

**Female adolescents' experiences of romantic relationships**

**by**

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## Declaration

I declare that this mini-dissertation is my own original work. Where secondary material is used, this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with the university's requirements.

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## Abstract

Relationships play an important role in an adolescent's psycho-social development, part of this development is participation in intimate and romantic relationships. Such romantic relationships to a large extent feature in adolescents' social life and as a result adolescents tend to invest a great amount of time in these relationships. This mini-dissertation examines female adolescents' experiences of romantic relationships. This study draws on the experiences and views of white, Afrikaans female adolescents from conservative middle to upper class backgrounds. Social constructionism is used to contribute to understanding these experiences within their specific context that shape their expectations and behaviour. This study draws the conclusion that even though adolescents have their own ideals and expectations of romantic relationships, these do reflect those ideals and expectations held by society. Agents of socialisation such as parents, peers and the media shape these ideals and expectations. Furthermore it indicates the prevalence of increasing use of social media in relationships and normalisation of sexting.

## Opsomming

Verhoudings speel 'n belangrike rol in 'n adolessent se psigo-sosiale ontwikkeling, en deel van hierdie ontwikkeling is deelname aan intieme en romantiese verhoudings. Romantiese verhoudings vorm uit 'n groot deel van adolessente se sosiale lewe en as gevolg daarvan spandeer hul die meeste van hul tyd gefokus op romantiese verhoudings. Hierdie mini-verhandeling ondersoek vroulike adolessente se ervaringe van romantiese verhoudings. Hierdie studie verken die ervaringe en perspektiewe van Afrikaanse wit vroulike adolessente van konserwatiewe middel- tot hoë klas agtergronde. Sosiale konstruktionisme word gebruik hul ervaringe binne hul spesifieke konteks te verstaan wat 'n impak het op hul verwagtinge en gedrag. Hierdie studie kom tot die slotsom dat selfs al het adolessente hul eie ideale en verwagtinge van romantiese verhoudings, dit nogtans 'n refleksie is van die ideale en verwagtinge wat binne die breër samelewing heers. Sosialiseringsagente soos ouers, die portuur en die media vorm hierdie ideale en verwagtinge. Daarmee saam bevind die studie die voorkoms van die toenemende gebruik van sosiale media binne verhoudings en die normalisering van 'sexting'.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Romantic relationships is a popular topic frequently featured in music, art, literature and film. Romantic relationships are set in motion as soon as individuals express interest in each other as potential partners. They are overcome with elation and seek a connection with each other. Every individual's experience of romance differs and every individual expresses it in a different way (Fisher, 2004, as cited in Fisher, 2012:8).

Adolescents are avid consumers of media, listening to music, watching films and television, reading magazines and increasingly have access to this through electronic devices in particular cell phones. New media types lead to new ways of relating (Arnett, 1995:520).

### **1.1. Adolescence and romantic relationships**

Adolescence is a critical stage in human development as it encompasses the transitioning from childhood to adulthood. This developmental stage encompasses physiological, psychological, emotional and sexual development. It is in this stage that peer group interaction and social status come to play an important role in establishing one's sense of identity and furthermore contributes to angst and turmoil the adolescent may experience. Compared to earlier development stages there is more interaction between females and males during adolescent development. This interaction potentially sets the scene for heterosexual romantic encounters and relationships. Such relationships are generally expected in the heteronormative context which prevails within society (APA, 2002:8; Larson et al., 2002:51; Tanti et al., 2011:555, 564; Tuval-Mashiach et al., 2008:471; UNICEF, 2006:1).

Adolescent romantic relationships are seen to be “short-lived and superficial”, due to the brief periods within which some adolescents engage in romantic relationships. These relationships are described as “superficial” as they are not regarded as serious. However fleeting or shallow such relationships may appear, they may evoke very strong emotions from adolescents and can affect them in a profound way. Romantic relationships during adolescence provide a stepping stone for romantic relationships in adulthood, playing an important role in an adolescent’s psycho-social development, which in turn shape relationships they may have subsequently (APA, 2002:8; Furman & Shaffer, 2003:3).

