you be upset?' And I said, 'I don't think I would.' That's wrong, isn't it?

Yeah, well, I'm not saying that it's wrong but, I mean-,

Nicky: But it's not-, it's not healthy and then I just think, 'God, if that-, I wouldn't want to leave the house, I wouldn't want to upset the kids, so it's just another day, isn't it?

#### Hard Realist vs. Traditional Romantic

Julie appears to acknowledge the power she has in the 'Hard Realist' position, when she voices that her husband has 'found it hard' (Ref. Extract 29). In rebuffing gestures and rejecting

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<sup>36</sup> The impact of the comments from the 'Hard Realist' is further discussed in 6.3.6 *Traditional Receiver*; it shows that Cheryl was hesitant to contribute and fearful of reproach.

romance, it is my understanding that the 'Hard Realist' denies the 'Traditional Romantic' any opportunity to 'please her'. (For further discussion on this issue see 6.3.7 *Traditional Romantic*.)

#### Hard Realist in Male Company

This 'Hard Realist' position, which some women appeared to occupy in the all-female focus groups, was observed as only fleetingly occupied in this mixed-sex focus group. Extract 18 may provide potential clues as to this reduced occupation in the face of male company. In seemingly taking up this subject position with its financial imperative, Marion is reprimanded by Jimmy, from apparently the 'Traditional Romantic' position, which upholds a moral commitment to love being the foundation of a relationship. Marion seems to readily concede her 'Hard Realist' position with a somewhat apologetic 'No, no'. It is likely that Marion's location in the 'economic' discourse is seen as unfeminine and her concession to a male in the 'Traditional Romantic' position serves to preserve heteronormative order.

Extract 18 (mixed group)

**So, like, separate lives in the same house?**

Sandra: Yeah.

Marion: I know a few couples like that.

Jimmy: Well I don't think that's-, I wouldn't want that in a relationship, I would rather be on-, be on my own, seriously. Finding somebody that wants to be with me, I mean, I don't want to be with somebody just for the sake. (Talking over each other 01.18.06).

Marion: Financially they can't afford to. (Talking over each other 01.18.11).

Jimmy: So again, back to, we all go back to -, the same thing. It's all about money isn't it? And, y, y, you-, so that's what you're saying, and so-, it shouldn't be should it?

Marion: No, no.

For more discussion on how the 'Hard Realist' may be mobilised see 6.3.5 *Poor Me*.

### **6.3.2 Hero Assessor**

The second of the less commonly expressed subject positions is the 'Hero Assessor' position. It is my understanding that women who occupy the 'Hero Assessor' position are located in the 'romantic love' discourse and are looking to be pleased by men, however they are insisting on high—or heroic—standards. Speakers from the 'Hero Assessor' appear to see men as deficient in their princely attributes. The 'Hero Assessor' in the all-female groups may be experienced as intimating, cynical and tended to dominate the other female positions with their harsh critique (ref. Trisha in Extract 16, 32 & 47 and Annie in Extract 31)

An example of this subject position may be found in Extract 2, where we see Trisha privileging a Louis Vuitton handbag over a mere Kit Kat. As mentioned earlier, it is as if they are the princess being courted by a jester, where it appears that they are looking to be pleased by a

knight in shining armour. In this way, women seem to be constructing their men as failures and may see them as a joke (see Extract 19).

Extract 19 (all-female 2)

Trisha: Yeah, I mean I joke about it, because it is actually quite funny, when you, like, look at the things that he does.

#### Hero Assessor vs. Best Friend Romantic

In Extract 20 Sharon appears to be occupying the position of 'Best Friend Romantic' which values caring communication. Meanwhile, we can see Nicky seeming to dispute that text messages can be romantic, which might suggest that she is located in the 'romantic love' discourse and mobilising the position of 'Hero Assessor'. 'When he's waiting for the bus', Nicky scoffs, thus implying a text sent on route to work could not possibly be romantic. From the 'Hero Assessor' position, grand heroic gestures tend to be valued and warranted as romantic. I suggest that in this extract we are witness to a clash of masculine ideals: 'retributive man' (and the knight/hero) versus 'new man'.

Extract 20 (all-female 1)

**So what is it about the text message in the morning that you find romantic?**

Sharon: Just that he's thinking about me. Just that he's thought about me, woken up, making sure I'm okay, and making sure that everything's alright. Not that I need anything in terms of-

**Yeah.**

Sharon: But just looking forward to-

Carol: That you're on his mind?

Sharon: Yeah, that kind of thing. So that's just-, that he's thinking about me, for me, is romantic. And the fact that-

Nicky: When he's waiting for the bus (laughter).

Carol: I don't think that I-, I don't think I'm a romantic person though.

Nicky: I'm out the loop with this group (laughter).

Indeed, it would appear that easy fodder for the 'Hero Assessor' is 'new man' (see also Extract 47). There's a sense as if Trisha, in Extract 21, may be preying on the participants' stories of nice gestures, ready to gun them down—and their men—as not romantic. Here we might observe her dominance and readiness to expose Gloria's partner as a romantic failure. 'What do you class as a nice gesture? I'm asking the questions now'. Coates (2004b) suggests that asking direct questions of other participants is a hallmark of powerful people. In response Gloria, seemingly speaking from the 'Traditional Receiver' position, presents her man as 'retributive man' with apparently sufficient knightly credentials to avoid Trisha's critique. Arguably, this represented a change in position for Gloria; she may have been in the 'Best Friend Romantic' position, given her earlier understated reference to 'nice gestures' and

'everyday life'. Van Langenhove and Harré (1999) suggest that early seizure of a dominant role in a conversation can force others to take up positions that they would not have chosen otherwise. The 'Traditional Receiver' position may be a more legitimate defence, when confronted by the 'Hero Assessor', than the 'Best Friend Romantic' position; potentially because of their mutual location in the dominant 'romantic love' discourses and respect of hegemonic masculinity.

Extract 21 (all-female 2)

Gloria: [...] And he does do nice gestures, but it's just, it's just everyday life, isn't it.

**Yeah.**

Trisha: What do you class as a nice gesture? I'm asking the questions now. (Laughter).

**(Talking over each other 15.36) Yeah that's fine.**

Gloria: Um, Christmas, just before Christmas, he booked us a weekend away, and organised the childcare, which was nice. 'Cause we don't, we don't have a good circle of childcare. Our child's with a childminder in the day. We both work hard, and my mum's really quite old, his parents live far away, so it's hard. That-, that was nice. And, and it was a really lovely gesture, and we went off to another city for the weekend.

### Hero Assessor in Male Company

The 'Hero Assessor' seems to construct men who lack in heroic ability, as failures and sees them as a joke (see Extract 19). As such, it is arguably a risky position to take up in male company and may explain why it was not observed to be mobilised in the mixed-sex group. Potentially, this deferral of position reflects the female participants' underlying respect for heteronormative order.

For further insights on how the 'Hero Assessor' position may be mobilised, refer to 6.3.1 *Hard Realist* and 6.3.5 *Poor Me*.

### **6.3.3 Family Man**

It is my understanding that males who occupy the 'Family Man' position are 'new men', who help with the housework and take care of the children; they seem to privilege the family over the couple dyad. This position appears to be located in the wider 'life-stages' discourse, which constructs relationships and marriages that evolve successfully as generally going through phases of development. Accordingly, with young children, the 'Family Man' may have limited scope for romance. Romance seems to be constructed from within the 'Family Man' position as a luxury that they can ill afford.

Extract 22 (all-male 2)

Andy: I think that's why we feel the most, when we go, like, one or two weekends a year, but when you go away it's like a recognition that, actually, 'You know what, we work pretty hard, and invest all our time in the children that actually we deserve this,' almost, and then make the most

of it, and-, because you don't get the opportunity that often, so it's make the most of that opportunity, and not feeling guilty for it, the fact that the kids are at their Nan's or whatever, having a great time getting spoilt rotten.

Eric: That's another thing I think they live with, those with children, you can feel guilt. If you go away (Talking over each other 01.11.36).

It can be seen in Extract 22 that Andy might be oscillating between the 'Family Man' position and the 'Traditional Romantic'. It seems that Andy might be ensuring that his 'Family Man' position can accommodate the 'Traditional Romantic' by constructing himself as a responsible romantic who is well aware that his primary responsibility is to the family. This he appears to display by demonstrating that he does not engage in frivolous behaviour (as indicated by his reference to the rarity of his weekends away and by indicating that his children are well looked after by their grandmother).

#### Family Man vs. Traditional Receiver

It is my reading that in Extract 23 there is tension between the 'new man' 'Family Man' position and the more macho 'retributive man' in the 'Traditional Romantic' position. Rob is arguing that with children there is no time for romance. Voices that might be recognised as from the 'Traditional Romantic' position are telling Rob to 'man up' and 'make the time'. In this way, we might appreciate why the 'Family Man' subject position is marginalised.

#### Extract 23 (all-male 1)

Rob: We've got children, so no time for some quality time with the other half, because obviously there's-,

M: Yeah, but you make the time, don't you? You make the time, don't you?

M: Mmhmm.

M: Yes, definitely.

Rob: It's a lot harder when you've got children, and it depends how many children you've got, and if you've got no children then it's a lot easier to arrange things and do-,

Ian: If they're young.

Rob: You can't do spontaneous things if you've got children. If you've got two and three kids-,

This appears to be additionally played out in Extract 24, where we see Andy seemingly in the 'Family Man' position and having surrendered to there being no romance (at least for the first six years of his children's lives). Whereas Kevin who also has children, appears to reject the 'Family Man' position and instead mobilises the 'Traditional Romantic' that tends to take charge of the romantic situation. In this way, it seems that Kevin is presenting hegemonic masculinity and seeking to sustain his place in the heteronormative hierarchy.

#### Extract 24 (all-male 2)

Andy: I think it's a, it's a mutual acceptance of how it is, and that, kind of, makes it okay. We, I think, I went to a friend's barbeque the other day. And we both sat there, it, I think it was the first time, so my daughter's six now, first time in six years, both of us had just sat, not had to do anything for about two or three hours, because the kids just entertain themselves. And we both got home, and went, 'Yeah, we just sat and had a drink with friends, and not had,' they came up every now and again and said, 'Can we have a drink?' Or whatever. But we didn't have to change a nappy, or we didn't have to take someone to the toilet, or anything like that. And it was like, if you, if you've made it to those milestones, I think you've made it to-

Simon: That's the first stage, yeah.

**What are you thinking, Kevin, there?**

Simon: Can't wait for his kids to grow up. (Laughter).

Kevin: I was gonna say, like, for us, we're used to, plan it in around, like I say, they go to gym. If they go to the gym, and it's a couple of hours, then we'll do something then. [...] Now they're slightly older, we can take them to a class, or do whatever, do, they're left with grandparents, or whatever they do. Then that's the planned time to, to do whatever, bit of us time. You know, whatever it is, but it's a bit more focused on us two, rather than the everyday.

#### Best Friend Romantic and Family Man

In the second all-male group the apparent positioning of men with children as 'Family Men' could be seen as an attempt to help them 'save face', thereby potentially excusing them from the imperative of performing romance from the 'Traditional Romantic' position. Notably, it was those who frequently appear to occupy the 'Best Friend Romantic' position that provided these face saving attempts; both 'Family Man' and 'Best Friend Romantic' are thought to subscribe to 'new man' as their masculine ideal. Eric and Simon, both of whom seem to speak from the 'Best Friend Romantic' position can be heard expressing empathy and understanding with the 'Family Man', as seen in Extracts 22 and 24: 'those with children, you can feel guilt', 'That's the first stage, yeah', 'Can't wait for his kids to grow up'. It might also be observed that Simon in Extract 24 is attempting to position Kevin in the 'new man' 'Family Man' position, which he rejects. It could be argued that in supporting 'Family Man' they are endorsing 'new man', and it is 'new man' who is being met with resistance. (For further discussion on the marginalisation of 'new man' see 6.3.9 *Best Friend Romantic*.)

#### **6.3.4 Mothering Him**

'Mothering Him' like the 'Family Man' position appears to be located in the 'life-stages' discourse. Controversially, as gathered by reactions and responses, women who might occupy the 'Mothering Him' position refer to their relationship with their husband as having evolved into one of mother and son.

In Extract 25, Sandra describes how she treats her spouse as a child: and her husband 'keeps saying 'Yes Mum''. The 'Mothering Him' location in the 'life-stages' discourse is potentially

evident in how Sandra explains that it is her daughter leaving home that has her 'turned all motherly' towards her husband. She repeatedly says 'only got the one' with reference to her children now living at home. It is my reading of this talk that Sandra is privileging the children over her husband, which may contravene the moral order of 'romantic love' and 'intimacy' discourses.

Extract 25 (mixed group)

**Okay. Sandra, would you describe yourself as romantic?**

Sandra: I probably am, but since I've only got the one son at home now, I've turned more motherly towards my husband. He keeps saying, 'Yes mum.' Treat him like another child, more than my husband now, because I've only got the one there, you know, my daughter has left so I've turned all motherly. Like, 'Tuck in your collar,' and, 'You can't go out looking like that,' this kind of thing. I am quite romantic, I do like going away together and we like going to London a lot and we went to the park, things like that. That's what we do, like do sightseeing.

**Tell me, do you think when you treat your husband, you know, do you think it's possible for him to be romantic when he's being treated in that way?**

Sandra: Yes, he is, he just jokes, he just said, 'Yes mum.' He just jokes about it now. Yes, I think he is romantic anyway, he is the that type of person anyway, so-

I observed this position making its presence felt in only one of the focus groups. The limited expression of the 'Mothering Him' position in the focus groups may be due to it being considered somewhat taboo. The importance placed on the set and specific roles of mother, father and child is long established and normalised; for example, Allen (1942) writes that it is biologic and essential to society order. Meanwhile, attachment theorist Ainsworth (1989) offers that parent-child dynamics in a spousal relationship, though not ideal, can be sustained nonetheless. She adds that the parent role is played by the person who is viewed as 'stronger and wiser and whose satisfaction comes through giving care and feeling needed' (p. 713). Picard (2016) writes that it is common and beneficial for couples to occasionally find themselves in parent-child bonding patterns; as it offers a chance to connect with our 'inner child', show vulnerability and receive protection and love. However, if this bonding pattern is sustained then it is expected that the relationship will be de-sexualised. Research into egalitarian versus gender-dominant couple dyads suggests that marital satisfaction is lowest for those in wife-dominant relationships; this discontent is particularly evident from the wife as they can be willing their male partner to take more control (Gray-Little *et al.*, 1996).

Likely this position is controversial, more so than the 'Family Man' position that also seems to privilege children over the relationship, because in treating her husband as a boy, she is emasculating the man. And the participants tend to be focused on preserving hegemonic masculinity.

### Mothering Him and Best Friend Romantic

Sandra tries to recover by asserting that after all she is 'quite romantic' and appears to mobilise the 'Best Friend Romantic' position with references to valued couple time. She also seemingly tries to make light of the situation: 'he just jokes about it now'. The apparent ready mobilisation from 'Mothering Him' to the 'Best Friend Romantic' rather than subject positions located in the 'romantic love' discourse, may reflect a degree of alignment between the moral commitment of the two: they both tend to maintain the 'new man' masculine ideal, privilege caring and thoughtfulness, and this reflects a lower sexual imperative. The 'Best Friend Romantic' appears to be regularly legitimised by the 'life-stages' discourse – that passionate love matures into a companionate friendship type love.

### **6.3.5 Poor Me**

The 'Poor Me' position is the first of the more commonly expressed positions presented in this section<sup>37</sup>. Like the 'Traditional Receiver' position, the 'Poor Me' position appears to draw from 'romantic love' discourses and puts men in a powerful position of 'pleasing her'. Unlike the 'Traditional Receiver' position which may applaud the rarity of gestures (as making them special), women in the 'Poor Me' position tend to moan about the lack of romance.

A prior occupation of the 'Poor Me' position appeared to be narrated as pivotal to the women's expressed subsequent take up of subject positions: 'Hard Realist', 'Hero Assessor' and 'Best Friend Romantic'. Davies and Harré (1999) assert that in speaking from a particular position, the conversant is bringing their history as they see it; that is the discourses and positions they have occupied in the past. Choices between different subject positions will be mediated by the emotional meaning they associate to those positions based on self or other experiences (as well as the degree of moral alignment). The women who might be seen to speak from the 'Hero Assessor' or 'Hard Realist' position tend to justify their aggression and resistance to gestures by mobilising the 'Poor Me' and referencing to being failed by romance and/or men (either current or previous partners), whereby their men did not observe their romantic or relationship duties. For example, Julie reveals that her ex left her for somebody else, while Trisha tells the group that her husband did not bother to show appreciation (see Appendix 29: FDA Summary Papers).

Apparently mobilising the 'Poor Me' position, Annie references that she 'wanted it [romance]' and that her partner failed to take any romantic initiative and 'took her for granted' (see Extract 26). Annie shares that he is now doing his upmost to please her. The use of the puppy metaphor, may be seen as an articulation of her current occupation of the 'Hero Assessor'

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<sup>37</sup> The 'Poor Me' position is located in a dominant discourse and is frequently mobilised by women, however it is a subjugated position. As such, it is the topic of discussion in *8.2.1 Navigating from the 'Poor Me' Position*.

position. It appears that Annie's husband's desperate attempts for her approval are being experienced as unattractive. Annie repeatedly uses the word 'annoy'; it is my interpretation that it is his neediness that annoys her and in this way she is irritated because he is failing to act like a 'proper' man. According to Hollway (1983) 'masculinity is meant to involve being confident, dominating and self-sufficient' (p. 136). Here we may see how women, like Annie, might collude in male performance of hegemonic masculinity.

Extract 26 (all-female 1)

**So it sounds like err, Annie you've got a little bit more romance back in your relationship since you-, [organised a vacation without him]**

Annie: Yes. To a degree, but it annoys me now.

**Oh, what? Tell me. What-,**

Annie: He annoys me because for so long I wanted it and it was, sort of, like, he took me for granted, he took me for granted. And I think I tried more because this is the second relationship.

**Yeah.**

Annie: Err, that, as I say I just went away and when I came back, I mean, you know, to the point of annoying now. (Laughter)

...

Annie: Like a puppy, 'I've done this for you, I've done that.' You haven't done it for me. You've just done it. And now it's annoying.

...

**So it feels a bit more, like, contrived, maybe? That he's-, or, err-,**

Annie: He's desperate (laughter).

Julie: Over the top. Over the-, yeah. (Laughter)

There seems to be a noticeable power exchange in Extract 26. Annie's apparent take up of the 'Hero Assessor' position allows her to see her partner as 'deficient', thus reversing the previous dynamic whereby potentially he was able to position her as 'lacking' in the 'Poor Me' position.

#### Poor Me and Best Friend Romantic

From my understanding of the available discursive resources it might make sense for women to move from a 'Poor Me' position where men have power, to the 'Best Friend Romantic' position, where the power is equitable. Rita and Sonia seem to transfer positions in this way. We can see Sonia in Extract 27 appearing to reference how the 'Poor Me' position was pivotal to her current location in the 'intimacy' discourse and occupation of the 'Best Friend Romantic' position. Notice how she repeats 'because I didn't have it for so long'. Here we can potentially see that she's become more grateful for smaller gestures, like a Kit Kat, and does not require the fairy tale.

Extract 27 (all-female 2)

Sonia: It doesn't need to be a huge gesture like that for me, because I didn't have it for so long (talking over each other 01.20.01).

Trisha: Well, if he did it properly. A Chunky Kit Kat's not romantic, but, (talking over each other 01.20.05).

Sonia: I got used to it from when we got together and then didn't have it, and it was difficult, but because the romance and the spark seems to have come back again, those little things I appreciate a lot more, I suppose, because I didn't have it for so long.

Poor Me vs. Best Friend Romantic vs. Hero Assessor

Rita in Extract 28 appears to mobilise the 'Poor Me' position to fuel her expressed occupation in the 'Best Friend Romantic' position. Furthermore, she seems to be using the 'Poor Me' position to resist the 'Hero Assessor' position. Rita appears to be referencing the challenge of being located in the 'intimacy' discourse, which privileges togetherness, with wanting her own space and she describes finding that balance as 'hard'. She seems to oscillate between the 'Hero Assessor' position wanting to 'push it away, feeling suffocated' and the 'Best Friend Romantic' position. The nature of her recall of the 'Poor Me' position 'Well hang on, I've got, kind of, what I always wanted here' may facilitate her apparent occupation in the 'Best Friend Romantic' position. In my reading of this extract, Rita demonstrates the opportunity for agency across subject positions; Davies and Harré (1999) write that 'the possibility of choice in a situation in which there are contradictory requirements provides people with the possibility of acting agentically' (p. 49).

Extract 28 (all-female 2)

Rita: We are very, touchy-feely, and automatically hold hands when we go out.

**So Rita, is there anything you wouldn't want, in terms of a romantic act or gesture?**

Rita: I wouldn't want? (Silence 32.29-32.31) I don't know, because although we are like that, still this dilemma of, like, needing my own space as well, you know. I don't, you know, there have been times when I've said, 'Oh, yeah, bit much for me.' You know, it was probably a bit too much, at first, and that was 'cause I went from one extreme to the other. So I did find it a bit, but the I just thought, 'Well hang on, I've got, kind of, what I always wanted here, and I'm pushing it away.' So, but it's, it's finding that balance, which is, I don't know, hard.

**Yeah, so maybe, if it's too-,**

Rita: Too suffocating, and too, yeah. That, that's not good, 'cause that's not romantic then. It's not.

Underlying Rita's tension may be a conflict of masculine ideals: the 'intimacy' discourse tends to privilege 'new man', whereas the 'romantic love' discourses appears to value 'retributive man' or the idealised heroic version. Indeed, I observed regular dismissal of the 'intimacy' discourse and its associated 'new man' masculine ideal from those seemingly occupying the 'Poor Me' position. As shown in Extract 29, Carol apparently drawing from the 'intimacy'

discourse and speaking from the 'Best Friend Romantic' position, suggests that Nicky who seems to frequently occupy the 'Poor Me' position would find it romantic if her husband showed more support in her endeavours. This suggestion appears to be rejected by Nicky, who discounts the 'intimacy' discourse, which tends to privilege support and friendship with: 'I never got married just to have a friendship'.

Extract 29 (all-female 1)

Carol: Just to take interest in you and what you're doing now, you'd probably see that as a bit of a romantic little side to him, because if he sat down and went, 'Right, Nicky, tell me what you do in your business,' or whatever, you would probably think (inaudible 01.23.56) ready to do that. They just need to take that little bit of interest and just support you, support in what you're doing.  
Nicky: Yeah.

Carol: That goes a long way.

Nicky: Mmm.

**So do you think in general for-, that-, in an established relationship, is not having romance in that relationship, is it a problem?**

Yeah (x2).

Julie: I think it depends what you want from the relationship. (Talking over each other 01.24.27).

**So it depends on, on what you're expecting from the relationship.**

Julie: Yeah.

Nicky: I think you've got to have a bit of romance, but I don't think it will last forever (inaudible 01.24.35), unless you just want a friendship. I never got married just to have a friendship, and that's what I've got now.

**Yeah.**

Annie: But I think, again, there is a fine line between romance and-,

Carol: I know, but if you ask a lot of people, the majority of people would say, 'I just want, like, a friendship. It's like a friendship relationship.' I think it does tend to go (talking over each other 01.24.54).

Julie: We think the same on lots of different things and, kind of, almost weird on some stuff, and I don't expect flowers, I don't expect romance. I think it's what you expect out of it, you know?

Annie: I think you expect more caring than romance.

Julie: He is, but I probably don't appreciate it. Because I've been in a relationship before, I don't appreciate it all, but I know he's found it hard [voice is wavering], and he shouldn't be the one to blame. (Silence 01.25.20-01.25.25).

It should be noted, that female take up of the 'Best Friend Romantic' position relies on a male partner being willing to navigate 'new man'. Potentially, if he is firmly 'retributive man', then mobilising the 'Best Friend Romantic' may not be an available option, and could force a female to remain in the 'Poor Me' or move into the 'Hard Realist' or 'Hero Assessor' position (this is likely the case for Trisha; see Extract 47). Whereas Nicky indicates that her partner is able to traverse 'new man' when she acknowledges—and rejects—the friendship that is the primary feature of their marriage: 'that's what I've got now'.

Potentially the 'Poor Me's' readier mobilisation of the 'Hero Assessor' or 'Hard Realist' positions (as seen in Extract 26) and somewhat resistance to the 'Best Friend Romantic' position may be seen as dismissal of 'new man', commitment to dominant heterosexual discourses and a choice to overturn power relations. When located in the 'Poor Me' position, I suggest that it is the man who may hold the more powerful position (as discussed in relation to Extract 26) while the 'Best Friend Romantic' involves partners sharing power. The way that male and/or romantic failings facilitate the 'Hero Assessor' and 'Hard Realist' position, can be read as the 'Poor Me' position seeding these positions. This draws on Foucault's (1977) notion that within the repressed are seeds that serve to disrupt the dominant views. The 'Poor Me' position places the man in a more powerful position as the reassurance of being loved is being withheld. Conversely, from the 'Hero Assessor' position, women may take the role of powerful judge and view men as deficient in their romantic efforts. The 'Hard Realist' appears to extract herself from romantic love obligations and rejects attempts to 'please'. As mentioned earlier, in 6.2.2 *Observing the Heteronormative Space*, that 'putting the lady on a pedestal' and providing a grand gesture appears to actually acknowledge that she is, in fact, less highly valued in society.

#### Poor Me in Male Company

Below in Extract 30 we can observe Sandra seemingly occupying the 'Poor Me' subject position and wishing for her husband to be romantic. Sandra is telling her husband to forgo buying her a gift 'Oh don't worry', yet she really wants for him to be romantic. Note the apparent male bafflement at this behaviour. Arguably, the female tendency to say 'don't worry' reflects subscription to femininity norms—and being nice.

#### Extract 30 (mixed group)

Sandra: I think you wish your husband would do something [for Valentine's day], even though you're telling him not to do something, saying, 'Oh, don't worry.' Then when it comes you're thinking, 'God, he hasn't done anything.' (Laughter)

Jimmy: (Talking over each other 29.59) they tell you not to do anything, then you don't do anything. (Laughter).

George: I was told not to buy a Christmas present because we were saving for a house, so I didn't buy anything and she was like, 'Where's my present?' (Laughter)

#### **Yes. So you are disappointed when you don't get something for Valentine's Day?**

Sandra: Yes, I am. Even though I say it's a rip off and all that, and then you've got your friend ringing you up saying, 'Oh, I had this lovely bouquet of flowers. Did you get anything?' 'No' So yes, I think most people would like something.

Jimmy: Why do they tell you that they don't? (Laughter)

It can also be seen, in Extract 30, that George and Jimmy are taking up the option of not supplying a gift. In this way, they are potentially occupying the 'Strategic Romantic' position and taking available economic shortcuts. Theoretically, a male situated in the 'Traditional Romantic' position would seek to provide a romantic gesture even when a get out clause is offered; as for them it is likely an intrinsic practice of self. I am therefore left pondering if a male located in the 'Strategic Romantic' position somehow mobilises a female's move from the 'Traditional Receiver' position to the 'Poor Me' position. Men are regularly shown as the central figure and that women carve out their destiny in relation to men (e.g. Burns, 2002; Whelehan, 2000, cited in Nicholls, 2009). Indeed, the 'Poor Me' position seems pivotal for female subsequent uptake of the 'Hero Assessor', 'Hard Realist' and also the 'Best Friend Romantic' position.

### **6.3.6 Traditional Receiver**

It is my reading that the 'Traditional Receiver' draws on 'romantic love' discourses and is one of the most commonly expressed positions in the discursive terrain. The women who potentially take up this position may seek to be treated like a lady and value traditional gestures—flowers, gifts and dinners out.

Tina seems to speak exclusively, in Extract 31, from the 'Traditional Receiver' position; she recognises flowers as special because they are not an everyday occurrence. In this way, the gesture of flowers is likely to 'please her'.

#### **Extract 31 (all-female 1)**

Sharon: See, I don't know. I, err, when I was listening to you [referring to the group] about romance and flowers, romance, flowers just doesn't do it for me. That's not my kind of thing, it doesn't, I'm just kind of like, mmm, it's not really. I'd rather, err, him coming in and just saying, 'Thanks for looking after us.'

Annie: I always feel-, yeah, I always feel flowers make me ill.

Sharon: Yeah. Not-, no, I don't-, it doesn't mean. (Talking over each other)

#### **[...] Tina, now what were you saying?**

Tina: No, I was just saying I like flowers, 'cause it's not very often I get them. I think if you were getting them every week then it's nothing is it, but, err, you know, sometimes he remembers on our anniversary and occasionally he'll buy me a bunch. But not really, no.

#### **Okay.**

Tina: I don't get them often. So I'd think that would be really nice. I'd think that he was-,

Carol: Thinking about you.

Tina: (Talking over each other 06.17-06.24). I would like that (laughter).

#### **Has there been occasion in the past where you've found flowers romantic?**

Sharon: Err, I-, no. Err, possibly, no, no, no. I mean, I've had flowers in the past and he does buy me flowers. Err, I just don't find them-, I don't know. Err.

Julie: I'm not a fan personally.

Sharon: No, I'm not, no.

Julie: And if he buys them it's great (general agreement).

Sharon: Yes, it's 'Thanks ever so much.'

As a recognisable position – that is portrayed by television and magazines – it is typically mobilised early in the focus groups, and may also be occupied to draw a consensus. So albeit Julie and Sharon seemingly position themselves as the 'Hard Realist' and the 'Best Friend Romantic', they also appear to mobilise the 'Traditional Receiver' position in Extract 31. This can be seen when Julie asserts 'And if he buys them it's great' – which is met by fellow participants with general agreement. Sharon concurs and acknowledges that she would be gracious in receiving flowers with a 'Thanks ever so much'.

The moral commitment of this position is thought to uphold 'retributive man', while reflecting hegemonic femininity and the need to be gentle, caring and nice. As such, it provides a recognisable space for sustaining heteronormative order.

#### Traditional Receiver and Best Friend Romantic

It seems that the 'Best Friend Romantic' might mobilise the 'Traditional Receiver' to avoid 'new man' scorn from the 'Hero Assessor' (ref. Extract 21). As discussed earlier in 6.3.2 *Hero Assessor*, the 'Traditional Receiver' position is likely assumed to be a more legitimate defence when confronted by the 'Hero Assessor', than the 'Best Friend Romantic' position; arguably because of their alignment in the dominant 'romantic love' discourses and privileging of hegemonic masculinity.

#### Traditional Receiver vs. Hard Realist

It is my reading of the talk that the prevalence of the 'Traditional Receiver' position and its taken-for-granted assumptions about monogamy and love as the basis of the relationship, means that from the 'Traditional Receiver' position the 'Hard Realist' position might be viewed as 'sad', 'wrong' and 'not healthy' (ref: Extract 17). However, it does appear that the 'Traditional Receiver' may come under fire from the 'Hard Realist' as it puts men in the powerful position of 'pleasing her' and as such, those who occupy this position might be seen as weak and ridiculed as foolish and naive (ref. Extracts 15 & 16). As such many of the participants may have been hesitant to talk—or spoke with hesitation. Notice how in Extract 32 Cheryl litters her contribution with 'you know', 'sort of like'. These hedges are thought to mark vulnerable talk, yet there is an absence of self-disclosure that would be classed sensitive. In this way, I suggest that Cheryl who typically expressed occupation of the 'Traditional Receiver' or 'Best Friend Romantic' position may have been fearful of reproach. The apparent hesitation to contribute was to such a degree that I was having to call on participants to make

their offering. Cheryl, for example, needed to be called upon several times for her contribution to the conversation (she seemed to be actively engaged as I would call upon her based on body language which would frequently display disagreement). Davies and Harré (1999) write that not contributing to a conversation can, at times, be a sign of anger, oppression or being affronted.

Extract 32 (all-female 2)

Ruth: Are we blowing you out the water, now, is it?

**No, no.**

Trisha: Although we're a bit cynical, aren't we?

Cheryl: I think it changes as, say like, when you're first together, it's all, you know, sort of like, the flowers, the chocolates, and everything. And then, I suppose, you know, like when he proposed, that was very romantic, in the way that he, sort of, thought about and did it. But then, sort of like, with other things, it changes. So it's not, sort of like, the, the gestures so often. It's, like, sort of like, working together and being together.

Traditional Receiver and Traditional Romantic

The 'Traditional Romantic' tends to be the gentleman who is the complementary subject position to the lady that is the 'Traditional Receiver'. In Extract 33 below, Jimmy appears to voice dismay in Sandra's yearning for Coronation Street while out to dinner with her husband. Jimmy is likely occupying the 'Traditional Romantic' position whereby it is hoped that a wife/partner might mobilise the 'Traditional Receiver' position and be enthusiastic and grateful for being taken out for dinner. In this way, the 'Traditional Receiver' may be upheld by males as the ideal recipient of their romantic gestures.

Extract 33 (mixed group)

Sandra: I think sometimes you like go for a meal and you, kind of, start chatting and then you're running out of conversation and thinking (laughter) 'Gosh, I'm missing Coronation Street.'  
(Laughter)

Jimmy: That's a bad sign. (Laughter) (Talking over each other 36.38).

### **6.3.7 Traditional Romantic**

It appears that the 'Traditional Romantic' is located in the 'romantic love' discourse and represents the most commonly expressed position for male participants. The men who occupy this position are likely to be chivalric and treat their loved one as a lady. They tend to value traditional gestures—flowers, gifts and dinners out. This position appears to draw on the 'romantic love' discourses and constructs romance as something that a man does to 'please her'.

It would seem that the 'Traditional Romantic' position was readily mobilised by male participants. For example, the men tended to show active interest in gathering romantic ideas from fellow participants and appeared eager to present themselves as romantic, as seen in Extract 34.

Extract 34 (mixed group)

Sandra: I mean, I have mentioned about the ballet many times. I still haven't got there.  
George: The theatre's good. I didn't think I'd like that but you know, but that's good.  
Jimmy: I bought good tickets, as well for the theatre, Mama Mia, so that's one of the romantic things, really. I just realised that's a romantic thing.  
Yeah x 2

Traditional Romantic and Strategic Romantic

At times it appeared to be a challenge for men to sustain the 'Traditional Romantic' position. At the start of Extract 35 we can see George seemingly occupying the 'Traditional Romantic' position and being thrown that his grand gesture of a romantic dinner on the beach, failed in 'pleasing her'. As George recounts this story, it is my interpretation based on the recordings that he is oscillating between the 'Traditional Romantic' and 'Strategic Romantic' position that is located in the 'economic' discourse; there appears to be telling emphasis placed on the 'cost me £100'. It could be that the 'Strategic Romantic' position shields men from emotional vulnerability and by viewing the failed gesture as a transaction, is more comfortable than a failed expression of love. Indeed, the moral commitment of the 'Strategic Romantic' seems considerably different to that of the 'Traditional Romantic' (as reflected in Table 6-2: Traditional Romantic versus Table 6-4: Strategic Romantic).

Extract 35 (mixed group)

George: Men are expected to be romantic, aren't they, more so than women? [...]  
**So you think it's on the bloke, pressure?**  
George: It is. I would say so, yes. It's like, we went to Mexico and I thought, 'Oh, we'll have a nice meal on the beach, and what not, cost me £100.' At the end of the night she turned around and said, 'You know, this was the ideal opportunity to propose to me,' and I thought you can't, sort of. (Laughter)  
Suhail: Maybe next time. (Talking over each other 24.16-24.21).  
Jimmy: Maybe next year. (Laughter)  
George: I don't know, you're just always expected to do more, sort of thing.  
**Okay, so you feel pressure to be romantic?**  
George: Yes, I would say so, yes, as a man.  
**What do you think guys? Do you feel pressured to be romantic?**  
Jimmy: I think you're right. It is my job, sort of thing, to-, with the holidays and bookings and things like that. It is, I think it is the man's job to be romantic. Sometimes we're not really good at it I don't think. There are sometimes you're trying to be and then you do the wrong thing.

Suhail: I think the longer you've been with somebody, it's looking for something-, new challenges to do as opposed to repetitive (talking over each other 25.09).

Jimmy: I think it's hard, it is hard. It's hard.

Suhail: 'Oh, you've done that again.'

Marion: You did that last year. (Laughter)

When gestures failed or are rejected, the expressed disappointment by the men may be read as reflecting their commitment to 'pleasing her' (ref. Extract 30 & 33). It appears that the 'Traditional Romantic' position was narrated as pivotal to the men's occupation of the 'Strategic Romantic' position. This could mean that the uptake of the 'Strategic Romantic' position might be justified with reference to experiencing a failure/rejection when located in the 'Traditional Romantic' position (in the same way the 'Poor Me' may be mobilised to legitimise the occupation of the 'Hard Realist', 'Hero Assessor' and at times the 'Best Friend Romantic'). As mentioned earlier, when choosing between positions, the emotional meaning that is associated with a position, based on either past occupation or relating to someone in that position, can serve to sanction a choice (Davies & Harré, 1999). (See also the discussion after Extract 39 in *6.3.8 Strategic Romantic*.)

#### Traditional Romantic vs. Best Friend Romantic

In Extract 36 we can see Jimmy appearing to mobilise the 'Traditional Romantic' position which privileges sex in a relationship, to resist the 'Best Friend Romantic' position. Jimmy seems alarmed at the prospect of becoming his partner's best friend and losing sexual intimacy. While Jimmy appears to construct affection as sexual intimacy, his fellow focus group participants seemingly speaking from the 'Best Friend Romantic' position construct affection more broadly; referencing friendship as well as hand holding.

#### Extract 36 (mixed group)

Jimmy: I think then you lose the affection don't you? If it becomes your best friend, you've got to have that bit of-, you got have an affection within a relationship, you've got to have that bit of, I don't think I would like to become her best friend.

Marion: Mmm, but you might not say when you're in your 60s or 70s.

Jimmy: You know the way I look at it, the way I look at it even when I'm 60.

Marion: Best friends is affection isn't it, I think? Being best friends.

George: Holding hands as well.

Suhail: It's part of affection, isn't it? And a relationship.

Jimmy: I know, let's wait till I'm 70 and see what happens.

The 'Best Friend Romantic' and the 'Traditional Romantic' position appear to represent a clash of masculinities: the more feminine 'new man' and the classic macho 'retributive man'. It is my reading of Extract 37 that Chris may be mobilising the 'Traditional Romantic' to challenge

'Best Friend Romantic' Greg's masculinity. Notice Chris's reference to having a life outside of the relationship and engaging in male dominated sport – fishing and golf.

Extract 37 (all-male 1)

Chris: Can I ask a question, do you do-, have you got hobbies? Do you go fishing, golf? [From the video it is evident that Chris is directing his questions to Greg] (Silence 50.44-50.46)

Greg: I love to play golf every now and again but not to the extent where I'm out every weekend, just stuff like that, just, like I say, more my thing is Formula 1, to be honest, not just watching it I want to keep up with all what's happening and stuff like that.

Chris: But you could do that at home.

Greg: Oh, yeah, yeah but I go and play golf and she, she's been a few times and stuff, the good thing about our relationship is we're, we're, we're good friends as well if you know what I mean? Not just, we're not just about sex, we're really good friends, we like-, well, that's the best way I can describe it we're really good friends and, you know-,

Ian: friend then it's not just your partner, it's, she's your friend.

Greg: Yeah, but she's my best friend.

The dominance of this position may also be seen when the male participants consistently answered the questions on romance from a sexual perspective (deploying the discourse of 'romantic love') and invoked masculine humour, thereby appearing to mobilise 'retributive man' and the 'Traditional Romantic' position (see Extract 38 for an example). This is to suggest that the 'Traditional Romantic' position is at the forefront, and represents the dominant discourse—and could be read as male participants asserting 'we're real men first'.

Extract 38 (all-male 2)

**Are there times when you might want to be more romantic than normal? You know, like if you had a-**

Eric: Maybe after one or two brandies. (Laughter).

M: It's my birthday. (Raucous laughter)

Eric: Oh. [Composing himself] I think it's just when you are happy you know. It's anytime things have turned right, which is why-,

For further discussion on how 'new man' may be rejected by 'retributive man' see 6.3.3 *Family Man*. Refer also to 6.3.9 *Best Friend Romantic* for insights on how mobilising the 'intimacy' discourse may mitigate disappointing 'Traditional Romantic' experiences.