## **1.2. Research on adolescent romantic relationships**

Although adolescent romance is a popular theme in youth literature and media it has only in the past 20 years garnered scientific interest (Shulman & Seiffge-Krenke, 2001:417), hence currently in the past 30 odd years.

Studies on romantic relationships among adolescents tend to focus on what adults consider to be the ‘problematic’ aspects such as the commencement of sexual encounters, risky behaviour, teenage pregnancy, and HIV/AIDS, South Africa being no exception to this. Such research tends to rely on quantitative surveys using predefined constructs of romantic experiences and intimacy to measure adolescent romantic relationships (Gevers et al., 2012; Harrison, 2008; Jamieson & Wade, 2011; Kreager & Staff, 2009; Lesch & Furphy, 2013:619-620; Rostosky, 2005; Swart et al., 2002; Whitty, 2008, Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2001). According to Lesch and Furphy (2013) adolescents’ subjective experience should be approached holistically to consider what factors influence particular perceptions and conduct with regard to romantic relationships. Whilst these experiences may be classed and raced, parents, peers and the media all play a key role – often reaffirming heteronormative ideologies (Reddy & Dunne, 2007).

According to Gevers et al. (2012:1125) romantic relationships in adolescence shape development significantly. Nevertheless, research on romantic relationships during adolescence received limited attention as this topic was avoided by social researchers for the reason that it might unintentionally encourage premarital sexual exploration among adolescents. In the U.S.A in 1991 funding was withdrawn by the Secretary of Health and Human Services for research proposed by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. This research included questions on romantic and sexual behaviour among adolescents. The Secretary of Health and Human Services, Louis Sullivan, argued that asking these types of questions would encourage adolescents to engage in casual sex (Collins, 2003:3).

Collins (2003:4, 7-8) highlights two myths associated with adolescent romantic relationships. First, in the past scientists only studied adult romantic relationships which they considered to be 'stable' and long-term as there was the supposition that adolescent romances were shallow, insincere and transitory. This myth has been disputed by research that found that not all adolescent romances are fleeting and that they may culminate in long-term relationships. Levesque's (1993) research concluded that many adolescents' relationships had similar qualities to that of adult romantic relationships, such as devotion, closeness, ardour and contentment. This contradicted beliefs that adolescents were inept to participate in romantic relationships. Second, researchers focused exclusively on problematic aspects of adolescent romantic relationships. This thinking may have its origin in the transition that occurred in the 1960's when the introduction of the birth control pill made it possible that sexual activities were no longer exclusively tied to matrimony. The sexual revolution of the 1960's saw great social changes regarding sexuality that liberated women sexually. Parents who could no longer regulate their children's dating behaviour and social lives believed romantic relationships to be harmful to their children leading to activities such as engaging in premarital sex with the threat of conception reduced (Greenwood & Guner, 2009:23; Moran, 2000:298-299).

This mini-dissertation examines the experiences that female adolescents have about romantic relationships. Social constructionism provides a suitable theoretical grounding to research

intimate and romantic adolescent relationships. This situates the research in the meanings that adolescents negotiate in their everyday contexts, social practices and interaction. It aims to give a ‘voice’ to female adolescents to understand how they construct their social worlds and navigate romantic feelings and relationships.

### **1.3. Outline of chapters**

Chapter 2: *Adolescence and romantic relationships* provides an overview of adolescent development with regard to the physiological, emotional, cognitive and social development. This development is situated in distinct social and cultural mileus which contribute to their development. As a result of the transition between childhood and adulthood, adolescents seek support from outside their families and associate with their peer group. Peer groups increasingly exercise influence over individuals. Furthermore peer groups offer adolescents the prospect of experimenting with intimate relationships.

Chapter 3: *The media landscape* considers the impact of the media on how adolescents think about and engage in romantic relationships in a contemporary context. New developments such as social networking platforms and smartphone messaging systems introduce additional ways to connect with other people or to keep in contact with them. Social media has a broader reach and penetration. Thus, in a way individuals engage in a global environment as they interact and exchange information. In this digital age the technological changes potentially impact on adolescents’ ideals, expectations and notions of romantic relationships.