### 6.3.8 Strategic Romantic

Male participants appeared to regularly speak from the 'Strategic Romantic' position. Drawing from the 'economic' discourse, the 'Strategic Romantic' tends to have a keen sense of the transaction; and may seek to minimise the costs while reaping the benefits from any romantic

action. Several men when appearing to occupy of the 'Strategic Romantic' spoke of 'collecting brownie points'; for example, cooking her breakfast in bed might transact in a few extra beers out with the lads. In this way, potentially we see macho 'retributive man' in operation, and as such the 'Strategic Romantic' might be mobilised to distance the conversant from idealistic or sappy notions of romance.

Extract 39 (all-male 2)

Eric: Something like-, I'm thinking it does come down to the cost. If I'd gone out and bought her some crazy-priced thing, 'We're working for family, and you buy me stuff like that?' So I wouldn't do that, yes, a bottle of wine.

Simon: Just a fiver on the flowers, I'm not going to go out and buy, you know, spend £50 on a massive thing of roses or whatever, but just £5 from the supermarket, just-,

Eric: You can get a lot of value as well now for such a little (talking over each other 01.05.57-01.06.00) valentine's day, £1.99 for a card that big (hand gesture indicates a large card). I know some people don't and whatever but some people could spend £20 on a card but for £1.99-,

Simon: It's the same.

Eric: Get that, it's cool. Everything's okay.

Simon: It's sound. It's just a sound job.

The above extract demonstrates that the provision of a romantic card, by these men, may be outcome focused, it highlights a strategic perspective. It is my understanding that men when located in the 'Strategic Romantic' position see romance as a job or a chore. In Extract 39, Simon and Eric appear to speak animatedly about bargain gestures that do the 'same job' as more extravagant gestures. We can also see Jimmy in Extract 35 saying 'it is my job, it is the man's job to be romantic'. Crawford (2004) writes that when men call romantic work a job this 'grants his wife the status of a boss or supervisor, and implies that he is subject to legitimate performance standards' (p. 75). This is potentially visible when Jimmy (Extract 35) makes references to doing the 'wrong thing' and being 'not really good at it'. George appears to also reference that women are the evaluator of romance with 'you can't win' and 'you're just always expected to do more'. Positioning the woman as the 'employer/boss' may then legitimise certain 'rebellious' practices such as 'skiving off' or even minor forms of cheating or other forms of 'protest'. Potentially, viewing romance as a job, from the 'Strategic Romantic' position might stem the emotional vulnerability that may be experienced when judged as failing in the affairs of the heart. (See also the discussion in 6.3.7 *Traditional Romantic* after Extract 35.)

Strategic Romantic vs. Best Friend Romantic

It would seem that the 'Strategic Romantic' position might serve to distance the participant from emotional disclosure. Immediately after several 'new man' admissions, apparently originating from the 'Best Friend Romantic' position that included being comfortable crying

and being transparent with feelings, Kevin is asked for his views of feelings and romance (see Extract 40). There are indications of some tension for Kevin: the extended silence; and that he replies ignoring feelings (despite saying he agrees 'with what the lads are saying'). Instead he appears to mobilise the 'Strategic Romantic' position, deploying the 'reciprocity' repertoire that is drawn from 'economic' discourses. It is my reading that he is distancing himself from 'new man', restoring heteronormative order and preserving his masculinity.

Extract 40 (all-male 2)

**What do you think about feelings and romance there Kevin?** (silence 01.15.11-01.15.15)

Kevin: I don't know. I agree with what the lads are saying, it is a-, in a long relationship-, everyone's different aren't they? So it is I guess, that's when the relationship breaks down. If there's a conflict and you two are being a bit more selfish I think as I've got older I've, kind of, learned to be a bit more tolerant and a bit less-, and so I worked quite hard when we first got together to make the transition from being single and being able to do what you want all the time to actually having a give and take and then, I think that-, then building the trust and still being able to recognise each other's needs and wants.

#### Strategic Romantic vs. Traditional Romantic

A different meaning may be given to the same behaviour from different positions, thus potentially generating a change of romantic practice. In Extract 41, Rob appears to be questioning the merit of ironing as a romantic gesture. It is probable that from the 'Traditional Romantic' position housework is not a proper gesture, yet from a 'Strategic Romantic' position, if you do not already do the housework, then it is romantic (and thereby earns you brownie points). While, Rob's wife rates the ironing over the wine, it seems that Rob might not rate the gesture of ironing. I suggest that from the 'Traditional Romantic' position the gesture should in some way reflect yourself as a gentleman. See how Rob refers to 'A lot of people' and 'My wife', but not himself. It seems that the 'Traditional Romantic' might be somewhat reluctant to being positioned here.

Extract 41 (all-male 1)

Rob: Can not romance be shown, as in, doing the housework?

**What do you reckon? It's your opinion.**

Rob: My wife said it, it can be some, some days. A lot of people, you know, do the ironing, instead of getting the wine out.

**Yes. As, like, a treat for them?**

Rob: She rates it, you know, it's the cost of me doing it.

Exploring moral commitment, I presented the participants with a scenario of a woman who is finding romance with her tennis partner, whilst married to an alcoholic. In Extract 42 it can be observed that the scenario troubles Greg who appears to be located in the 'romantic love'

discourse. He wants the woman to leave her alcoholic husband and enter a monogamous relationship with the tennis partner, potentially in this way her infidelity will be redeemed. The other men seem to mobilise the 'economic' discourse as a lens for her behaviour, which Greg arguably greets with some disdain. It might be seen that Greg is committed to the moral code of the 'romantic love' discourse, which upholds monogamy and love as the basis of marriage.

Extract 42 (all-male 1)

Greg: And she's unhappy, and, I don't think her husband is (talking over each other 01.27.32-01.27.38). (Laughter)

Chris: I don't think he cares. (Talking over each other 01.27.39-01.27.43). (Laughter)

Greg: If she's never happy then, she's gonna go there, why not just go around with the tennis player?

**'Cause I think, uh-,**

M: That's what's, she's got it too good.

Greg: She's got a bit of a good thing with him, isn't it?

**I think she's got it pretty good with, uh-,**

Ian: It's like that, they're there for one reason only but then they do, they go and live their own separate lives. He likes his drink and she likes to go off play tennis and do things, or meet people.

Greg: If she's only staying there 'cause she's onto a good thing, there's obviously no romance at all is there?

...

Greg: You know, in your mind does it make it right, what she's doing?

In this way, potentially the 'Strategic Romantic' may be mobilised to legitimise a range of behaviour that might fall outside the moral code of the 'romantic love' and 'intimacy' discourses.

See also 6.3.5 *Poor Me* (ref. Extract 30) for a discussion as to whether a male located in the 'Strategic Romantic' position may somehow mobilise a female's move from the 'Traditional Receiver' position to the 'Poor Me' position.

### **6.3.9 Best Friend Romantic**

The 'Best Friend Romantic' position is located in the 'intimacy' discourse. While not the most commonly expressed position, its presence appeared to feature across all the focus groups. The women and men who occupy this position tend to value together time and emotional closeness. This position seems to construct romance as collaborative, involving thoughtfulness and everyday relationship warmth.

The 'Best Friend Romantic' position tends to value 'new man' and is located outside of the dominant 'romantic love' discourse, as such the mobilisation of this position, by either males or females, appears to invite tension. For the most part, mobilisation of this subject position seemed to be sanctioned in the focus groups if it oscillated with occupation of the 'Traditional Receiver' or 'Traditional Romantic' positions (ref. Extracts 21, 31 & 45) and was accompanied with 'life-stages' discourses (ref. Extract 36 & 43). Potentially, this is a way of preserving 'romantic love's' privileged status as the dominant discourse.

In Extract 43 below we see that the 'life-stages' discourse and being older, is likely being used to legitimise the 'Best Friend Romantic' position. We might observe that being physically desired, which tends to be indicative of the 'romantic love' discourse is being cautiously trumped by the 'intimacy' discourse and the idea of having a personality match that will facilitate long-term closeness.

#### Extract 43 (mixed group)

George: It's more companionship as well, is it. You know, so you've got-, even my-, my age, you know, like, I speak to girls at work and that and they say, 'Oh, I want to find a boyfriend etc.' And, like, yes, as you get older, looks, etc. it doesn't come in to it as much, does it? It's more about the companionship and people's personality.

Marion: Yeah.

Sandra: Yeah.

George: It's nice growing-, growing old together.

In addition, the 'Best Friend Romantic' appears to be mobilised in response to claims of relationship struggles (ref. Extract 29). The 'Best Friend Romantic' tends to privilege communication and emotional expression and its location in the 'intimacy' discourse draws on the language of therapy. See Extract 44 below whereby the men in the group advocate 'communication', and appear to mobilise the 'Best Friend Romantic' position as a way of contending with Justin's sense of dejection.

#### Extract 44 (all-male 2)

Eric: But that's where it comes down to, like you say, that communication.

...

Justin: Like I say, you know, you might be stressed, a lot of things on your mind, not sleeping well. So you get home from work. One of you cooks a dinner, and you just want to go straight to bed, if you're feeling like that, don't have a good night's sleep. That can make your partner, or vice versa, a bit dejected, you know, all you're doing is coming home, having dinner, going to bed. But if you're not sleeping well, you can't really function very well, can you? So it's like-,

...

Simon: That's, that's where the communication comes in.

Potentially, the 'Best Friend Romantic' position may shield men and women from romantic love disappointments. For example, Simon spoke about a gift that backfired from a 'Traditional Romantic' position, but also how it was not a problem because, she was after all being honest with him (see Appendix 29: FDA Summary Papers). Rather than experiencing a rejected gift as a personal failure, Simon apparently in the 'Best Friend Romantic' position and located in the 'intimacy' discourse may be able to privilege the *honesty* that he has with his wife. Meanwhile, Sonia attests that because she went so long without romance she is grateful for small gestures—like a Kit Kat (ref. Extract 27). Davies and Harré (1999) describe a weaving of positions within and across discourses, as people navigate: the emotional meaning attached to a position, the stories that can be made sense of via specific positions, and the moral order that legitimates the choice.

The 'Best Friend Romantic' appears to be relatively ungendered in its speaking rights and practices; however, male mobilisation of this position may have necessitated performances of hegemonic masculinity, as shown next.

#### **6.3.9.1 Males Mobilising the Best Friend Romantic**

It is my understanding that the 'Best Friend Romantic' and the 'Family Man' are the least aligned to dominant norms of masculinity—as they tend to reflect 'new man' (as shown in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain). In Extract 45 we can see that 'new man' Greg, who frequently appears to locate himself within the 'intimacy' discourse and occupies the 'Best Friend Romantic' position, might also be intent on expressing his sexual prowess.

##### **Extract 45 (all-male 1)**

Greg: Yes. That's the thing. That's how I found out, like anything. (Talking over each other 26.34-26.38). I'll take the-, I went in too far, but the Jacuzzi was great. (Laughter 26.41-26.43) It was. (Laughter 26.44-26.49) I mean, she loves all that and I love all that, if that answers your question, you know, for me, you know, we're always supporting each other.

The 'Jacuzzi' suggests a sexual tone. Indeed, Coates (2007) writes that the metaphor of Jacuzzi 'plays on the fact that the main feature is that water spurts out in an ejaculatory way' (p. 46). Potentially then 'new man' Greg may be going to efforts to ensure that he is seen as masculine. Coates (2004a) says that men, 'normally choose to present themselves in alignment with the norms of hegemonic masculinity' (p. 200). In her studies of male friendship groups, she observes that men are careful not to come across as 'feminine'.

Meanwhile Suhail, who frequently appears to occupy the 'Best Friend Romantic' position (ref. Extract 36), tended to dominate proceedings in his focus group. He asked the most direct

questions of other participants, which as mentioned before can be recognised as a hallmark of powerful people (Coates, 2004b). Suhail also most frequently used wit to interrupt conversation and dominate the floor (see Extracts 35 and 48). This behaviour might be read as a way for Suhail to prove his masculine muscle in a bid to ensure that he did not come across as 'feminine'. His credibility may be as Edley and Wetherell (1997) found 'dependent on some level of proximity to or correspondence with those of the macho men' (p. 211).

Furthermore, it appears that when men like Chris who typically seem to place themselves in the 'romantic love' or 'economic' discourses, express a location in the 'intimacy' discourse and mobilise the 'Best Friend Romantic' position, they tend to make considerable effort to present hegemonic masculinity. See Extract 46 below, whereby Chris is using humour when describing his act of listening, in this way he may be seeking to preserve his heteronormative position. Similarly, Williams' (2008) research with working-class fathers suggests that humour was used to divert attention from vulnerability and reinforce their own heterosexuality.

Extract 46 (all-male 1)

Chris: So, she's upset about something, or-, I tend to be sympathetic with her. She may come home and she's stressed by this person. I pay her a lot of attention, I'd listen. I mean, I spend a lot of time listening. We can-, I mean, I've talked to her at night, where I fell asleep, and woke up, and she's still talking. (Laughter 32.41-32.44) I did say I was tired. (Laughter)

The likely obligation to perform hegemonic masculinity appears to be reinforced by female participants. For example, in Extract 47 Rita seems to be feeling vulnerable and almost apologising for her 'new man' partner and his love of romantic films when she uses a tag question and says: 'They have their little moments, don't they?' Note Trisha's choice to cite her husband, and deploy strong macho language to chastise this 'new man' behaviour.

Extract 47 (all-female 2)

Trisha: Yeah. Men don't want to go and watch romantic films, they want to go and watch action films.

Sonia: No, he'll watch romantic films, but he's quite happy to sit at home and watch them, when the kids have gone to bed, as opposed to going to the cinema.

Rita: Mine's obsessed with them.

Trisha: He likes romantic films?

Rita: Yeah (spoken in a high pitch voice). It's like 'PS I love you' is his favourite film. (Laughter).

Trisha: Andy'd be like, 'Get this shit off my TV.'

Yeah (x2).

Rita: (Silence) They have their little moments, don't they?

The apparent commitment to heteronormativity is also observed in Extract 48. It is my reading that here we can see females conspiring with the males, criticising feminine 'new man' and upholding hegemonic masculinity with their comments such as: 'that's not right'; 'bloke should be a bloke'; 'it's weird'; 'it's a bit too vain and it looks odd, it looks so artificial', and finally - 'it almost looks feminine'.

Extract 48 (mixed group)

George: I think it goes back to what Sandra said, though, I think these days, you know, men are taking more of an effort though, aren't they? You know, especially, like, programmes, like, TOWIE and, like, like, blokes I know they have their eyebrows threaded, they have, um, err,

Lynn: You see, that's not right- (talking over each other)

George: -sunbeds and stuff like that. I think a bloke should be a bloke (Talking over each other 50.18).

Jimmy: Some people, on the sunbeds and they even have that fake tan, I just-, I've never really never been on a sunbed. I remember years ago, the wooden ones you used to have. And I'm not doing that-, I'm not having that fake tan put on me. (Inaudible 50.37) and I don't think the men that do do that-, or, or-,

Suhail: I do that sometimes. [Suhail is Asian British]<sup>38</sup> (Laughter 50.44-50.50).

Jimmy: I know men that do that, it's never, it's never appealed to me. Some reason, I don't know. Like, I know some lady, who dates-, older men. Well, she wouldn't, like it either if I was like that.

George: I just think (talking over each other 51.01-51.08).

Yeah, George, you were saying?

George: I wouldn't like, um, if I was a lady. I wouldn't like my husband or partner in the bathroom longer than me. I mean, you're walking down the street, you look in the mirror more than the woman does. You know. It's weird. It's a bit too vain, sort of, thing.

Lynn: I think it looks strange, as well, when men are too, like, primmed and pruned. It looks odd. With all those eyebrow waxing, and fake tan and the teeth whitening. And it looks so artificial. It's-, it almost looks feminine, it's-,

Coates (2004a) observes about everyday talk that: 'gender demarcations are carefully maintained with women colluding in constructing male dominance' (p. 196).

### **6.3.9.2 Females Mobilising the Best Friend Romantic**

The 'Best Friend Romantic' position appears to be relatively ungendered and tends to view men and women sharing responsibilities and collaborating in thoughtful acts of kindness. As mentioned above, mobilising the 'Best Friend Romantic' seems to be permitted when the male or female speaker additionally employed the 'life-stages' discourse and/or oscillated the

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<sup>38</sup> Given Suhail's ethnicity, the remark 'I do that [fake tan] sometimes' is delivered and received as ironic humour, and rewarded with six seconds of laughter. Suhail frequently deploys wit as a way of dominating proceedings (this is mentioned earlier in 6.3.9.1 *Males Mobilising the Best Friend Romantic*).

position with the 'Traditional Receiver' position. Otherwise potentially it would become conspicuous and might represent a threat to hegemonic masculinity.

It is my reading that this issue can be seen in Extract 49, here the women appear to go to great effort to distinguish between romance being constructed as special times (and heroic efforts) versus caring, which I suggest represent the discourses of 'romantic love' and 'intimacy' respectively. In this extract we can see Sharon apparently located within the 'intimacy' discourse and mobilising the 'Best Friend Romantic' position to directly disagree with the 'romantic love' discourse. The protracted silences at the end of the extract might be seen to reflect the debate and resistance to each other's position.

Extract 49 (all-female 1)

Carol: Does romance-, you can't have that you can keep romance up every day 'cause then it wouldn't be special.

Tina: It wouldn't be romantic, would it?

Carol: No, it wouldn't be romance.

Tina: No.

Sharon: You see, no, now I disagree. I think you can be romantic on a daily basis and it doesn't require half an hour, an hour, I think it's just-,

...

Carol: I think they're caring, like, every day, you know, but, I mean, like I said before it's, where is the line?

Julie: Where's the line?

Carol: It's just where is the difference between romance and caring?

Annie: Yeah. I think romance is actually, you know, going out for the night, making a real effort, sort of thing.

Carol: Laughing together and enjoying each other's company.

Annie: Yeah, whereas caring is-, (talking over each other 55.07).

Sharon: I don't think you need to go out and-,

Annie: Yeah, but, to me, what he does for you is just caring.

...

Annie: Yes, yeah, whereas the caring is there all the time. (Silence 56.01-56.05).

Sharon: What you were saying there about, there about romance and you being the centre of attention but surely those little snippets of a cuddle, kiss, a text message or whatever, those are all making you feel really special and that's the romantic element of being in a relationship. (Talking over each other 56.23). (Silence 56.25-56.29).

Throughout the focus groups there appeared to be regular resistance from the women to being positioned in the 'intimacy' discourse (ref. Extract 2, 16, 20) and I believe this is partly because, with its relatively ungendered notions, it may be the least respectful of heteronormative order—and privileges 'new man' over 'retributive man' or heroic masculine ideals. Indeed,

across the focus groups women seemed to collude in male performance of hegemonic masculinity—they appeared to desire manly men.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

This chapter offers an interpretation of the romantic discursive terrain of the participants in the focus groups as resulting from the FDA. It attempts to demonstrate how women and men in established relationships construct romance and are positioned by ready-made discourses. It can be seen that the available discourses and the associated constructions of romantic love tend to reflect courtly love practices and acts of friendship; in this way it could be argued that they are not particularly far-reaching.

It is my reading that the female and male participants occupied different positions in the romantic discursive terrain. Giddens (1992) predicted that gender likely represented a major difference in how romantic love is constructed. Furthermore, in working-class society, Shumway (2003) observed that separate gender spheres continue to define their marriages and partnerships. In which case, it was probable that my working-class participants would take up gendered positions.

Given that masculinity per se was not the specific subject of investigation it was interesting to see how the focus groups and analysis reflects masculinity-in-action. Yet the focus groups' preoccupation with presenting hegemonic masculinity should have come as no surprise: when Wetherell and Edley (1999) explored male identities, they found that even men who might deride gender expectations, by knitting for example, they still explained their difference from other men in terms of their strength and independence—evoking dominant norms of masculinity, and thereby indicating the pervasiveness of the 'heterosexual' discourses. As Gough and Edwards (1998) remark, in their seminal article 'The beer talking' that one should not 'deny the expectations and even pressures on men towards 'heterosexual' performance' (p. 432).

Relatedly, the FDA indicated that some male participants might shield themselves from the emotional vulnerability that they faced when located in the 'romantic love' discourse—and attempting to 'please her'—by moving to the 'Strategic Romantic' position. This position and the female occupied 'Hard Realist' are located in the 'economic' discourse; it seems that occupants of the 'economic' discourse (male and female) might justify their location here with recall to a distressing experience that has resulted from prior location in the 'romantic love' discourse. In this way, positioning in the romantic discursive terrain may be understood as pivoting on emotional meaning making. This concept is further expanded upon in Chapter 8: Discursive Emotional Dynamics.

## Chapter 7

# An Insider Perspective of Romantic Realities

The IPA of the twelve in-depth interviews sought to gain an insider perspective of those participants' experiential and emotional romantic realities. Specifically, it pursued answers to the following research questions:

- What does romance mean to people in established relationships?
- How do people in established relationships experience romance?

(As a reminder, my analytic journey for the IPA can be traced in 5.1.2 *The Analysis – IPA*.)

The analysis was fruitful in offering answers to these questions, it suggests that the lived romantic reality of participants may be read via the lenses of three master experiential themes: *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane*; *Striving to Protect the Self*; *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction* (as shown in Table 7-1, with accordant sub-themes).<sup>39</sup> These master themes attempt to go beyond describing the experience of romance in a linear way; rather they seek to provide an interpretive account of this experience and illustrate what romance may mean in the established relationship. In this way, the reading hopes to reflect the complexity of the romantic experiential and emotional meaning making of the participants.

Table 7-1: An Insider Perspective as Summarised by the IPA's Themes

Experiential Master Theme	Experiential Sub-Themes
<i>Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane</i>	Romance Experienced as a Lift
	Savouring Grand Gestures
	<i>Romance as the Physical Sparkle</i>
<i>Striving to Protect the Self</i>	Honouring a Personal Romantic Code
	Social Comparison
	Romantic Evidence at the Ready
<i>Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction</i>	Watching the Romantic Equilibrium
	When the Transaction Breaks Down

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<sup>39</sup> To assist the reader, I have italicised the IPA experiential master themes and associated sub-themes; these themes operate as lenses to the affect-laden lived experience of romance.

These experiential themes, which are identified by the use of italics, may be generalised across participants to accommodate the diversity that is articulated in their style of romance—whether that is going to the theatre or getting drunk together. Furthermore, these lenses, attempt to offer an integrated perspective on how romance may be experienced; like looking at an item in a globe and seeing it from different angles. In this way, we can see that sex, for example, might be experienced by participants as: *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane*; sexual initiative may make up a *Personal Romantic Code* that serves to *Protect the Self*; and sexual frequency might be valued as a critical element of *Romance as the Relationship Building Transaction*.

This chapter expands on each of the experiential master themes and explains the underlying sub-themes with the use of quotes selected from the corpus of interview transcripts. Supporting this discussion are comprehensive theme tables that present related citations from all interviewed participants, as shown in Appendix 31: Insider Perspective Final Formulation.

Together, the themes offer a reading of what romance may mean to people in established relationships and how they might experience romance (or lack of). To this end, I have highlighted the experience of those participants who are in non-romantic relationships; how these participants appear to make sense of that experience, labelled as ‘non romantic’, serves to underscore the reality of what is the romantic experience. As an example, Elaine’s readiness to exchange her husband’s gifts seems to underline the meaning of chivalric gestures within romantic relationships.

Finally, in accounting for participants’ experiences of romance in their relationship we need to consider their discursive resources, to establish the means that they have come to understand that romance (or lack of). Hence, I conclude this chapter with reference to the FDA (as presented in Chapter 6: Romantic Discursive Terrain) and seek to demonstrate how the take up of available subject positions might produce romantic understandings and realities.

## **7.1 An Insider Perspective via Experiential Master Themes**

### **7.1.1 Master Theme 1: Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane**

In undertaking the phenomenological analysis of the in-depth interviews, it seemed evident that participants prize *Romance as a Sparkle in the Mundane*. It is my reading that the daily lives of those in romantic relationships were elevated with romantic acts, as reflected in the first sub-theme: *Romance Experienced as a Lift*. The second sub-theme *Savouring Grand Gestures* attempts to illustrate that while lavish chivalric gestures might be rare, they are cherished and repeatedly recalled. Thirdly, *Romance as the Physical Sparkle* seeks to capture the private pleasure of sexual intimacy and feeling attractive.

All the participants in romantic relationships appeared to converse about their unique style of romance, which speaks to the range and blend of activities that bring sparkle; this may be getting drunk together, going out to dinner or it might be primarily focused on sex.

Insider perspectives from the non-romantic participants

Rather than look to the relationship for needed sparkle, it seemed that those without romance create *Sparkle in the Mundane* in other ways: by buying themselves treats and prioritising time with others. I suspect Martyn lacks romance in his relationship<sup>40</sup>; he divests himself from grand gestures (his wife wants an eternity ring and he treats it as a chore) and appears to resist being separated from his children. Meanwhile, Elaine and Jackie lightheartedly divulge rejecting their husbands' attempts at grand gestures. Elaine seems to experience her husband's purchase of jewellery as funny and amusing, while Jacquie appears exasperated by her man's lack of romantic initiative and buys her own jewellery. These participants do not speak about attraction or desire. It seems that Elaine is particularly adverse to sex and is discomforted that she has to contend with an expectation of sex in the relationship. It can be read that Martyn also feels awkward about physical intimacy, he and his wife sit at separate ends of the settee and he finds himself joking when he holds his wife's hand.

#### 7.1.1.1 Theme: Romance Experienced as a Lift

The participants tend to describe feeling 'bogged down' and 'run down' by ordinary life and romance appears to provide welcome respite from the same old, mundane daily activities. It seems to add sparkle to their life:

*[...] and it's like five kids and it's raining, [laughs] house is a mess, [...] but then the excitement is first thing I'll say to her if she says, like, it's a tough-, you know, a bad day and it's been a tough day, it's like that, 'It's our weekend this week.' It creates a lot-, it creates a lot of a buzz and enjoyment.* Peter, pg. 42

Sending a loving text message, running a bath or stroking hair, are some of the activities described by the participants as highlights. They seem to provide a lift out of the daily toil and may serve to make them feel significant and appreciated, while also reinforcing a valued sense of connection and intimacy. Tenderness appears to be expressed as they buoy each other up with romantic gestures:

*I, like, sent him a text message a couple of weeks ago and just said, umm, 'I love you. Missing you,' and his reply was, umm, 'You must sense that I'm not having a good day.'* Hilary, pg. 15

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<sup>40</sup> Martyn talks about the 'struggle' and 'massive upheaval' of losing romance after they had children (see 7.1.3 *Master Theme 3: Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*). He talks about recovering from that experience and describes the relationship as being 'back on track'. Yet, Martyn regularly refers to himself as one of the children; during the interview he would go off on a tangent talking about having fun with the kids and needed to be guided back to the topic of romance.

Weekend getaways, spa days, or going out for a nice meal are considered romantic events. Such special occasions may be seen as treats and indulgences that potentially offer sought after escape from the bleak reality of the daily grind. It is my reading that special occasions give them something to look forward to. These periodic events might be seen to brighten everyday living and for some participants it may make life feel more worthwhile:

*So, it makes it worthwhile. Well, it just-, I think you need it, because if it just carries on, you know, nothing changes, and it's quite mundane, then it becomes defeated and run down... Will, pg. 9*

#### **7.1.1.2 Theme: Savouring Grand Gestures**

The sparkle that dazzles appears to be the grand gesture, whether lavish purchases of flowers, staying somewhere wildly romantic or a sentimental proposal. Potentially, these are treasured as they are rare events in the face of practical concerns like money and children and gives them a slice of the fairy tale. Both male and female participants seemed to enjoy *Savouring Grand Gestures*; they animatedly recalled the details, speaking enthusiastically, expressing awe at the surprise and joy in the experience. The gesture might even be retold within the interview—as if the retelling provides them with extra sparkle:

*We stopped in a suite, and it was just-, if you describe it, what it was like, it was lovely. It was romantic. We had dinner in a library served by waiters in, umm, penguin suits and everything, and it, it was-, how would you describe that day? That, that day was amazing. Went to the spa followed by dinner. And lovely suite, so-, and do you know what I mean? Kenny, pg. 6*

*And it ended up being really super special, because when we got to the room there was, like, umm, petals on the bed and there was towels made out in, like, heart shapes. Hilary, pg. 2*

It appeared that the male participants who orchestrate grand gestures, take personal pride in making her dreams come true: like flying her over the grand canyon or buying her dream car. These men seemed highly invested in these gestures and may spend months, even years, planning and saving for them. They tended to speak about planning these events as if they are on a Special Forces undercover assignment and they express excitement, fear, bravery and vigilance. They also appeared to reveal a great sense of achievement:

*I went out and bought her the platinum ring that she always wanted, and hid it in my case, which is dangerous, because you're probably not supposed to do that. Hid it in my case, umm, and was waiting for the special night. Peter, pg. 8*

See also 7.1.2 *Master Theme 2: Striving to Protect the Self*, the grand gesture can be drawn upon as romantic evidence.

#### **7.1.1.3 Theme: Romance as the Physical Sparkle**

From the analysis of the interviews, it was seen that both males and female participants in romantic relationships cherish sex. It appeared to provide a sparkle to the day; this valued intimacy, is described as a deserved pleasure—as well as cheeky and fun:

*Just our time, lock the bedroom door, and just stay in bed [...] just make that little, private our time, otherwise he's the same as, you know, we'd be in that same old, stuck in that rut, doing the same old, same old, you know. So, that, to us, is our, you know, our own time*  
Hannah, pg. 19

The participants in romantic relationships appear to seek being desired and seen as attractive. They seem to get 'a kick out' of each other's looks. Accordingly, I observed the participants in romantic relationships faithfully attending to and complimenting appearances:

*He trains ever such a lot so he's got a great physique on him so I'll often say to him how nice he looks, yeah.* Lily, pg. 14

Dressing up for a special night out is regularly referenced by participants. Potentially, it is a chance to make the best of themselves and discard their everyday attire. Participants, in describing getting polished up, seem to reveal excitement and anticipation, along with evident pride in each other:

*[...] when she comes down in, in her-, in her nice clothes and nice dress, and she comes down or whatever, and you're thinking, 'That effort there is for me'. 'That's for me,' and it's like she-, well, she might feel the same. I come down, get your best suit on, do whatever you-, everything's polished, you're gleaming, and they're thinking, 'Yes.'* Kenny, pg. 16

Having explained my reading of the master theme *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane* and its sub-themes, we can now turn to the second of the master experiential themes, *Striving to Protect the Self* as an interconnected lens to participants' lived romantic reality.

### **7.1.2 Master Theme 2: Striving to Protect the Self**

For participants having romance in their relationship may be seen as a sign of success—a badge of honour. It might communicate that they are not boring or enduring a dull relationship (referenced as a common fear in *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane*, see Appendix 31: Insider Perspective Final Formulation). Potentially, for the female participants having romance is testament to being a 'good wife' and having a successful relationship. For men, romance seems to be an endorsement of their actions and masculinity. It is my reading that romance serves to make the individuals feel good about themselves and their role in the relationship. All of the participants appeared highly protective of themselves as they spoke about the romance in their relationships. As illustrated by the supporting three sub-themes: participants seemed to indicate unswerving commitment to *Honouring a Personal Romantic Code*; they appeared to speak heatedly using *Social Comparison*; and seemed comforted and assured to have *Romantic Evidence at the Ready*.

#### Insider perspectives from the non-romantic participants

Of the twelve participants only Jackie and Elaine owned up to relationships that were void of romance. Jackie seemed to fervently blame 'the problem' of the lack of romance on her husband (his lack of *Personal Code*), even though I suspect that she herself is the likely

inhibitor of romance. Meanwhile, Martyn did not admit to his relationship as currently lacking romance; he appeared to express some nervousness in the interview, like he was on shaky ground and anxious that he might be found out. This nervousness is likely due to the association between romance and manliness, and that a 'real man' would not stay in a romance-less union. Notice below how Martyn insists that all happy couple time is by definition romantic; his use of 'in fact' and repetition of 'every' suggests that he wants to convince me, and possibly himself, that they have romance (and that he is a man):

*But in, in fact no, because if we're happy, yes, every, every, every time it would be (romantic), there would be no reason it wouldn't be.* Martyn, pg. 17

Meanwhile, Elaine is apparently concerned not to be perceived as 'very boring' and presented a few couple activities as romantic, like going on date night, which in reality is an evening spent with another couple. These non-romantic participants seem to be sensitive to critique; they appear to work particularly hard to *Protect the Self* and are vociferous in respect to *Social Comparison*.

#### **7.1.2.1 Theme: Honouring a Personal Romantic Code**

Throughout the analysis I observed that participants tended to act on *Personal Romantic Codes*, a principled set of romantic behaviours. The apparent unrelenting commitment to these behaviours may suggest that they stem from values and make up part of their identity. Potentially these codes may move with the individual from one relationship to another as a way of sustaining or boosting confidence and self-esteem. Indeed, there is some acknowledgement of partners being indifferent to these behaviours. I noticed that emphatic words like 'definitely', 'important', 'never' and 'always' feature heavily in this theme; and the tone is assertive and confident.

*I'd always pay for the meal when we go out. Umm, [pause] I spoil her on her birthday, always get her flowers, like...* John, pg. 11

*I might not necessarily cook because I'm not the best cook anyway but I'll probably make the effort in the bedroom department I suppose. I think so [spoken assertively].* Lily, pg. 9

At times participants' expressions could be described as insistent, proud and occasionally smug:

*[...] my mates say to me, 'Come out, come out,' and I turn them down. She goes, 'Why are you turning them down for?' I says, "Cause I wanna spend the time with you'* Don, pg. 18

*I'm doing it not just for him, but for myself as well, you know. I'm still taking pride in my appearance, you know.* Hilary, pg. 10

*[...] I wouldn't say romance is his first trait, definitely not.* Jackie, pg. 2

Other quotes appear to amplify the feel good factor—the self-esteem enhancement—of acting on these *Personal Romantic Codes*:

*[...] dress up for him, and make gestures to him, and so forth, so it was all good [...] I felt good. I felt good, you know. It gives you a bit of, as you say, confidence boost, you know, your self-esteem...* Hannah, pg. 14

### 7.1.2.2 Theme: Social Comparison

Being invested in having a romantic relationship, the participants appeared to be sensitive to comparisons and seemed ready to defend their relationship and actions (or lack of). When discussing the romance of friends, or that presented via social media, some participants might mock the situation and score points by lauding relationship length:

*She was like, you know, 'He's my soulmate,' and blah, blah, blah and, err, they've split up now and you're just like, 'Oh, okay.'* Elaine, pg. 12

Participants seemed to frequently claim the moral high ground and actively engaged in downward comparison to reinforce this sense of superiority:

*[...] her proposal was, 'Er,' her ex-husband. 'Er, yeah, just get married. Let's just get married then,' or something stupid...* Peter, pg. 18

*I do do things, probably that not every average, normal couple would do all the time*  
Hilary, pg. 9

A few participants, like Kelly and John, appeared to use *Social Comparison* to affirm acceptance of their current romantic situation. For them, it may provide a sense of peace and further contentment within the relationship (see also 7.1.3 *Master Theme 3: Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*):

*[...] she expects to be wined and dined and, she's got this picture in her head of how it should be and she never gets those expectations met by her partner. So I think she sets the bar too high [...] I think she just expects it 24/7, then she gets really upset all the time...*  
Kelly, pg. 15

### 7.1.2.3 Theme: Romantic Evidence at the Ready

From the analysis of the in-depth interviews, it was apparent that all participants in romantic relationships were quick to frame thoughtful relationship gestures as romantic including 'doing the washing up', 'buying a crème egg' or fixing 'window wipers'. Potentially, in this way they magnify the value of the gesture (it becomes a little *Sparkle in the Mundane*) and provides readily available evidence that serves to *Protect the Romantic Self*. Noticeably, Don, John and Martyn repeatedly use the word 'fact', perhaps to add weight to the—sometimes questionable—romantic evidence. Irrespective of the quality of evidence, this reframing appears to endorse the self and relationship, offering comfort and assurance:

*I think the fact that she knows-, well, I've seen the window wipers aren't working, I go out and do that. I think the fact that that day I thought about her, that she finds it romantic.*  
Don, pg. 19

*[...] have a good conversation about things that are important to her. [...] And things that matter and things that we need to resolve. And things we needed to talk about and she'd be happy. [...] They don't have to be romantic. For it to be a romantic night.* Peter, pg. 27

As mentioned earlier, seemingly not wanting to be seen as unromantic, Martyn framed all couple time as by definition being romantic:

*[...] the two of us happy, it's going to be romantic, do you know what I mean? That's-, in fact, that, yes, that, that would be it, realistically. It doesn't-, I'm not saying every time, but do you know what I mean? But in, in fact no, because if we're happy, yes, every, every, every time it would be (romantic), there would be no reason it wouldn't be.* Martyn, pg. 17

See also 7.1.1.2 *Savouring Grand Gestures*, a sub-theme of *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane*, the grand gesture may be drawn upon as ready romantic evidence.

Having explained my reading of the master theme *Striving to Protect the Self* and its sub-themes, we can now turn to the third of the three master experiential themes, *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction* as a final lens to the participants' romantic reality.

### **7.1.3 Master Theme 3: Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction**

Throughout the interviews, participants appeared to speak candidly yet tenderly about their relationship's unique and successful style of romance—those romantic activities that bring sparkle to their lives. As mentioned in *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane*, the formula for romance is likely bespoke to the couple, it could involve going out for dinner, weekend getaways or be primarily focused on sex. This romantic formula may serve to build warmth and foster relationship strength. Underpinning these activities appears to be a *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*, which succeeds when roles and responsibilities are fulfilled.

Accordingly, as reflected in the two supporting sub-themes: participants *Watching the Romantic Equilibrium* tend to be heartened by displays of matching effort and may be disgruntled by imbalance or transaction misdemeanours; *When the Transaction Breaks Down* participants may feel sad, rejected and experience loss of self-esteem.

#### Insider perspectives from the non-romantic participants

It is my reading that the non-romantic participants Jackie and Elaine choose not to contribute to *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*. They seemed to acknowledge that they are not putting any effort into romance: Elaine believes all romance leads to sex, so she takes control and organises their couple time—like evenings out—to avoid romance and avert sexual obligations. Apparently Jackie feels strongly that her husband should be doing it all not her. Elaine and Jackie tend to take their husbands for granted and seem to hold no fear of a relationship split. This confidence in marriage strength likely rests on the proven endurance of their coupledness.

Martyn's experience of romance evidently changed with the arrival of children. Earlier in his relationship, it appears that *Romance was a Relationship Building Transaction* and he benefited from being the sole recipient of his wife's affection and then *When the Transaction Broke Down*, after the birth of his first child, he seemed to feel displaced, resentful and depressed. After which, he likely shielded himself from this distress by retreating from the *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*. Today, Martyn generally manages to side-step romantic expectations with an apparent singular focus on the children.

### 7.1.3.1 Theme: Watching the Romantic Equilibrium

The perceived balanced effort of both persons may serve to build a harmonious and fulfilling relationship. As such, the participant's romantic efforts in relation to their partner's are potentially under scrutiny. There appears to be a romantic gauge operating that has a highly affective quality: relief may be felt and contentment experienced when balance and a romantic state is achieved; concern and anxiety may present themselves when there is uncertainty of a satisfactory outcome; with disappointment and bad tempers tending to accompany imbalance.