Chapter 4: *Theorising about adolescent romantic relationships* examines social constructionism in an attempt to understand adolescent romance. It considers language and interaction as a vital part in constructing meaning. Social institutions such as the family provide the individual with

social and cultural knowledge on gender. This knowledge impacts on ideals, expectations and behaviour, which in turn influences romantic relationships.

Chapter 5: *Methodological considerations* discuss the methodological choices, the progression of the research and the ethical considerations. In research pertaining to adolescence it is important to engage with adolescents themselves to understand their experiences and conceptualisation of romantic relationships.

Chapter 6: *Experiences of romantic relationships* considers the agents of socialisation such as the family, school, church, peers and the media in shaping expectations of romantic relationships. Participants relate their own experiences of romantic relationships from showing interest, initiating a relationship and dealing with breakups.

Chapter 7: *Conclusion* – reflects on what can be learned from adolescents about romantic relationships in this specific study. Recommendations for further research are suggested.

## **Chapter 2: Adolescent development and relationships**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The notion of adolescence is a recent phenomenon and was not used in the Occident as an identifier of a particular grouping of individuals before the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **2.2. Adolescent development**

Adolescence is considered a developmental period wherein individuals experience biological, cognitive, emotional and social change. These changes, especially the biological changes are quite noticeable (Papalia et al., 2009:353).

#### *2.2.1. Puberty*

Biological changes that occur during adolescence are referred to as puberty, a biological progression towards physical maturity that enables individuals to procreate. There is no clear set age when puberty occurs as it differs from individual to individual (Papalia et al., 2009:354).

Puberty marks the biological transition from childhood to adulthood. The onset of puberty differs for females and males. Typically the onset of puberty for females occurs between the ages of ten and twelve, although due to a variety of factors it can start as early as eight or be delayed until middle adolescence. In males, puberty occurs between the ages of twelve and fourteen and their puberty period usually last longer than females (APA, 2002:7).

Puberty occurs in two key ways known as adrenarche and gonadarche. Adrenarche refers to the development of the adrenal glands that emits hormones that result in the growth of body hair, oily skin and increasing body fat. This triggers gonadarche, changes that occur in primary and secondary sex features. Primary sex features refer to the organs that are linked with reproduction such as the uterus, clitoris, vagina, ovaries and fallopian tubes in females. Primary sex features linked to male reproduction are the penis, testes, scrotum, prostate gland and seminal vesicles. Secondary sex features include the growth of breasts, in young females and growth in vocal chords resulting in the lowering of the voice, in young males. The maturation of sex organs within this developmental stage establish primary sex features directly linked to reproduction (Papalia et al., 2009:356-358).

### *2.2.2. Emotional and cognitive development*

Recent research has found that the brain is not yet fully developed by adolescence, with many changes still occurring during young adulthood. Adolescence is associated with risk-taking and immaturity, attributed to the maturation processes in the brain. Steinberg (2005) argues the inclination for extreme emotions and risk-taking behaviour during adolescence result from the socio-emotional and cognitive control networks in their brains. These networks, which are more prominent during adolescence, impact the way in which adolescents control social and emotional stimuli and how they respond to stimuli. According to Baird et al (1999) and Yurgulen-Todd (2002) adolescents between the ages of 11 and 13 use the amygdale to make sense of their emotions whilst adolescents aged 14 to 17 use the frontal lobes. This affects the way in which adolescents reason, respond and act. The amygdale, located in the temporal lobe, is linked to reactions based on emotion and instincts. The frontal lobes are associated with judgements based on reasoning, planning, regulation of emotions and impulses. This research suggests brain development may to a large extent shape risk-taking behaviour and maturity (Papalia et al., 2009:360).

These changes triggered by hormones can impact on the mood and emotions of adolescents. They may leave adolescents more vulnerable to feelings of frustration and anxiety. These feelings may continue during puberty which lasts between three and four years. Anxiety about one's body image starts in middle-childhood and increases immensely in adolescence. During puberty a female's body fat increases. This can cause immense anxiety as slim figures are regarded as more attractive in Western societies which to a large extent dictate content within the global media. Extreme anxiety over one's body image and weight can lead to eating disorders, which are more prevalent among younger females (APA, 2002:7-9; Papalia et al., 2009:263-264, 356-357).