Across the participants there appears to be varying degrees of conscious awareness of the romantic gauge being in operation and its underlying desire for equilibrium:

*But I don't-, I'm not expecting anything back, but you [pause] you-, I suppose in a way you are, but you're not.* Don, pg. 5

Conscious awareness tends to come with disappointment and the frustration that accompanies a lack of balance. Below, Hannah is likely fatigued and feeling sorry for herself about doing all the giving, whilst Kelly is cross with her husband for not prioritising their arrangements and failing to match her effort:

*[...] there's been a lot of time where it's me doing the giving, you know, he's been the recipient, but, not getting it back in vice versa.* Hannah, pg. 3

*[...] we were meant to have a nice night out but he'd been to the football beforehand and he'd got too drunk. So it wasn't what it was meant to be. So I was really annoyed then. 'Cause I'd made the effort and he hadn't.* Kelly, pg. 11

Participants seem to express sensitivity to their partner's moods in respect to their romantic action (or lack of), for example crankiness may suggest that they need to take corrective measures:

*If I go all night without giving him a kiss or a cuddle he'd be like, 'Oh you haven't really bothered with me tonight,' that kind of mentality, you know?* Lily, pg. 10

As well as being highly affective, *Watching the Romantic Equilibrium* appears to have an embodied aspect too. It may be seen that participants in romantic relationships are monitoring the affective state of their partners and might use body language as clues:

*[...] feel the connection from your partner. That everything's right, eye contact, umm, [pause] and just how they look, how they go at ease.* Peter, pg. 25

*It's, you just-, you just know from the vibe you're getting and the smile that, that, that means, you know, you're-, well, put it this way, if it's not going well, you know [both laugh], do you know what I mean? So that's the way that I would weigh it up, but it-, you know, you just know, because they're enjoying it, they're laid back, they're chilled out.* Will, pg. 6

### 7.1.3.2 Theme: When the Transaction Breaks Down

Participants appeared to describe distressing periods when *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction* broke down. This could be due to illness and depression or consuming work patterns. Potentially, these are times when one or both parties do not fulfil their romantic roles. For participants, it seemed that commonly it was the arrival of children that derailed the *Relationship Transaction*.

When *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction* fails then the participants may lose the *Sparkle in the Mundane*—and are left with the mundane. Furthermore, without romance they may be less able to *Protect the Romantic Self* and are likely to lose confidence and self-esteem. Under these circumstances life might feel grim and bleak. Participants express sadness and talk about this bleakness as: 'going through the motions', 'wasted' and 'end of the fairy tale':

*[...] it was just, like, probably a wasted few years, do you know what I mean? Where it was kids had took over, house had took over, work had taken over, and we'd forgotten about maybe each other a little bit.* Kenny, pg. 12

There appears to be a victim—the person who played their part; who is likely wounded by the broken transaction. They might struggle to reconcile the situation and may feel neglected and sidelined, which tends to be accompanied with feelings of insecurity, jealousy, resentment and rejection:

*[...] he thought I was going off him. [...] we spoke, but then speaking would, like, get into a bit rowdy, arguing about it, and I was like, you know what, just leave me alone, I can't be bothered.* Hannah, pg. 7

*I'd got all of Julie's affection and vice-versa, you've then got somebody else coming into that situation, [...] obviously, some of Julie's affection would then-, or, it goes towards Hailey (their baby), so it's taken from me. [...] Maybe jealousy would be the way to describe it...* Martyn, pg. 11

Potentially, a concerted effort is then needed to re-claim *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*; the phrase 'step back' is voiced repeatedly by participants. They appear to talk about going back to what they used to do, thus reengaging with their proven romantic formula. Also in a sense, stepping back from being otherwise consumed—by work, children or illness:

*Doing something that, you know, well, that we'd used to do regularly, you know, pre-kids* Will, pg. 5

There seems to be a degree of 'cool' cognition needed in order to step back; a recognition that romance will not happen by itself. The participants appeared to internally reason with

themselves that a change to the current romance-less status quo is necessary and that they need to act. This meaning making is likely propelled by the fear of not having a relationship—or being stuck in a boring life:

*[...] then there might not be a relationship, do you know what I mean? Will, pg. 9*

It seems that they are coaching themselves to take responsibility for the situation, and reignite the spark, with the participants asserting: 'you need to start', 'you don't want to be stuck', 'you do need to make sure':

*[...] and then you think, 'We loved each other before there was children.' [...] and the thing is, you appreciate your partner and then start thinking you have to start making time for each other. You need to start making a bit more effort... Kenny, pg. 3*

This act of stepping back seems to range in difficulty. For participants who may have been some years out of the habit of romance, the act of stepping back may seem scary and challenging; and require marshalling courage:

*[...] I shouted in my head that, you know, 'You don't want to be stuck like this long already, so early in a relationship' Hannah, pg. 8*

For others stepping back appears to be less onerous and might be a conscious process, like a conversation, that is revisited when the romance slides every now and again:

*But that's down to me and my partner, isn't it? To make sure. And if it isn't, then talk about it to, to make it happen. [...] you know, 'When was the last time we went out?' Or, 'When was the last time-', do you know what I mean? That sort of conversation. Umm, I think sometimes you just need to take a, take a step back... Will, pg. 9*

*I think you need to take a step back sometimes and see what you've got. [...]. So I think you do have to make sure you're making it work as well. Kelly, pg. 16*

Having stepped back, and apparently reignited the romantic repertoire, the participants tend to report feeling upbeat and 'reenergised' and that they feel a 'buzz about doing stuff'; there returns a *Sparkle in the Mundane*. With the *Relationship Building Transaction* being again fulfilled they seem to feel affirmed by the warmth and the rekindled sense of closeness. Potentially, they are again *Honouring a Personal Romantic Code* and are more able to *Protect the Self*, which may have a confidence boosting, self-esteem enhancing effect.

*I felt good. I felt good, you know. It gives you a bit of, as you say, confidence boost, you know, your self-esteem, and, you know, the giving and the receiving back, the together part of it with us both. Hannah, pg. 15*

Together, the master themes *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane*; *Striving to Protect the Self*; and *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction* offer a reading of what romance may mean to people in established relationships and how they might experience romance (or lack of). As can be seen in this section, the master themes attempt to go beyond describing the experience of romance in a linear way; rather they provide an interpretive account of this experience.

## 7.2 The Discursive Production of Romantic Realities

The IPA describes, particularly via *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*, that romance in an established relationship may entail a roller coaster of emotions and potentially demand an exhausting amount of sense-making activity. There can be 'jealousy', 'struggle' and 'wasted years' as participants appear to contend with and re-evaluate the fairy tale.

Underlying this portrayal of lived experience is an assumption held by phenomenology that participants can describe their experience using language, yet hermeneutic phenomenology reminds us that a person's description of experience is always an interpretation. Resting on the significance of interpretation is the social constructionist stance taken in this thesis, which argues: 'that language constructs rather than describes, this (romantic) reality' (Willig, 2008, p.66). So while IPA gives us some purchase on what romance may mean from the perspective of a participant's engagement with it, the FDA and its identification of accessible ready-made discourses attempts to present the socio-cultural context and show the means by which romance in the established relationship may be understood by participants.

Larkin *et al.* (2006) echo the importance of the person-in-context and that phenomenological descriptions are determined by a person's current position:

From our point of view, an (IPA) account can be used to reveal something about the person, but *only*<sup>41</sup> that person's *current positioning* in relation to the world of objects – the bodies and bodies of knowledge – which have come to constitute love in their experience, culture and locale. (p.109)

To this end, the Enlivening the FDA paper (Appendix 30: Enlivening the FDA with the Insider Perspective) fully integrates the IPA with the discursive resources, and presents a reading of how the experiential master themes may play out in different ways depending on the subject positions and their discursive location. In this way, we are able to see how the described romantic realities are potentially produced, via the take up of available subject positions.

The Enlivening the FDA paper works through the identified subject positions from the FDA and voices the associated experiential and emotional consequence of taking up these positions using findings from the in-depth interviews. Accordingly, the felt impact of location within the romantic discursive terrain is read via the lenses of the three master experiential themes derived from the IPA: *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane*; *Striving to Protect the Self*; *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*.

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<sup>41</sup> The use of italics is replicated from Larkin *et al.*'s (2006) paper.

Piecing the analyses together and matching the insider perspectives from the IPA to the subject positions required that I cast a FDA eye over the IPA data. A full Foucauldian analysis was not conducted, as in the ‘and/and’ approach used by Colahan (2014). However, the participants shared constructions provided a link for matching the two sets of readings. In the FDA of the focus groups, for example, it was found that romance is constructed as ‘pleasing her’, ‘thoughtfulness and relationship warmth’ and ‘grand gestures’ and these interrelated constructions are mobilised differently depending on the subject position. Thus identifying the representation of these constructions from the participants’ interviews made possible the synchronisation of the separate IPA and FDA readings and enabled the *enlivening* process.

Not surprisingly, for the less frequently voiced positions there was less IPA material to draw on (there were twelve individuals who participated in sharing their romantic selves via empathetic in-depth interviews, whereas the subject positions were identified through a more critical process<sup>42</sup> involving thirty-three people). As was the case for the ‘Hard Realist’, ‘Hero Assessor’ and ‘Family Man’ positions where there were only one or two interview participants who presented similar constructions of romance. Indeed, I could not find evidence of any interview participant being located in the ‘Mothering Him’ position, and this is likely due to the mother-son couple dyad being somewhat taboo in today’s society, thus this position could not be *enlivened*.

Each subject position in Appendix 30: Enlivening the FDA with the Insider Perspective is introduced with a table that summarises the social practices they may invoke/demand and implications for subjectivity, as identified from the FDA of the focus groups (Tables 6-1 to 6-9). The third column is the new *enlivened* addition, which details the insider perspective, my interpretation of their experiential and emotional romantic reality as relayed from the in-depth interviews; it separates out the IPA experiential master themes as lenses to this lived reality. Table 7-2 below is an example of my FDA reading of the ‘Strategic Romantic’ position, now *enlivened* with the IPA.

Table 7-2: Strategic Romantic *Enlivened* with the Insider Perspective

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity	Experiential and Emotional Reality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pleasing her for an easy life</li> <li>• Keen sense of the transaction: conscious of costs and reality</li> <li>• Being one of the lads</li> <li>• Earning brownie points</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Romantic gestures can feel like a job/chore</li> <li>• Less invested in their gestures, so more resilient to rejection or dismissal</li> </ul>	Romance experienced as the sparkle in the mundane <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Romance can be experienced as a bit of</li> </ul>

<sup>42</sup> For the FDA, in order to identify the discursive resources and tease out those marginal subject positions available to participants, as a facilitator I needed to question the taken-for-granted constructions offered by the focus group participants and invite challenge.

Rights and Practice	Implications for Subjectivity	Experiential and Emotional Reality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A means to an end, has a temporal element</li> <li>• The form of the gesture is open to negotiation</li> <li>• Takes shortcuts when they're available</li> <li>• Acknowledging Valentine's, and other official occasions as quick wins</li> <li>• Keep out of the 'doghouse' by doing enough</li> <li>• Take the blame if you get it wrong</li> <li>• Engages in laddish humour</li> </ul> <p>Wrongs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being too sentimental</li> <li>• Wasting money</li> <li>• Forgetting Valentine's or other easy romantic transactions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensitive to personal expense/ personal sacrifices</li> <li>• Less likely to be jealous</li> <li>• Can experience romance as hard work</li> <li>• Tends to be defensive, and feel the need to justify the lack of a proper gesture: as 'she's happy anyway'</li> <li>• Can wrestle with what is enough e.g. asking for a gift list vs. giving her money so she can buy her own presents</li> </ul>	<p>chore, rather than a sparkle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyday sparkle may be experienced elsewhere e.g. with the lads at the pub</li> <li>• Relies on wife to prompt him that he needs to be romantic</li> <li>• Happy to provide treats which they both enjoy and offer a win-win e.g. sharing a bag of crisps</li> </ul> <p>Striving to protect the self</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in downward social comparison re: having an easier life/ relationship length</li> <li>• Frames general relationship behaviours as romantic</li> <li>• Take pride in being prudent</li> <li>• Committed to personal code of doing what is necessary to keep out of trouble</li> <li>• Feels accomplished that he has time for himself</li> </ul> <p>Romance as a relationship building transaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Romantic gestures are deployed to get out of, or keep out of, trouble</li> <li>• Waits for wife to voice displeasure – e.g. that they haven't been out in a while</li> <li>• Disgruntled when partner becomes demanding of his time</li> <li>• Assumes that his romantic efforts must be enough because she's still with him.</li> </ul>

Following these *enlivened* tables, in Appendix 30: Enlivening the FDA with The Insider Perspective, are one or two-page descriptions of what the romantic perspective may look and feel like for participants when occupying each of the identified subject positions, using actual quotes from participants. In this way, the Enlivening the FDA paper presents a full account of how occupation of the various subject positions in the romantic discursive terrain may impact the experience of romance (or lack of). As mentioned earlier, it is my reading that all subject positions accommodate the same experiential themes but how they manifest may depend on discursive location—that location in discourse produces different experiential realities.

In order to demonstrate the discursive production of romantic realities, I have two subsections below dedicated to *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*; they indicate how location in the dominant 'romantic love' discourse may produce the emotional distress as described in the IPA. These subsections consider the occupation of the 'Traditional Receiver' subject position and the reciprocal 'Traditional Romantic' position, and try to voice the associated experiential and emotional consequence of this location.

Altering discursive location may significantly impact how people experience and make sense of romance. For example, small daily acts of thoughtfulness tend to be experienced as *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane* by those who appear to be located in the 'intimacy' discourse and occupy the 'Best Friend Romantic' position, while gifts, special occasions and grand chivalric gestures are likely felt as the *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane* to those appearing to be located in the 'romantic love' discourse and occupying the 'Traditional Romantic', 'Traditional Receiver', 'Hero Assessor' or 'Poor Me' positions. In contrast, as illustrated in the third subsection, the romantic reality of male location in the 'economic' discourse and take up of the 'Strategic Romantic' position, seems to reveal men saluting yet begrudging *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane*.

In my attempt to demonstrate discursive production of romantic realities, the next three subsections redeploys material from 7.1 *An Insider Perspective via Experiential Master Themes*. In which case the reader will observe some repetition of content and quotes.

### **7.2.1 Traditional Receiver: Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction**

This subsection touches on the felt impact of female location in the dominant 'romantic love' discourse and occupation of the 'Traditional Receiver' subject position. It looks at how this location may produce the experiential and emotion reality as expressed via the *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction* lens derived from the IPA.

For women who appear to be located in the 'Traditional Receiver' position the activities that bring sparkle are chivalric gestures and physical affection. Potentially, this romantic repertoire serves to build warmth and foster relationship strength. Underpinning the repertoire appears to be a *Relationship Building Transaction*: the 'Traditional Receiver' relies on her romantic partner occupying the reciprocal subject position—the 'Traditional Romantic'—in order for this *Relationship Building Transaction* to be fulfilled. Accordingly, it seems that participants *Watching the Romantic Equilibrium* are heartened by displays of 'Traditional Romantic' behaviours and might be disgruntled by imbalance or transaction misdemeanours. For example, Hannah is likely fatigued and feeling sorry for herself around

doing all the giving, whilst Kelly is cross with her husband for failing the chivalric code by getting drunk and failing to match her efforts.

*[...] there's been a lot of time where it's me doing the giving, you know, he's been the recipient, but, not getting it back in vice versa.* Hannah, pg. 3

*[...] we were meant to have a nice night out but he'd been to the football beforehand and he'd got too drunk. So it wasn't what it was meant to be. So I was really annoyed then. 'Cause I'd made the effort and he hadn't.* Kelly, pg. 11

*Watching the Romantic Equilibrium* may have a highly affective component that incorporates the embodied. Participants apparently located in the 'Traditional Receiver' position tend to show sensitivity to partner's moods in respect to their romantic action (or lack of): bad moods and grumpiness may require that they need to take remedial action.

*If I go all night without giving him a kiss or a cuddle he'd be like, 'Oh you haven't really bothered with me tonight,' that kind of mentality, you know?* Lily, pg. 10

As is the case for these relational subject positions, which rely on a couple dyad, *When the Transaction Breaks Down* participants may feel sad, rejected and experience loss of self-esteem. For a 'Traditional Receiver' who is with a 'Traditional Romantic', these are times when one or both parties might not fulfil their romantic roles and could be due to illness and depression, consuming work patterns or the arrival of children. Alternatively, it might be that the 'Traditional Receiver's' partner occupies a less sympathetic subject position; the 'Strategic Romantic' or 'Family Man' for example. The perspective of a broken transaction experienced from within the 'Traditional Receiver' position may mobilise their subsequent occupation of the 'Poor Me' subject position.

## **7.2.2 Traditional Romantic: Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction**

This subsection attempts to voice the felt impact of the male location within the romantic discursive terrain via the *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction* lens. As the reciprocal subject position to the female occupied 'Traditional Receiver' position, and similarly located in the dominant 'romantic love' discourse, many parallels may be found in how this experiential theme plays out.

From within the 'Traditional Romantic' position the activities that tend to bring sparkle are physical attention and pleasing her with traditional gestures. This repertoire likely serves to build warmth and foster relationship strength. Underpinning the repertoire appears to be a *Relationship Building Transaction*: the 'Traditional Romantic' seems to rely on his romantic partner occupying the reciprocal subject position—the 'Traditional Receiver'—in order for this *Relationship Building Transaction* to be fulfilled. Accordingly, it seems that participants *Watching the Romantic Equilibrium* are heartened by displays of 'Traditional Receiver' behaviours and may be disgruntled by imbalance or transaction misdemeanours.

*But I don't-, I'm not expecting anything back, but you [pause] you-, I suppose in a way you are, but you're not.* Don, pg. 5

*Watching the Romantic Equilibrium* may have a highly affective component that incorporates the embodied. Those who appear to occupy the 'Traditional Receiver' position tend to show sensitivity to their partner's moods and body language in respect to their romantic action:

*[...] feel the connection from your partner. That everything's right, eye contact, umm [pause] and just how they look, how they got at ease.* Peter, pg. 25

Participants seemed to describe distressing periods when the *Relationship Building Transaction* broke down. This could be due to illness and depression, or consuming work patterns. For the male occupying the 'Traditional Romantic' position these may represent times when he or his partner do not fulfil their romantic roles. Commonly, it seemed that it was the arrival of children that derailed the *Relationship Building Transaction*.

It is likely that participants miss the *Sparkle in the Mundane* when *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction* fails. It appears that their lives might then be experienced as dreary and bleak and there is a sense of loneliness too. Moreover, without romance they likely lose self-esteem as they have less evidence to *Protect the Romantic Self*. Everything being 'blown apart' and 'just plodding through' are some of the expressions used by participants to communicate the sadness they experience when they lose romance.

Potentially, the broken transaction experienced from within the 'Traditional Romantic' position may mobilise the men's subsequent occupation of the 'Best Friend Romantic', 'Family Man' or 'Strategic Romantic' subject position.

### 7.2.3 Strategic Romantic: Romance as a Sparkle in the Mundane

This third subsection moves us away from the dominant 'romantic love' discourse and locates us in the 'economic' discourse, still within the romantic discursive terrain. Below we can see how the experiential theme *Romance as a Sparkle in the Mundane* may be constructed from the 'Strategic Romantic' position.

It appears that men who occupy the 'Strategic Romantic' position may not always experience *Romance as a Sparkle in the Mundane*. The provision of a dinner out, spa day or weekend away—for her benefit—is considered romantic but these men tend to feel the personal sacrifice:

*And, you know, buying flowers and taking her out for meals, you know, every week, you know, it's quite expensive, isn't it?* John, pg. 5

*[...] we'll go out for a meal, umm, go to the cinema, and as much as it, sort of, can be, not a pain, but, you know, finding babysitters and things like that* Martyn, pg. 5

They can almost begrudge having to be romantic:

*[...] she doesn't have to flipping pay for it* John, pg. 10

In mobilising the 'Strategic Romantic' position, men might invest in the occasional grand gesture as a form of relationship insurance or as a way of getting out of trouble. It appears that if they manage to pull-off something memorable then they might be excused from having to do romance for a while. Key to banking the brownie points seems to be getting it right (and thereby not wasting the time, money and energy spent) which can cause a degree of consternation:

*Only putting pressure on myself, I'm not, not pressured from-, by anyone else, but, it is, like, a big thing though. 'Cause you can-, and you don't want to blow it, do you?* Will, pg. 18

When the risk of getting it wrong is too high, men who seemingly occupy the 'Strategic Romantic' position may consider it a waste of their personal time and divest themselves of the responsibility:

*Jane wants an eternity ring. I know there is no point in me going out to pick her an eternity ring, I'd be wasting, wasting my-, I'd say wasting my time. Jane would need to be there.* Martyn, pg. 16

In taking up the 'Strategic Romantic' position and being located in the 'economic' discourse, we can see that romance is likely experienced as a balancing act, a financial burden, and somewhat of a chore—that he does for her.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

This chapter presented my understanding of participants' personal lived romantic experience and how they make sense of the experience that they label as 'romance'. Meanwhile, the FDA from Chapter 6: Romantic Discursive Terrain, mapped out my understanding of the participants' discursive resources. Neither IPA nor FDA is able to theorise the lived consequences of discursive location. Therefore, the final section of Chapter 7 presents the *enlivened* research that integrates the IPA reading with the FDA and provides us with a view to the discursive production of romantic realities. This sheds light on the dominant 'romantic love' discourse, that is taken-for-granted and considered normal for a relationship and shows that emotional distress captured via *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction* may be produced from location in this discourse.