### *2.2.3. Social development and identity formation*

Erikson (as cited in Papalia et al., 2009:390) positions adolescents within his fifth psycho-social development stage: identity vs identity confusion. During earlier developmental phases individuals learn skills such as 'appropriate' behaviour and beliefs. These skills are used during adolescents to make sense of their social world and how they fit into this world. It also enables them to manage their emotions and cope with pressure. This is directly linked to their sense of self and identity. According to him identity is constructed around their value system, the profession they want to follow and their sexuality. Many adolescents experience identity confusion when their beliefs, ideas or feelings are not congruent with their parents, peers or society's beliefs, ideas or feelings (APA, 2002:15).

### *2.2.4. Sexuality*

Within a heteronormative context heterosexuality is assumed. Sexuality becomes 'visible' in instances where individuals deviate from what is regarded as the 'norm' and express preference for different forms of sexuality (Striepe & Tolman, 2003: 254). Sexual identity is defined as an



individual's notion of themselves and the way in which they express themselves sexually. Sexual orientation refers to an individual's sexual preference, such as attraction to the opposite sex, the same sex or both sexes. Sexual practices describe what individuals do when they participate in sexual activities.

During adolescence there is a greater self-awareness of sexual orientation. Generally heterosexuality is considered to be universal and normative within society and taken for granted. It is regarded as a 'natural' and a 'default' identity. In contrast homosexuality is marked by a struggle to assert. This can cause a great amount of anxiety within the adolescent if they were socialised in a particular way and their sexual identity does not fit into how their society or community constructs normative sexual identity (Papalia et al., 2009:365-369; Striepe & Tolman, 2003:524).

### **2.3. Relationships**

All individuals have a need to belong. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995:497, as cited in Forsyth, 2010:58)

“all human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and impactful interpersonal relationships.”.

Primary social groups include family and friends. Since adolescence is that developmental stage where individuals individuate, peer influences and acceptance, become key issues.

### 2.3.1. Peer group

As children mature the influence of their primary group, the family, is complemented (and may even be eclipsed) by a peer group as a resource for socially acceptable standards of views and behaviour. Early childhood friendship is primarily among peers of the same sex. During early adolescence peer groups consist of both sexes. A closer bond forms between peers during their adolescent years with most of an adolescent's free time spent on socialising with peers.

Smith (1997, as cited in APA, 2002:22) indicates that there are differences between the conduct of female peer groups and male peer groups in the activities they engage with. Stewart et al. (2003, as cited in DeVito, 2009:195) found that females divulge more information about themselves and their lives than males do.

Peers have a positive impact on individuals. By associating with a peer group, adolescents become more knowledgeable about their social world beyond the closed network of the family. Unlike parental socialisation, peers contribute to developing self-sufficiency and engaging in more mature conduct. Furthermore close and healthy peer relations enable adolescents to engage in positive romantic relations later in their development. Peer group relations are important for the psycho-social development by cultivating interpersonal skills such as loyalty, reliability and trust. Association with a peer group is essential for participating in romantic activities. The peer group also contributes to the individual's romantic capability (Dhariwal et al., 2009:584-585; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002:219).

In contrast to the positive effects peer relationships have on adolescents, it can also have negative effects. Adolescents, who have no friends or are snubbed by peers, are more likely to participate in destructive behaviour and engage in romantic relationships which are marked with dominance, violence and maltreatment. In addition peers may police the heteronormative order within the

community. This can place an additional burden on an adolescent whose sexual orientation differs (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002:219).

### *2.3.2. Popularity and acceptance*

Peers are often a resource for approval and popularity. Adolescents' self-esteem is affected by popularity. Physical appearance, class status and owning expensive items such as mobile phones or wearing specific brands contribute to popularity. Qualities like self-assurance, aptitude, compliancy and thoughtfulness further adds to popularity. In contrast, unpopular individuals tend to be socially awkward or are individuals who are typically rejected by peer groups. When individuals are rejected by their peers it can result in low self-esteem (Breckler et al., 2008:271; Kreager & Staff, 2009:144).