Uniquely, in combining the IPA with the FDA, we can attempt to articulate the romantic experiential and emotional reality that might be produced from location within the discursive terrain.

## Chapter 8

# Discursive Emotional Dynamics

In this chapter I am presenting the *enlivening* of my FDA with IPA as a theoretical offering called Discursive Emotional Dynamics. The first section of the chapter introduces the term and briefly theorises the relationship between discourse, subjectivity and experience. The second section demonstrates Discursive Emotional Dynamics, showing how available discourse and relational contexts might construct the ways in which we can experience ourselves in our romantic relationships.

### 8.1 Introduction to Discursive Emotional Dynamics

#### 8.1.1 Why Discursive Emotional Dynamics?

My use of the term Discursive Emotional Dynamics recognises Parker's (1992) seminal text *Discourse Dynamics*, which continues to provide a comprehensive and accessible guide to discourse research. Parker introduces *Discourse Dynamics* as being:

...about the dynamics that run through the operation of different discourses, the cultural dynamics that affect the way we use discourse and the subjective dynamics which tear at our sense of self as discourses use us. (Parker, 1992, p. xii)

These dynamics that Parker references, are revealed in the FDA (Chapter 6: Romantic Discursive Terrain), which explored how women and men in established relationships construct romance and are positioned by ready-made or historically given discourses. Underlying cultural dynamics are brought forth and operational dynamics exposed as the FDA of the focus groups sought answers to three questions: what discursive resources are available and drawn on by the group?; what are the tensions and challenges presented?; and what was the project of the participants in the session?

As for the subjective dynamics that Parker describes, the FDA considers subjective implications of taking up discourses which were evidenced in the clashes, verbal sparring and silence from focus group participants, however the affective nature of Parker's subjectivity dynamics, which he viscerally described as a 'tear at our sense of self as discourses use us' cannot be fully accounted for by the FDA alone. Hence the use of hermeneutic phenomenology, in the form of IPA (Chapter 7: An Insider Perspective of Romantic Realities) with in-depth interviews, to articulate the felt impact of living within these discursive frames.

There are other reasons to embrace the term Discursive Dynamics. The word 'dynamics' recognises that the discursive resources mapped out represent snapshots in time (as shown in Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain). The 'romantic love' discourse, for example, is historically situated and ever changing.

Willig (2000) also used Parker's term discourse-dynamics in a paper directed at social constructionist health psychology, where she advocated a need to move on from the deconstruction of discourses and instead research ways that they can be deployed to alleviate physical distress. A discourse-dynamic approach to the study of subjectivity in health psychology she writes, 'needs to theorise the relationship between discourse, practice, subjectivity and experience' (p.554). Willig's (2000) approach for the health field proposes that positioning theory, memory work and research into embodiment as fruitful to this end. Bodily meaning production being arguably more relevant to Willig's (2000) concern for health psychology than this current exploration into the social practice of romance. As mentioned earlier, the thesis adopts a language-dominant conceptualisation of the relationship between discourse and experience, which is informed by romance being identified as a social practice that has evolved since the twelfth century. If the topic being investigated were to suggest that the experience pre-exists discourse, like blindness, pain or dizziness, then there would be more of a phenomenological led conceptualisation and the research would arguably elicit more embodied responses. (It should be noted that the interview schedule asked participants few direct questions that enabled them to consider embodiment in the context of their experiences and understandings of romantic love.) Indeed, the themes from the IPA showed few embodied responses, rather the meaning and lived experience of romance may be read via the lenses of: *Romance as a Sparkle in the Mundane*; *Striving to Protect the Self*; and *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*. (These lenses constitute the master themes that resulted from the IPA). They reflect the lived experience of romance as affect-laden, which gives itself to Discursive *Emotional* Dynamics.

### **8.1.2 Positioning Theory – Emotions**

The positioning theory referred to above, helps us conceptualise how different forms of subjective experience are produced. It endeavours to theorise subjectivity via the concept of the subject position by proposing that the individual is constructed by the take up of various subject positions in discourse. While there are a number of approaches to positioning theory, 'they all attempt to make a connection between language and experience...and what it feels like to be constructed and positioned in particular ways' (Willig, 2000, p.558).

In bringing forth Discursive Emotional Dynamics, I am drawing on the positioning concepts offered by Davies and Harré (1999) and Drewery (2005). Davies and Harré (1999) regularly acknowledge emotions as a factor mediating positioning dynamics. For example, in making choices between available positions, people take into account ‘the emotional meaning attached to each of those positions which have developed as a result of personal experiences of being located in each position, or of relating to someone in that position...’ (p.49). In tune with Willig’s (2000) call for memory work, Davies and Harré (1999) assert that in speaking from a particular position, the conversant is bringing their history as they see it; that is, the discourses and positions they have occupied in the past. While Drewery (2005) reminds us to recognise relational limitations, that we are constrained not only by the available discourses, but we are ‘...constrained also by the context or terms of the negotiation, which are in effect the terms of the relationship’ (p. 319).

### 8.1.3 Taking Up Positions – Relational Agency and Power Relations

The reality of the relational nature of positioning in romantic relationships, as a by-product of the couple dyad, is in part captured by the IPA master theme *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*, which describes the lived experience—that is sometimes an emotional roller coaster—of participants monitoring and responding (or not) to their romantic partner via the sub-theme *Watching the Equilibrium*. Discursive Emotional Dynamics thereby offers insight into why and how we mobilise some subject positions and not others, how we position—and are positioned. Some positions offered may not be received or taken up; as subject positions can be either accepted or rejected. In this way, there is a degree of agency; Davies and Harré (1999) write that ‘the possibility of choice in a situation in which there are contradictory requirements provides people with the possibility of acting agentically’ (p.49). Drewery (2005) builds on this, with the concept of the agentive subject position, that some positions empower and therefore afford the possibility of agency. Her concept again recognises the collaborative force of language in the production of our lived reality. Drewery (2005) writes that ‘persons cannot be agentive on their own but only in relationship with others’ (p.315).

Underpinning the mobilisation of subject positions is the Foucauldian notion of power; that each subject position brings with it, its own power implications (e.g. Burr, 2015). Indeed, Drewery (2005) suggests that we see discourses and their accordant subject positions as ways of speaking and being ‘that reflect interwoven sets of power relations’ (p.313). The take up or acceptance of a subject position, within or away from the ‘romantic love’ discourse could then be empowering or subjugating, or both, for oneself or one’s partner.

#### **8.1.4 Benefits of Discursive Emotional Dynamics**

As discussed by Drewery (2005) having an understanding of how we become certain kinds of subjects, we can start to think about which forms of subjectivity would be more satisfying and then being able to produce, as Drewery puts it—more preferred subjectivities.

This Discursive Emotional Dynamic study of romance enables us to explore the relationship between discourses, accordant subject positions and the emotional meaning making produced by that discursive location which then implicates future positioning. Discursive Emotional Dynamics offers the potential to attend to the *enlivened* discursive terrain—the individual's relational context and emotional meaning making. As such, it enables us to understand how we become certain kinds of subjects within the romantic discursive terrain. This theoretical offering then can provide a way of seeing how people do change and are able to adopt more empowered and satisfying romantic subject positions.

For this reason, I have chosen to demonstrate Discursive Emotional Dynamics by showing how women can navigate from the subjugated 'Poor Me' position. It is a position of un-equal power; women who occupy the 'Poor Me' position place their man in the powerful position of pleasing her as a sign of love, and to their distress, this reassurance of being loved is being withheld.

## **8.2 Demonstrating Discursive Emotional Dynamics**

This second section to the chapter seeks to demonstrate Discursive Emotional Dynamics with reference to navigating positions from the female occupied, subjugated 'Poor Me' subject position. It does so by illustrating the *enlivened* discursive terrain (see Figure 8-1 below). While the FDA attempts to capture the romantic discursive terrain (as presented in Chapter 6), the IPA with its attention to emotion and experiential claims may be seen as fully *enlivening* this terrain. With this enlivened view, we can observe the entrenchment or pace and gait that comes with taking up subject positions; some may be emphatically rejected, others will be swiftly adopted, some moves might involve tentative steps or negotiating hurdles.

### 8.2.1 Navigating from the 'Poor Me' Position

Figure 8-1: Enlivened Discursive Terrain

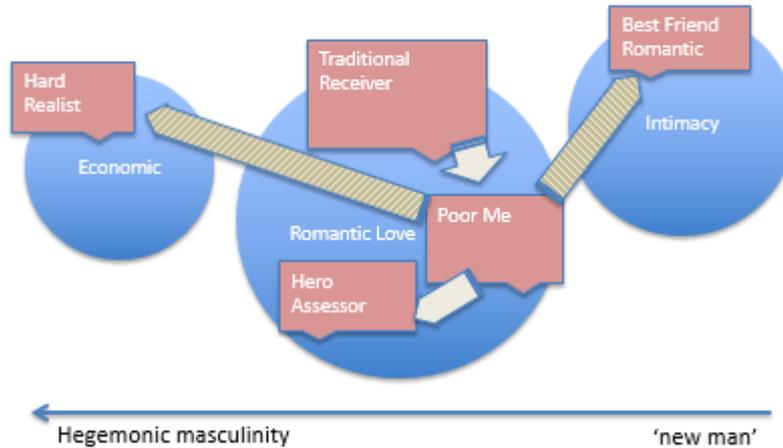


Figure 8-1: Enlivened Discursive Terrain shows the take up of positions within and across discourses as women navigate, from the 'Poor Me' position, the emotional meaning attached to available options within the discursive economy. This *enlivened* discursive terrain enables awareness of the experiential actuality of taking up specific subject positions. Accordingly, the textured arrows in Figure 8-1: Enlivened Discursive Terrain show departure from the 'romantic love' discourse; and reflect that this relocation can be complicated. The plain block arrows represent more straightforward moves.

Discursive Emotional Dynamics recognise the accessible discursive resources as producing what can be felt, said and experienced. As reflected in Figure 8-1: Enlivened Discursive Terrain, the choice of subject positions is constrained by the available discourses and also via relational constraints, as alluded to by the hegemonic masculinity scale; the 'intimacy' discourse is at the low end of the scale and is aligned to 'new man', while 'romantic love' and 'economic' discourses are aligned to 'retributive man'.

In navigating between subject positions, we can see Discursive Emotional Dynamics in operation; this concept acknowledges emotions being both produced by the position and as a factor mediating future positioning. It builds on Davies and Harré's (1999) positioning theory which states that in making choices between positions, people consider the emotional meaning attached to the available options. The FDA now *enlivened* with hermeneutic phenomenology in the form of IPA, enables an empathic reading of what it experientially means and emotionally takes for a person to mobilise one subject position over another. (As shown in 7.2 *The Discursive Production of Romantic Realities*; and Appendix 30: Enlivening the FDA with the Insider Perspective.)

Foregrounding occupation of the 'Poor Me' subject position is a breakdown in the *Relationship Building Transaction* from the position of 'Traditional Receiver', where *Watching the Relationship Equilibrium*, they are aggrieved by their husband or partner not pulling his weight, recognising a chivalric code or being motivated to 'please her' romantically. The women who take up the 'Traditional Receiver' position rely on their romantic partners mobilising the reciprocal subject position—the 'Traditional Romantic'. Given the *Breakdown of the Transaction*, it is likely that for the women who occupy the 'Poor Me' position, that their partner frequents the 'Strategic Romantic' position. As such, they feel hurt, let down, sad and rejected. By nature of the *Relationship Transaction* having failed, the partnership is experienced as vulnerable and women in the 'Poor Me' position can feel exposed and not sure that they are truly loved. Women in this position are looking for *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane* as a proof of love, they are *Striving to Protect the Self* and are hungry for *Evidence at the Ready*, so see themselves as needy of romance. As such, they might incite romantic responses, by leaving hints, chastising, sulking or in desperation, walking out. The 'Poor Me' position places the man in a more powerful position as the reassurance of being loved is for him to give or withhold.

The broken transaction experienced within the 'Poor Me' position can mobilise their subsequent occupation of alternate subject positions. Given the discursive economy accessible to the women from my research (see Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain), the positions available from the 'Poor Me' position are the 'Hero Assessor', 'Hard Realist' and 'Best Friend Romantic'. For each alternate option there is an accordant subsection below that elaborates on the emotional meaning making that serves to mobilise that position. These subsections start by summarising the difficulty and relational requirements of this discursive relocation.

In navigating between subject positions, along with emotional meaning, Davies and Harré (1999) write that the stories that can be made sense of via specific positions, and alignment to a moral order, can serve to sanction a choice. From the FDA, we can see that participants showed a strong commitment to preserving heteronormative order; accordingly this moral code favours those positions that promote hegemonic masculinity (see Figure 8-1: Enlivened Discursive Terrain).

#### **8.2.1.1 Stepping Back to Traditional Receiver**

Mobilisation: emotionally difficult.

Relational requirement: partner occupying 'retributive' male aligned 'Traditional Romantic' position.

Along with the three options described above, women in the 'Poor Me' position could theoretically return to the 'Traditional Receiver' subject position. Indeed, there is evidence from the FDA of oscillation between the two. However, when the take up of the woeful 'Poor Me' position becomes entrenched, there appears to be considerable fatigue and emotional vulnerability (see Appendix 30: Enlivening the FDA, Watching the Equilibrium) associated with their past occupation of the 'Traditional Receiver' position, which is curbing re-entry. Furthermore, the fruitful take up of the 'Traditional Receiver' position relies on their partner occupying the chivalric 'Traditional Romantic' position, which he has not historically sustained (otherwise she would not be in the 'Poor Me' position). Women in established relationships can step back into the 'Traditional Receiver' position; however there appears to be some intermediary occupation of other more powerful positions like the 'Hard Realist' or 'Hero Assessor' (see 8.2.1.2 and 8.2.1.3 below). They also need the assurance of a reformed, receptive partner. Reoccupying this position can be a daunting undertaking that necessitates the marshalling of courage; it requires the woman returning to the scene of the crime, the place where they were repeatedly wounded. Accordingly, there seems to be considerable 'cool' cognition<sup>43</sup> needed in order to step back; they need to be able to internally reason with themselves that stepping back into the 'Traditional Receiver' position is safe and that a change to the relationship status quo is needed. This meaning making can be propelled by fear of not having a relationship—or being stuck in a boring life.

*[...] I shouted in my head that, you know, 'You don't want to be stuck like this long already, so early in a relationship'* Hannah, pg. 8

Given the major dependency on a partner occupying the reciprocal 'Traditional Romantic' position, for some women, return to the 'Traditional Receiver' position is more inviting with a new man, a more chivalric partner (e.g. Peter's ex-wife—potentially disenfranchised by his location *outside* of the 'romantic love' discourse—had an affair and left him for another man).

### 8.2.1.2 Poor Me to Hard Realist

Mobilisation: emotionally difficult.

Relational requirement: the 'Hard Realist' respects 'retributive male' yet the power implications of this position means that it can be mobilised in respect to any male subject position.

As evidenced in the focus groups, there is natural tension between the 'Poor Me' and the 'Hard Realist' position; they reflect locations in alternate discourses and the 'Hard Realist' is noticeably at odds with dominant femininity discourses. Thereby taking up the 'Hard Realist' position following the 'Poor Me', is a ground shifting move.

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<sup>43</sup> Harré (e.g. 1997) conceptualises individual cognition as an internalised discourse that is produced by language and social discourse.

*What is the associated emotional meaning making that mobilises the 'Poor Me' occupier to take up this position?*

It relies on being able to exchange romantic ideals that include seeing *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane*, for contentment with the daily grind and looking outside of the relationship (to friends and children) for occasional sparkle. Women from the focus groups who cited the 'Poor Me' position as pivotal to their subsequent occupation of the 'Hard Realist' position, revealed particularly traumatic relationship experiences—like being left for another woman in a past relationship, depression or grappling with major conflict—which have made them 'hard'.

This phenomenon resembles compassion fatigue as experienced by care-giving professionals. Compassion fatigue is associated with an emotional disengagement or lack of empathy and has been connected with burnout and trauma. Nurses described a change in their practice, as produced by compassion fatigue, in which they began to emotionally shield and distance themselves from their patients (Austin *et al.*, 2009). Similarly, it can be seen that the 'Hard Realist' is mobilised after suffering considerable romantic fatigue as a way to protect themselves from repeated emotional distress.

The 'Hard Realist' extracts herself from romantic love obligations and rejects attempts to 'please'. This position is quite powerful; Julie acknowledges the power she has in the 'Hard Realist' position when she voices that her husband has *found it hard*. They also assert power over women who position themselves in the 'Traditional Receiver' or 'Best Friend Romantic' positions. They tend to see themselves as wise to life and are quick to show disdain for those women who embrace sappy notions of romance or seek emotional intimacy.

### **8.2.1.3 Poor Me to Hero Assessor**

Mobilisation: straight forward.

Relational requirement: the 'Hero Assessor' respects 'retributive male' yet the power implications of this position means that it can be mobilised in respect to any male subject position.

The 'Hero Assessor' position is assumed to be a more legitimate choice for the 'Poor Me' occupant when confronted by the choice of that or the 'Best Friend Romantic' position; arguably because of their mutual location in the dominant 'romantic love' discourses and respect of hegemonic masculinity. As such, the women who mobilise the 'Hero Assessor' position are critical and insistent that caring, listening or a look does not count as romantic—

and that flowers are not always enough. They would rather be taken out, whisked away or surprised with a grand gesture.

*What is the associated emotional meaning making that mobilises the 'Poor Me' occupier to take up this position?*

The meaning making in the take up of the 'Hero Assessor' position is relatively straightforward, there is no need to give up on romantic ideals—they remain in the 'romantic love' discourse and continue to covet a Hollywood style of romance as *the Sparkle in the Mundane*. Seductively for the 'Poor Me', mobilising the 'Hero Assessor' position empowers while not requiring them to unsubscribe from *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*. There is simply a shift in the relationship transaction's direction: from the 'Poor Me's' practice of being the 'good wife' and in return expecting to be treated like a princess, the 'Hero Assessor' expects to be treated like a princess and in return she is the 'good wife'. From the 'Hero Assessor' position women take the role of powerful judge and actively *Watch the Relationship Equilibrium* for signs that he is failing his heroic duties, which then licenses the 'Hero Assessor' occupant to take him for granted or treat him a bit mean. She also then feels entitled to create her own sparkle and privilege others over him.

Women from the focus groups who cited the 'Poor Me' position as key to their current occupation of the 'Hero Assessor', dwelled on their man's desperate attempts to 'please'—following her 'Poor Me' actions to incite romantic response by walking out or going on holiday without him. In adopting the 'Hero Assessor' position they then experience these behaviours as annoying and unattractive. For example, Annie used the metaphor of her partner being like a puppy and urgently trying to please; it is his neediness that annoys her—he is failing to act like a 'proper' man—'masculinity is meant to involve being confident, dominating and self-sufficient' (Hollway, 1983, p.136). Here we see how women, like Annie and other inhabitants of the 'romantic love' discourse, collude in male performance of masculinity. There is also a noticeable power exchange: Annie's position of 'Hero Assessor' allows her to reject her partner as 'deficient', thus reversing the previous dynamic whereby he was able to position her as 'lacking' in the 'Poor Me' position.

Unlike speaking from the 'Poor Me' position and bemoaning the lack of romantic attention, speakers from the 'Hero Assessor' have come to see their man as lacking sufficient knightly credentials. The women who take up the 'Hero Assessor' position work hard to *Protect their Self*, they exonerate themselves as being beyond fault for the problem of a lack of romance and readily express exasperation over their man's romantic incompetence. The 'Hero Assessor' also asserts power over other women, particularly those in the 'Best Friend Romantic'

position, as she mocks their welcome of caring 'new man' romantic attempts like the small gift of a Kit Kat or a thoughtful text message.

It should be noted that occupying this position can serve as a stepping stone to a later take up of the 'Hard Realist' position, located outside the 'romantic love' discourse. The 'Hero Assessor' and 'Hard Realist' are both empowered positions, which share a moral code that allows for romantic apathy. In taking up either of these positions, women protect themselves from the emotional vulnerability of being underappreciated in the 'Poor Me' position.

#### **8.2.1.4 Poor Me to Best Friend**

Mobilisation: emotionally complicated.

Relational requirement: partner occupying the 'new man' aligned 'Best Friend Romantic' position.

One would assume this power-sharing position, the 'Best Friend Romantic', might be a logical move for someone in the 'Poor Me' position. Giddens' (1992) proposes that the gender-neutral, power-equal 'intimacy' discourse, as constructing a democratically 'pure' relationship. In which case, Drewery (2005) who advocates a push to produce respectful relationships and more preferred subjectivity, might also promote mobilisation of this subject position. However, the reality, shown via tensions in the focus groups, and through the lived experiences shared in the interviews, indicates that this subject position is readily rejected or defensively accepted. Giddens (1992) foresaw this pushback, describing the 'pure' relationship as 'a relationship of sexual and emotional equality, which is explosive in its connotations for pre-existing forms of gender power' (p.2).

Concurring with Giddens, I believe that the resistance from being positioned in the 'intimacy' discourse was partly because, with its relatively ungendered notions, it is the least respectful of heteronormative order—and privileges 'new man' over 'retributive man' or heroic masculine ideals. Navigating these masculinities is a challenge for men and complicit in how men 'do' masculinity are women (as shown as such in the FDA of the focus groups where the obligation to perform 'retributive man' is reinforced by female participants). Hollway (1983) writes, 'the perception of men as powerful is also promoted by women's desire for 'the other' and subsequent misrepresentation of men as a result of their own vulnerabilities and also their assumptions about gender difference' (p.126).

Meriting 'new man' and being located outside of the 'romantic love' discourse, occupation of the 'Best Friend Romantic' invites tension. For the most part, mobilisation of this subject position was sanctioned in the focus groups if it oscillated with occupation of the 'Traditional Receiver' position and was accompanied with 'life-stages' discourses. Potentially, this is a way

of preserving 'romantic love's' privileged status as the dominant discourse. Otherwise take up of the 'Best Friend Romantic' position would become conspicuous and represented a threat to hegemonic masculinity.

*What is the associated emotional meaning making that mobilises the 'Poor Me' occupier to take up this position?*

Mobilising the 'Best Friend Romantic' position calls for 'cool' cognition; the 'Poor Me' needs to accept circumstances and feel reconciled with their current reality as not being the fairy tale. Rather than turning away from their partner (as in the 'Hard Realist' or the 'Hero Assessor' positions), instead they turn towards their man offering warm positive regard and empathy—extending friendship. The success of this move is conditional on a receptive partner who is willing to occupy the 'Best Friend Romantic' position and therefore comfortable doing 'new man'.

Significantly for the 'Poor Me' it requires embracing a new transaction, *Romance as Relationship Building Transaction* is redefined to revolve around togetherness, emotional intimacy and thoughtfulness. In this way, the 'Poor Me' is able to give up on romantic ideals and forgo grand gestures. To the critical 'Hero Assessor', this is witnessed as letting him off-the-hook. Yet for the 'Best Friend Romantic', they derive satisfaction that they are 'above' the grand gesture, which they now negatively judge as being commercial or all financial. Instead, Lily refers to conversations with her husband as being 'priceless'.

Indeed, the 'Best Friend Romantic' modifies the *Sparkle in the Mundane* to recognise small gestures. From the in-depth interviews there is an observable amplification of daily relationship acts to romantic status, whether that is doing the washing up, buying a crème egg or changing the windscreen wipers. In this way, they have readily available evidence that serves to *Protect the Romantic Self*.

The oscillation referenced earlier, from the 'intimacy' to the 'romantic love' discourse as a way of sanctioning the mobilisation of the 'Best Friend Romantic' position, was experienced by participants as *Savouring Grand Gestures* from the past and still cherishing feeling desired. In some cases, they flit between positions; that a meaningful discussion with their man can make them want to 'do romantic things'.

The 'Best Friend Romantic' position is relatively ungendered and views women and men sharing responsibilities and collaborating in thoughtful acts of kindness. The 'Poor Me' in moving to the 'Best Friend Romantic' position, also has to take more responsibility for the romance in the relationship—it is no longer his job to 'please her'—it is now a mutual

exchange of kindness. This is translated into a relationship imperative to work at it, to make romance happen.

### **8.3 Conclusion**

It can thus be seen that occupation of positions in the romantic discursive terrain is relational and contingent on the emotional meaning making that is constructed by current and past discursive location. The theoretical offering of Discursive Emotional Dynamics enables us to explore the relationship between discourses, accordant subject positions and the emotional meaning constructed within that context which then implicates future positioning.

## Chapter 9

# Conclusions and Prospects

This chapter concludes the thesis by firstly summarising the insights that originate from the research and then discussing recommendations for those operating in couples therapy or marital counselling. As the chapter proceeds, it moves away from the subject of romantic love to contemplate methodological choices, limitations and opportunities for future research.

### 9.1 Key Insights

In this first section, I present the key insights on romantic love that stem from the thesis. As a reminder, the FDA sought to explore how the participants in established relationships construct romance and are positioned by ready-made and historically situated discourses.

The specific research questions were:

- What discursive resources are available and drawn on?
- How does available discourse and relational context construct the ways in which people can experience themselves in their relationships?

Meanwhile, the IPA of the in-depth interviews sought to gain an insider perspective of participants' experiential and emotional romantic realities. The specific research questions addressed by the interview study were:

- What does romance mean to people in established relationships?
- How do people in established relationships experience romance?

Each of these inquiries has individual merit in the study of romance (as described below in 9.1.1 and 9.1.2). However, their combination attempts to shed light on the *process* whereby individuals in established relationships position themselves within available discourses and thus experience their relationships as romantic (or otherwise).

#### 9.1.1 FDA Insights

An early insight, from the genealogy in Chapter 2: A History of Romantic Love, is that the Western construct of romance in an established relationship is a social practice which evolved from the glorification of courtly love in twelfth century feudal Europe, with verbal disclosures and sustaining a sexual spark being part of its modern form.

Meanwhile, the analysis of the focus groups demonstrated how women and men in established relationships might construct romance and are positioned by ready-made discourses. It was shown, in Chapter 6: Romantic Discursive Terrain, that the available discourses and the associated constructions of romantic love generally reflect courtly love practices and acts of friendship. The two discourses that privilege the couple dyad and promote the social practice of romance are the 'romantic love' and the 'intimacy' discourses.

The working-class participants in the study were seen to observe heteronormative order which merits location in the chivalric 'romantic love' discourse. The strength of the 'romantic love' discourse can be recognised when location in the relatively ungendered 'intimacy' discourse is legitimated and sanctioned by virtue of oscillation with the heteronormative affirming 'romantic love' discourse. Furthermore, the witnessed mobility of participants between the 'romantic love' and 'intimacy' discourses can be seen to broaden their access to romantic love constructions and offers couples a wider set of romantic conventions. The 'intimacy' discourse can be framed as a new expression of romantic love. It observes the romantic love narrative but does not necessitate observance to the heteronormative hierarchy and thereby offers an alternative set of romantic love constructions and conventions. In this way, we can see the romantic love narrative adapting and having the potential to persist.

### **9.1.2 IPA Insights**

The research presented participants' personal lived romantic experience and how they might make sense of that experience they label as 'romance'. The IPA of the in-depth interviews identified master experiential themes: *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane*; *Striving to Protect the Self*; *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*, which attempt to reflect the complexity of participants' romantic experiential and emotional meaning making.

The theme *Romance as a Sparkle in the Mundane* shows participants speaking fondly about their relationship's unique style of romance. This romantic repertoire, which serves to lift them from the monotony of the daily grind, is bespoke to the couple; it could involve going out for dinner, weekend getaways, getting drunk together or be primarily focused on sex. Underpinning this repertoire is a *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*, which fosters relationship warmth when both parties play their part. Participants described distressing times when the *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction* failed and this commonly coincided with the birth of children. Without *Romance as a Sparkle in the Mundane*, life for working-class participants can become bleak.

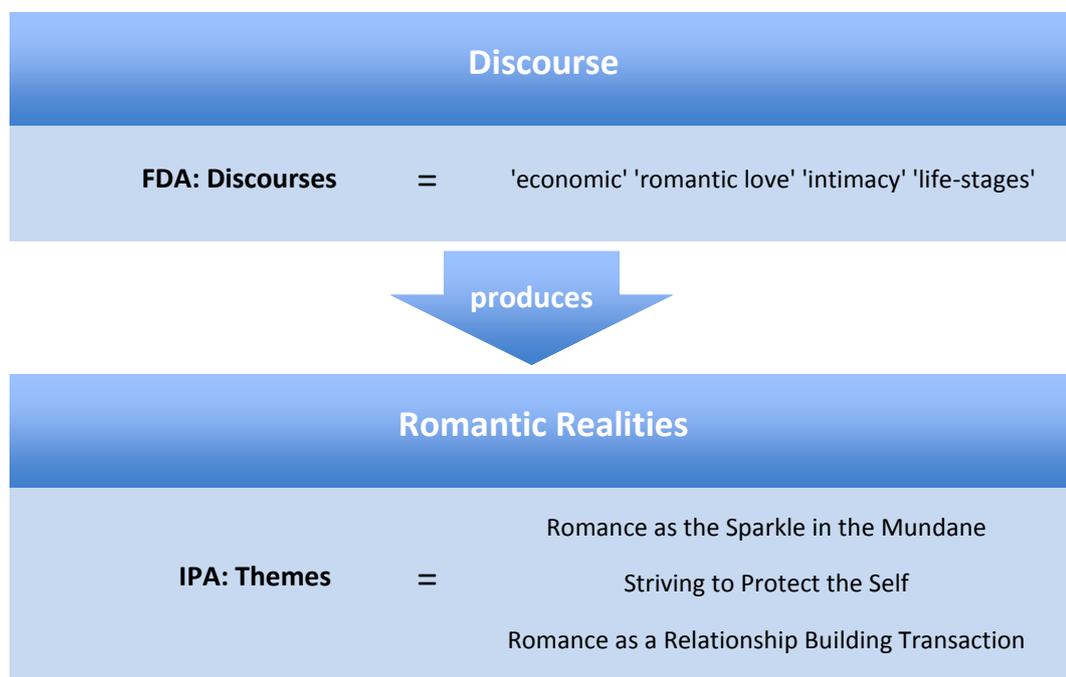
Relatedly, having romance in their lives communicates that they are not boring and sad with a dull relationship. For participants having romance in their relationship is seen a badge of honour. It is my interpretation that for the working-class participants, romance serves to

*Protect the Self*. For men, romance seems to be an endorsement of their actions and masculinity, while for the female participants having romance is testament to being a ‘good wife’ and having a successful relationship. Importantly for the working-class participants, having romance in their lives serves to validate them.

### 9.1.3 Discursive Production of Romantic Realities

As a reminder this study theorises discursive production of romantic realities and deploys a social constructionist language-dominant conceptualisation of the relationship between discourse and experience, as shown in Figure 9-1.

Figure 9-1: The Discursive Production of Romantic Realities



Uniquely, in combining the IPA with the FDA and adopting a language-dominant conceptualisation we are able to articulate the romantic experiential and emotional reality that may be produced from location within the discursive terrain. The *enlivened* research as presented in Chapter 7 integrates the IPA reading with the FDA and provides us with a view to the discursive production of romantic realities.

The nature and expression of the romantic repertoire as a *Sparkle in the Mundane* is produced by location in either the chivalric ‘romantic love’ discourse or the ‘intimacy’ discourse. Yet the repertoire relies on both members of the dyad to participate in order to create the sparkle—they need to be mutually located in a discourse. When the repertoires are realised, through a couple’s compatible discursive location, then a sparkle results which then serves to build warmth and foster relationship strength.

The *enlivened* research reveals a number of positioning insights that may prove beneficial to the couple and/or an individual within the relationship. For example, acknowledging that the failure of *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction* is produced by relocation to another discourse by one member of the couple and that this can then mobilise the other partner's subsequent occupation of another position, might encourage more considered discursive relocation at the outset.

Meanwhile, the *enlivened* discursive terrain (as presented in Figure 8-1: Enlivened Discursive Terrain) enables awareness of the experiential actuality of moving discourses and taking up specific subject positions. As illustrated in Chapter 8, not all moves are easy or comfortable; some will be resisted and be more challenging than others. The theoretical offering of Discursive Emotional Dynamics enables us to explore the relationship between discourses, accordant subject positions, and the emotional meaning making constructed within that context which then implicates future positioning. As demonstrated with the subjugated 'Poor Me', an understanding of the emotional demands, relational constraints and power implications of repositioning the subject, can promote empathy with the plight of those who are located here—and help to clarify what is possible.

*Enlivening* the FDA with the IPA sheds light on the process whereby individuals in established relationships position themselves within available discourses and thus experience their relationships as romantic (or otherwise). It demonstrates that people's discursive location is likely contingent on relational context and emotional meaning making based on previous positions held or relating to someone who has been in that position (Davies & Harré, 1999). This thesis therefore offers insights into why and how we mobilise some positions and not others, how we position—and are positioned.

#### **9.1.4 Contributing to Debate**

This subsection details how the research contributes to debates in the literature. There were three main debates that surfaced in the literature review: what is romantic love?; is romantic love gendered?; and does romantic love die in a relationship? (For an introduction to the debates refer to: 2.2.1 *Shedding Light on the Experience of Romantic Love*; and 2.3.2 *Gendered Love*.)

##### **9.1.4.1 What is Romantic Love?**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, there is confusion in the mainstream literature as to what romantic love is. The articles typically incorporate the term 'love', or 'romantic love', expecting it to be understood by the reader. Some authors use it interchangeably with the word 'love' in the couple dyad; while others use it as a subset of love and therefore ascribe a certain quality to

it. Furthermore, the various papers and studies in the literature review presented a range of behaviours—from emotional relatedness to sexual attraction and saying thank you—as characteristic or expressive of love in a relationship but failed to distinguish whether any of these feelings or behaviours are experienced as romantic.

The research suggests that what is experienced as romantic—whether heartfelt conversations, expensive gifts or sexual intimacy—is a product of discursive location. This thesis demonstrates that moving discursive location might significantly impact how people experience and make sense of romance. For example, small daily acts of thoughtfulness may be experienced as *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane* by those who are located in the ‘intimacy’ discourse while gifts, special occasions and grand chivalric gestures may be felt as the *Romance as the Sparkle in the Mundane* to those located in the ‘romantic love’ discourse.

#### 9.1.4.2 Is Romantic Love Gendered?

In the mainstream literature there is continuing debate as to whether romantic love is gendered. Many articles are quick to point out female and male variances in a number of areas, including sexuality and emotional responsiveness (e.g. Hatfield & Rapson, 1990). Yet there is widespread challenge to this view with many researchers reporting that women and men are similar in a multitude of romantic ways (e.g. Gabb *et al.*, 2013; Schoenfeld *et al.*, 2012). This research shows that depending on discursive location, romantic love can be gendered. For example, if a person is located in the heteronormative affirming ‘romantic love’ discourse then the associated romantic repertoire and conventions will be gendered. However for those who are located in the relatively ungendered ‘intimacy’ discourse, their experience of romantic love will be less gendered, which is expressed by women and men speaking from the same ‘Best Friend’ subject position.

As discussed earlier, the working-class participants are motivated to preserve their heteronormative status, in which case their constructions of romantic love are largely gendered. This is demonstrated by the dominance of the ‘romantic love’ discourse as well as the multitude of differentiated speaking positions<sup>44</sup> for males and females.

#### 9.1.4.3 Does Romantic Love Die in a Relationship?

Thirdly, the research is able to make a contribution to the debate in the literature as to whether romantic love dies in a mature relationship or has the potential to exist.

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<sup>44</sup> Figure 6-1: Romantic Discursive Terrain presents the participants’ full discursive economy in relation to the topic of romance. It reveals that there are eight gender-specific positions while there is only one position from where both males and females speak.

The readings indicate that romance is not a constant nor guaranteed, there are times and periods in the participants' lives when it slides. Yet those who report romantic relationships suggest that they are prepared to make a conscious effort to step back into proven repertoires and thereby return to the 'intimacy' discourse or 'romantic love' discourse. In this way they acknowledge that romance does not just happen; it requires effort, attention and work.

It would therefore appear that romantic love has the potential to perish in an established relationship and to be resurrected too—and that it is positioning that determines the fate of romantic love. In which case, working to sustain a position in the 'romantic love' or 'intimacy' discourse allows romantic love to remain alive in an established relationship.

## **9.2 Prospects for Counselling**

There are a number of ideas and suggestions offered by this research that might prove useful to couples counsellors. Three areas of recommendations are expanded on below. There is firstly a discussion on the social practice of romance being a transaction that requires each party to observe their role. The next area looks at the relational nature of romantic love and a preference for individuals within a couple dyad to be mutually located in a discourse. The third discusses lessons from the participants (who are all in enduring relationships) as to sustaining a romantic spark.

### **9.2.1 Recognising the Transaction**

Romantic success in the established relationship requires observing and respecting repertoires (these repertoires vary depending on discursive location, as outlined in the tables found in Chapter 6: Romantic Discursive Terrain, or Appendix 30: Enlivening the FDA with the Insider Perspective). When both parties play their roles the social practice of romance operates smoothly and it serves to build warmth and foster relationship strength. If however, the social practice is mishandled, disrespected or stops, it directly impacts the other and prompts doubt. As Lily indicated 'if he went through a phase of not saying it (how attractive she looks)... I'd see it as an issue' (Appendix 31: IPA Final Formulation). In this way, the social practice of romance serves as a relationship building transaction.

The 'economic' discourse is explicitly transactional in terms of acknowledging that the relationship serves purposes outside of love, as introduced in Chapter 6: Romantic Discursive Terrain. The Interdependence Theory, which is part of Social Exchange Theories, accounts for couples who stay together without romantic love motives. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, a couple knew why they were married and the terms of the union—whether for financial, political, religious or family reasons. In the 'intimacy' and 'romantic love' discourses, we observe a more implicit transaction that involves the romantic repertoire.

For example, Don remarked ‘But I don’t-, I’m not expecting anything back, but you [pause] you-, I suppose in a way you are, but you’re not.’ Given *Romance as a Relationship Transaction* is not fully articulated, participants are uneasy; they are not sure of how their partner will react to their romantic action (or lack of).

Helping a couple to articulate their romantic repertoire and making the *Romance as a Relationship Transaction* less implicit, might serve to avoid misunderstanding, reduce the need to constantly monitor a partner’s affective state and mitigate future disappointment. In addition, taking time to voice the romantic repertoire may serve to promote its value and place in the relationship. Gabb *et al.’s* (2013) *Enduring Love* project also found private repertoires of love to be meaningfully prized across their respondents. Whether expressed as kissing rituals, a bedtime foot massage or a certain ‘look’, Gabb *et al.* (2013) posited that through these repertoires couples were able to emotionally and symbolically connect: ‘They symbolised and fostered the intimate ‘couple world’ that is special, private and personally meaningful’ (p.55).

For those located in the ‘romantic love’ and ‘intimacy’ discourses—unlike the participants located in the ‘life-stages’ or ‘economic’ discourse—a couple’s romantic repertoire is key to the relationship transaction. As discussed above, there may be benefits for those located in the ‘intimacy’ and ‘romantic love’ discourses, to take a leaf from the ‘economic’ discourse and make the nature of the transaction more transparent.

### 9.2.2 Being Co-located in Discourse

The research suggests that a partner needs to be mutually located in the same discourse and occupy a sympathetic subject position for the social practice of romance to be sustained. Like dancing a waltz, the social practice of romance is going to be messy if one person does not know, or forgets, their steps.

Recognising the need for sympathetic or reciprocal positions might help individuals, couples and counsellors. Firstly, it could help to refine a person’s choice of future partner, for example a male comfortably located in the ‘intimacy’ discourse might avoid personal or partner distress by seeking a similarly located partner. If his partner were to be a female located in the ‘romantic love’ discourse, she might quickly become frustrated with his lack of chivalry and read this as a lack of romantic effort and love. I could speculate that Arthur Miller’s marriage to Marilyn Monroe may have failed because of their location in competing discourses and occupation of subject positions that were not mutually satisfying.