The popularity of the group itself also has an impact on the individual's self-concept. Individuals tend to value themselves based on a collective self-esteem. Studies have found that adolescents are more prone to be receptive to peer pressure and persuasion. Adolescents may experience their social world as uncertain and perplexing. Their uncertainty can leave them in an emotional state and by conforming to the group's expectations they can feel more at ease. This is reinforced by rewarding or punishing individuals. Being rewarded includes acceptance whereas as punishment includes rejection or exclusion (APA, 2002:21; Breckler et al., 2008:272; Forsyth, 2010:80-81, 96; Gass & Seiter, 2007:97, 128, 130).

### *2.3.3. Friendship*

Friendship with peers is the first significant phase in social maturity and plays an important role in any adolescent's social experience. Friendships between individuals develop from an early age

due to propinquity. Children who are in the same proximity to each other on numerous occasions have the opportunity to form a close bond that can lead to friendship. However, not all children who go to school together, play or see each other regularly will become friends, some will only remain acquaintances. Individuals who spend time together will take on a mindset of “we-ness”, as they will no longer see themselves as disconnected individuals but rather an “exclusive unit”, which is the foundation of friendship. The bonds of friendship are strengthened by engaging in conversation and exchanging personal information and reciprocating (APA, 2002:21; Breckler et al., 2008:270, DeVito, 2009:250; Forsyth, 2010:18, 106; Gass & Seiter, 2007:128; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002:216).

Friendship differs from other relationships to the extent that individuals can choose their friends based on the needs they want to fulfil. They look at how they can benefit from the friendship. Some of the benefits include: utility, affirmation, ego support, stimulation and security. Utility entails the ‘usefulness’ of an individual for another individual. Many seek friends with specific resources to assist them in various ways. They also seek affirmation of their own worth. Individuals may also seek out friends who give them an ego boost and who can cheer them on. They might also seek someone who can stimulate them intellectually. Lastly individuals may also seek out friends who provide them with security, who will not betray or hurt them (deVito, 2009:248).

A dyadic friendship clique can evolve to a larger friendship clique. Newcomb (Forsyth, 2010:106) refers to this as the elaboration principle, where dyads evolve when group members find a similarity in others and these others will be included in the group. Thus friendship groups evolve when all the individuals of the group find a common link or outsiders are drawn to a single individual within the group.

Friendship circles or cliques are regarded as primary groups, as they are fairly small compared to other groups and individuals within these groups attach a profound significance to one another.

Cooley (1909, as cited in Forsyth, 2010:11) maintained that the main purpose of primary groups “create a bridge between the individual and society”. Friendships with peers are also important as it enables individuals to become familiar with someone they perceive to be their equal (Cavanagh, 2007:575).

Close friendships are important for development and positively influence future relationships. Friendships are one of the first sources for learning to navigate intimate relations, conflict, affection, encouragement and competence. Adolescents who form close bonds with friends and enjoy a mutually beneficial positive relationship have a higher self-esteem. This is carried into adulthood and has the implication that other relationships will also be better (Gass & Seiter, 2007:97; 128).

According to DeVito (2009:250) there is a difference between male and female friendships. Females are more likely to share their problems, opinions and emotions with their friends. They also show greater affection towards their friends than men do. Female friends act as support systems to reassure and act as counsel to their friends before, during and after engaging in romantic relations. Female adolescents tend to converse on the subject of romance in their close-knit friendship circle whereas male adolescents tend to hold back their emotions in their sizeable friendship groups. Male friendship centre on interests or hobbies they partake in. However it has been found that males will reveal more of themselves at the beginning of a friendship, as a way to be in command of a new relationship (Dhariwal et al., 2009:586, 597; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002:223).

#### 2.3.4. *Romantic relationships*

According to Furman and Shaffer (2003:3) romantic relationships play a significant role in an adolescent's life and impacts on the emotions of the adolescent. It also features as a frequent topic in their conversations.

Romantic ideals and expectations are influenced by agents of socialisation such as parents and peers. Within peer relationships 'acceptable' romantic behaviour is identified and enacted. In many instances this reinforces gendered norms and heterosexual behaviour that is embedded within society (Cavanagh, 2007:572).