Secondly, for the participants it was commonly the arrival of a baby that coincided with romantic discord. The experienced disruption to romantic love seems to represent a move by one member of the couple dyad to another discourse. From the research there appeared to be

heartache for the person who still mobilises a romantic position if the other re-locates. So couples who are about to have children might need to be more mindful of their discursive location and societal pulls for them to reposition to the 'life-stages' discourse. If expectant parents seek to sustain their current romantic position—or consciously oscillate between discursive locations—they might think about how they can preserve the repertoires that make up the relationship transaction (via babysitters, date night, weekends away). Alternatively, couples might need to be more intentional or work to find a new sparkle from an adjusted repertoire in light of the children (a Friday night take away and bottle of prosecco rather than a dinner out). Needless to say, that without *Romance as a Sparkle in the Mundane*, as shown in this study, life for working-class participants can feel dull and monotonous.

### **9.2.3 Stepping Back into Romance**

For the participants, who are all in enduring unions, there are times over the course of the relationship when romance may be lacking – like after the birth of children as discussed above. Yet those who are prepared to make a concerted effort to step back into proven repertoires are able to reignite the romantic spark.

As shown in 7.1 *An Insider Perspective via Experiential Master Themes* the expression 'step back' is repeatedly voiced by participants. They talk about going back to what they used to do, so reengaging with their proven romantic repertoire. Also, in a sense stepping back from being otherwise consumed—by the children, work or illness. With the *enlivened* reading that these romantic realities are being produced by discursive location, we can appreciate that this experience of stepping back, is produced by discursive relocation, stepping back from 'life-stages' or 'economic' to 'romantic love' for example.

This finding of participants making efforts to sustain romantic love mirrors the research of others, for example a 'working at' discourse was identified in Burns' (2000, 2002) study of intimate relationships and Crawford (2004) also identified that coupledness involved concepts of work. Albeit unlike Burns (2000, 2002) who found men being located in the 'working at' discourse, in this study of working-class participants in enduring unions, both men and women voiced the need to apply themselves in this way. Cuber and Harroff's (1971) interview study of middle-class couples also constructed the need for relationships to be worked at, that they require attention and investment in order for them to remain 'intrinsic' and have demonstrable love.

When romance is experienced as missing or lacking, then recognising the need to step back into romantic repertoires and that this requires repositioning, might assist couples and counsellors in a number of ways. This would include taking the time to identify current and previous discursive locations to establish the nature of the step back required. Acknowledging

a couple's earlier proven romantic repertoire can aid identification of the former discursive location (as 'experience' is produced by 'discourse'). This would also be useful, when working with couples in a therapeutic capacity, as per the IPA analysis (Chapter 7: Insider Perspective) participants mostly talked about returning to established 'proven' patterns and romantic repertoires, as opposed to inventing something new.

Furthermore, appreciating that stepping back for those who have been away for an extended period from the repertoire (and by definition a former discursive location) requires courage (as per 7.1 *An Insider Perspective via Experiential Master Themes*), then in a therapeutic capacity one can look at how to bring down obstacles to stepping back. For example, if the repertoire involved her 'dressing up' for him<sup>45</sup>, then establishing when and where she might be more comfortable 'dressing up' – in the afternoon or in the morning once the children have left for school – might be helpful. It might also be beneficial for her confidence to try on her 'dressing up' clothes in advance. By breaking the repertoire into tangible manageable tasks might desensitise the situation and aid the act of stepping back.

On a related note, recognising that participants sense-making for stepping back is propelled by a fear of not having a relationship or being stuck in a boring life (as shown in Chapter 7: An Insider Perspective of Romantic Realities), then motivational type questioning that draws on this discrepancy between desire for a life with sparkle and living with the mundane, might encourage change. In this way, a therapist is helping a client become conscious of where they are positioned and where they would like to be. The client's process of reappraisal and then selecting a desired position for themselves is likely to be empowering. Davies (1998, cited in Burr, 2015) offers that in the context of therapy, a client becoming aware of the discourses positioning them and how these may be optional and resistible can lead to empowerment and action. To articulate the concept of positioning in the counselling setting, a therapist might make use of diagrams or physical objects like chairs, cards and arrow shaped post-it notes to aid a client's understanding of their current and future position.<sup>46</sup>

#### **9.2.4 Cautions for Repositioning the Subject**

Underpinning the mobilisation of subject positions or change in discursive location, is the Foucauldian notion of power; that each position brings with it its own power implications (e.g. Burr, 2015). Indeed, Drewery (2005) suggests that we see discourses and their accordant

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<sup>45</sup> An actual romantic repertoire as disclosed by Hannah in the interviews.

<sup>46</sup> Social workers and counsellors working with couples and families can be found using physicality, graphical representations and spatial awareness as tools for depicting relationship dynamics, for example family constellations (e.g. Hellinger *et al.*, 1998) and ecomaps (Hartman, 1978, cited in Dorfman, 1996).

subject positions as ways of speaking and being 'that reflect interwoven sets of power relations' (p.313).

My reading of the FDA suggests that repositioning the subject in the relationship context, causes a dynamic shift which will serve to modify the power and may result in the marginalisation of the other. As demonstrated in *6.3 Subject Position Mobilisation*, the power afforded to a subject position is always dependent on the subject position held by others. In the relationship context, a woman located in the 'romantic love' discourse will feel neglected and underappreciated by her partner's location in the 'intimacy' discourse which might see him fail to open doors for her or compliment her appearance. Meanwhile, a woman's location in a position within the 'economy' discourse wields consistent power over her man when he is positioned in the 'romantic love' or 'intimacy' discourse: she will mock and reject his chivalric gestures or attempts to become emotionally close. Yet when mutually located in the 'romantic love' discourse, the woman places the man in the more powerful position as the reassurance of being loved is for him to give or withhold. However, once a romantic gesture has been bestowed the power moves to the female who then decides whether to acknowledge the act with appreciation and reciprocation.

It is only when located in the 'intimacy' discourse—where a partner is mutually located—that a straightforward power-sharing dynamic can be achieved. In which case one might assume that repositioning the couple to the 'intimacy' discourse is the optimal option. This discourse privileges emotional relatedness and sees acts of kindness and thoughtfulness as romantic. It is relatively ungendered which evokes a male partner being more of a 'new' man. As mentioned earlier, location in the 'intimacy' discourse resembles Cancian's (1987/1990) Interdependence blueprint which takes a more androgynous form, with the men reportedly taking more responsibility for their partner's emotional wellbeing. Like the Interdependence blueprint, the working-class participants located in the 'intimacy' discourse continue to value monogamy—and relationship endurance (this reflects a fundamental departure from Giddens' (1992) gender-neutral 'pure' relationship).

Also privileging the 'intimacy' discourse are typically those in the counselling profession. This discourse after all uses the language of therapy. In which case, there might be a tendency for those who work in counselling to promote emotional connectivity as a way for couples to feel closer; however, given the working-class participants, such advice may not be welcomed or practical. As shown in Chapter 6: *Romantic Discursive Terrain*, there was regular resistance to being positioned in the 'intimacy' discourse; being relatively ungendered it challenges their commitment to heteronormative ideals.

Furthermore, research from Wilcox and Nock (2006) stresses the importance of social and normative support for marriage and the couple. They suggest that social support fosters higher investment in the marriage/partnership and distinguishes higher levels of happiness in long term couples (Wilcox & Nock, 2006). Recognising the value of societal support then, rather than promote a repositioning outside of working-class social norms, counsellors or therapists might do well to draw from the working-class discursive terrain. In this way, the counselling facilitates a more sustainable position that will be endorsed by the people around them, albeit such an approach will aid the (re)production of dominant discourses.

The analysis from the FDA (Chapter 6: Romantic Discursive Terrain) did suggest that the 'intimacy' discourse was adopted and legitimated by the working-class participants with recall to 'life stages' and oscillation with the 'romantic love' discourse. Foucault (1972) offers that a person lives under competing and contradictory discourses that allow them to use one discourse to get a purchase on another. In this way, a counsellor who sees merit in promoting the 'intimacy' discourse might seek to do so while leveraging the 'romantic love' discourse. For example, advising that going out for a candlelit dinner might provide a good opportunity to talk about what is important to them.

It should be remembered that Foucault (1984/1990) avoided making moral judgments and promoting one form of living over another, his analyses can be read as encouraging people to see beyond the normal or 'healthy' and explore new ways of living and being. (See also Willig, 1998, for cautions around offering practical guidance as a product of FDA.)

### **9.2.5 Opening up New Ways**

The 'intimacy' discourse may be viewed as a recent addition to the romantic love narrative (e.g. Shumway, 2003). It offers an alternative set of romantic love constructions and its conventions do not appear to require the same commitment to heteronormative order. As presented earlier, it is both the 'romantic love' discourse and 'intimacy' discourse, which offer romantic love positions. When we consider that the romantic realities produced from these discourses are experienced as the *Sparkle in the Mundane*; *Striving to Protect the Self*; and *Romance as a Relationship Building Transaction*, then there is much freedom in a couple's choice of romantic content or repertoire. For example, it was found in this research that some individuals find getting drunk together to be romantic and for others it was doing the gardening! I posit here that there may be limitless ways to defining a private repertoire, even within this discursive terrain.

## **9.3 Research Methods**

This section departs from the research interest in romantic love and reflects on the novel methodological approach taken in the thesis.

Embracing hermeneutic phenomenology within a social constructionist study *enlivens* the research and voices the felt consequences of discourses. In this way, the synthesis of FDA and IPA provides an input into the development of a social constructionist psychology that provides us with an appreciation and recognition of people's lived and felt reality.

The use of two methodologies and deploying the social constructionist language-dominant conceptualisation of language and experience, allows us to strengthen our grasp of how the methodologies connect. Also, my theorising of the research as social constructionist and conceptualising the relationship between discourse and experience as language-dominant paves the way for an unprecedented dialogue between FDA and IPA.

### **9.3.1 Innovative Theoretical Outcome**

Using methods like FDA and IPA that offer 'stances' and not formulaic recipes (see Chapters 4: Enlivened Social Constructionism and 5: Methods) required that I push my understanding of theory in order to develop a procedure that observed the spirit of each 'stance' yet could also be operationalised. It forced a deeper level of intellectual engagement. Contemplating theoretical issues and addressing the practical challenges that arose required persisting with literature and thinking broadly which resulted in innovation, for example Discursive Emotional Dynamics, an original contribution to theory.

As mentioned before, Discursive Emotional Dynamics theorises the relationship between discourse, subjectivity and experience. It shows how available discourse and relationship contexts construct the ways in which we can experience ourselves in our romantic relationships. Discursive Emotional Dynamics pivots on emotions that are produced by discursive location as the basis of positioning. Within the romantic discursive terrain it could be seen that the emotional meaning making recognises the legitimating force of heteronormative order and the intrinsic power relations of the couple-dyad. The theoretical offering of Discursive Emotional Dynamics therefore provides insight into why and how we mobilise some subject positions and not others.

### **9.3.2 Reflection on Choice of Methods**

As a whole I was fairly pleased with my decision to use IPA with the in-depth interviews and the FDA with the focus groups. While resource intensive, the focus groups were particularly powerful for witnessing competing constructions and positioning in operation. In this way,

the content from the focus groups provided rich data that allowed for ready mapping of the discursive terrain.

Other researchers might take a leaf from Colahan (2014) and seek to conduct the FDA and IPA on the same data set; also termed an ‘and/and’ approach. I have reflected on whether there would have been merit in doing the FDA and IPA on the interview data or the IPA and FDA on the focus groups. The IPA warrants a personal story—a journeying through a person’s lived experience—and the focus groups were not conducive to this kind of narrative. Similarly, the FDA is suited to textual data where there are conflicting constructions and positioning as indicative of power dynamics for which a group context provides natural content. It might have been harder to draw this content from a one-to-one interview or demand the interviewer be more provocative. In this way, I am pleased with the elected design as furnishing high quality data that suits the requirements of the analyses.

As a social constructionist researcher, I chose to use FDA and *enliven* my research and recognise the lived reality of human experience with recall to IPA. Q Methodology could be an alternative to the FDA for the social constructionist researcher. One could adopt an approach similar to Watts and Stenner (2014) who used participants’ Q sorts as a lens to the frequently voiced discourses associated with romantic love. Watts and Stenner (2014) additionally asked participants to talk them through their individual Q sort. Accordingly, participants expanded upon items that they felt were particularly significant to them as well as reflected upon whether any aspects of love were missing from the exercise. Also the researchers required participants to write a description that captured their experience of love. It might be feasible that an IPA could be conducted on this supporting dialogue and/or text as there is likely an experiential and emotional quality contained within them. In this way, one could do a dual method investigation with the same sample. Such an approach may be useful for a researcher who has limited time or resources.

In *enlivening* the social constructionist study I deployed IPA, however at times I found myself lost in the process of the analysis and struggled to find my way back to the insider perspective. Another potentially fruitful option for the social constructionist researcher wanting some purchase on what a discourse means from an inside perspective could be Kelly’s (1955) Personal Construct Psychology (e.g. Burr, 2015). Operationalising procedures that are associated with Kelly’s theory are relatively straightforward, for example repertory grid techniques, and might prove easier to navigate.

As a further reflection, I felt my reading of the data was somewhat nuanced because I placed emphasis on listening to recordings in addition to reading transcripts. The laughter in the focus groups provided insight into the project and moral code of the group (see Chapter 5:

Methods). Whereas for the IPA, my listening for ‘hot’ cognition—altered pitch, abruptness—was important as it suggested pockets where there should be amplification of meaning. These details were important to my interpretation and may have been missed without the aural component.

### **9.3.3 Limitations**

A weakness of this study is that it lacks a dialogue with participants on my interpretations; which Tracy (2010) calls ‘member reflections’. For the IPA, where I am attesting to voicing the ‘insider perspective’ of participants’ romantic reality, verification from participants of the credibility of the themes would be helpful; in this way it provides a ‘member check’. However, I did not return to my participants with my interpretations of their interviews to ensure that they resonated with their experience. Willig (2012) suggests that the ethical researcher should ensure that the participant’s voice is not lost. Yet, in my efforts to assure anonymity and confidentiality I adopted an irreversible process whereby once the consent form was signed the individual was referred to by a pseudonym. It was then impossible to identify the individual to whom the data relates. The IPA formulation and themes are however evidenced with reference to quotes from each participant (see Appendix 31: Insider Perspective Final Formulation). In addition, I supplemented the analysis with frequency appraisals to double-check that the themes identified were widely voiced, Smith *et al.*, 2009 advocate that this measuring of recurrence is important and can be seen as a way of enhancing credibility (See Appendix 22: IPA Integration Recurrent Themes).

While, the FDA does not merit a ‘member check’, I could still have offered a space for the participants to offer their reflections on my interpretations. By soliciting member reflections I could have learned whether the participants find my readings of the analyses interesting or meaningful and where they might see the research contributing.

My reading as any other, is partial and ‘always-already incomplete’ (Stenner, 1993, p.130 cited in Burns, 2002). As explicated in the genealogy, Chapter 2: A History of Romantic Love, these analyses are specific to a particular point in time; the discursive terrain is ever changing as are the discourses themselves. Furthermore, I have accessed and approached the data through my available discursive resources, other researchers who are availed with alternative resources will experience and interpret the participants’ talk differently. On a related note, my interpretation and readings are also specific to the Birmingham based working-class heterosexual participants who participated in the research. In this way, the research is not generalisable to other classes, relationships or cultures. The readings are only generalisable to those who inhabit the same discursive terrain.

## 9.4 Future Research

### 9.4.1 Staying with Romantic Love

Future research could continue the investigation of romantic love in working-class society and deploy the same methodology with single or divorced individuals—those who are not privileged to the couple dyad. People who are not in an established relationship are more likely to be marginalised by the dominant ‘romantic love’ discourse and such research would shed light on their experiential reality.

Another line of enquiry would be to continue the research with those in established relationships and explore the discursive production of romantic realities, using the same methodology with other groups: heterosexual middle-class society; or people from the LGBT community. It would be important for the researcher to ensure the participants inhabited a similar social world, otherwise a blurred picture of discursive resources will result. Discussed in the methodological critique in Chapter 2: Literature Review, this concern may read like an essentialist preoccupation, to control for variability in order to reveal a ‘truth’; however, rather here I recognise that available discourses are a product of social context and that the social domain of people in for example, the lesbian community may be visibly different to that of homosexual males.

Building on this study, which revealed that for working-class participants the arrival of children had a significant impact on their experience of romantic love, future research could delve deeper into first time parents’ discursive resources. It was observed that becoming parents seemed to propel participants’ discursive relocation and the breakdown of the romantic love transaction. Indeed Gabb *et al.*’s (2013) *Enduring Love* project suggests that mothers are more likely than fathers to consider their children as the most important person in their life. In which case, there might be competing discourses for new mothers, for example the ‘life-stages’ vs. ‘intimacy’ or ‘romantic love’ discourse. Prolonged or consistent take up of the ‘life-stages’ discourse may see the father feeling taken-for-granted or rejected and result in him mobilising a potentially long-term move to a less romantic position. Research of the discursive terrain of new or expectant mothers and/or fathers could be enlightening in this area.

A further consideration for research would be to explore the experiential romantic reality of those in relationships whereby one member of the couple dyad is ill or suffering from an affective disorder like depression. For example, two of the participants in the interviews experienced romantic love in a ‘Life is short’ way (as mentioned in 5.1.2.2 *Integration of Cases*, Kenny was terminally ill, while Hannah’s husband had surpassed his life expectancy). Given the concern of IPA to voice the concerns of the majority of participants, this meaningful theme

was not taken up and investigated within the realm of this study. However, research that draws a sample from those who are dealing with terminal or chronic illness, within their couple dyad, would then be able to explore in detail that particular romantic reality.

#### **9.4.2 Beyond Romance**

In this study, I found that deploying positioning theory and its concern with the production of subjectivities presented an important link for an FDA researcher to the lived reality of participants. As detailed in Chapter 5: Methods, I was influenced by Davies and Harré's (1999) theory on positioning, which offers that in taking up a position, there are resultant implications for practice and subjectivity. I would encourage other FDA researchers who are looking for a tie with subjectivity to attend to positioning.

Deploying the social constructionist conceptualisation of the relationship between discourse and experience allows us to theorise the discursive production of subjectivities. Being able to theorise the production of subjectivities is impactful and may encourage future researchers with political or social change agendas to conduct research in this manner. This language-dominant theorising would work well for researchers addressing questions to do with social practices, whether that be criminal activity, racist behaviour or motherhood.

Meanwhile, the theory of Discursive Emotional Dynamics presented in Chapter 8, which pivots on emotions that are produced by discursive location as the basis of positioning, could be deployed for research into other affect-laden spheres, for example mid-life crises, dealing with redundancy and grief. There is also potential to develop the theory of Discursive Emotional Dynamics into a form of therapy. As touched on throughout this chapter, there would be merit in the therapeutic encounter to raise awareness of the relational context and emotional meaning making and how this affects the move from one position to another. While social constructionist narrative therapy attends to positioning awareness, Discursive Emotional Dynamics offers the potential to attend to the *enlivened* discursive terrain—the individual's relational context and emotional meaning making. Attending to this *enlivened* terrain will highlight that not all moves will be possible or emotionally straightforward. It could clarify why we mobilise some positions and not others, how we position—and are positioned. I envisage that Discursive Emotional Dynamics as a therapy could make use of physical props, whether arrow shaped post-it notes, cards or chairs to aid a client's awareness and engagement with the process of positioning.

## 9.5 Last Words

This thesis explores the ways in which discursive constructions of romantic love inform people's talk about romance and their implications for romantic practice. The research suggests that by attending to discursive location and positioning in an *enlivened* discursive terrain, can give us a handle on a range of relationship dilemmas, from casting light on scholarly debates to reigniting a dimming romantic spark. As such there are a number of prospects for this research to enrich couples counselling and shape the nature and content of that therapeutic encounter.

On a personal note, I began this PhD with the idea that romance in some way had the potential to protect relationships but I was not entirely sure how or why. I discovered that depending on your discursive location that romance can be a critical part of the *Relationship Building Transaction*. I also learned that romance is a social practice—it does not happen by chance—but requires active participation, time and effort to keep up. As for my relationship, I am more respectful and engaged in our romantic repertoires. After seeing that my male participants were eager for feedback that they had 'pleased her', I hear myself being quick to express my appreciation for the gifts or romantic gestures that my husband offers. I say thank you more and take time to savour the sparkle that it represents.

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