From a developmental perspective there is a difference between the motivations for pursuing romantic relationships. Adolescents in their early development participate in romantic relationships for social acceptance, as a leisurely pursuit and companionship. Adolescents in their later stage of development report that they participate in romantic relationships for affection, company, leisurely pursuits, loyalty and devotion. Their responses do not make reference to romantic relations for social standing, thus indicating that this factor has reduced in significance (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002:218).

It is believed that age does impact romantic relationships to the extent that the experiences vary between early to late adolescence. Carver et al. (2003) found that there is a 75% increase in dating by eighteen years of age. Furthermore, as adolescents mature, the duration of their relationships are extended. Younger adolescents, who are still greatly influenced by their peers, tend to place greater importance on physical features to obtain status and popularity. In contrast it has been found that the peer group plays a smaller role in the older adolescent's choice in romantic partner. Older adolescents tend to place more importance on partners who are like-

minded. Older adolescent's also tend make more concessions when resolving conflict (Collins, 2003:14-15).

Zimmer-Gembeck (2002:218) contends female adolescents' who date develop faster than their counterparts who do not engage in romantic relations during early adolescence. They tend to be better acquainted with adolescents of the opposite sex and are considered to hold a higher social standing.

Zimmer-Gembeck (2002:220) suggests that when adolescents enter a romantic relationship they tend to devote more of their time to their romantic partner than to their close friends or family. This can ensue into a strained relationship or disagreements with parents or friends. Male adolescents have been found to devote more of their time to their romantic partners, whereas female adolescents find a balance in devoting their time to their friends and romantic partners.

Males and females differ in the way they perceive romantic expectations. Mainly male adolescents engage in romantic relationships to fulfil their need for pleasure and to be held in high esteem by their peers. Male adolescents also seem to experience an "awkwardness" in their approach to romantic relationships as they are confined to their largely male peer group where it is not necessarily considered to be 'appropriate' to disclose emotions and personal thoughts. Males' notions of romantic expectations are conceptualised around sexual expectations. In contrast female's notions are conceptualised around romanticised ideals and tend to focus more on fondness and devotion. Nevertheless, it seems as though adolescent males in the later stage of adolescence tend to seek partners with whom they can have a more meaningful relationship (Cavanagh, 2007:583; Dhariwal et al., 2009:586, 597).

This may be a very disconcerting period for adolescents, pursuing romantic relationships. Romantic relationships impact greatly on an adolescent's emotions and psychological well-

being. Positive romantic relationships may lead to a positive sense of self and adolescents may value themselves more and feel more competent in approaching romantic engagements. In contrast many adolescents encounter rebuffs and relationships that end in separation. Breakups can escalate to individuals being diagnosed with major depressive disorder. Adolescents who are involved in romantic relationships are more likely to be exposed to conflict. Numerous romantic partners during adolescence do present adolescents with the opportunity to take part in risky behaviour, such as unprotected sex. This can also lead to transient romantic relations which can result in academic difficulties, low self-esteem, more anxiety and little future prospects (Collins, 2003:5; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002:217-219).

Dhariwal et al. (2009:582-583) believes that adolescents follow two romantic styles, which can be used to assess competence in romantic relationships in adulthood, namely, a consolidated romantic style and an exploratory romantic style. Consolidated romantic style refers to relationships that are caring, shows loyalty and gives the individuals fulfilment. This style is also considered to be more stable and durable. Exploratory romantic style refers to adolescents who explore different aspects of romantic behaviour with different partners. Adolescents who follow this style will also satisfy their impulses by participating in various relationships. Hendrick and Hendrick (2006; as cited in Dhariwal et al., 2009:595) suggest during adolescence females are more likely to follow a consolidated romantic style, whereas males are more likely to follow an exploratory romantic style. These styles are not limited to adolescence and are present in adulthood. The gender differences during adolescence, in part, can be associated with how they are socialised.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

Adolescence is a critical period in development marked by various biological, emotional, cognitive and social changes. This chapter set out to offer an understanding of the changes that adolescents undergo and the impact these changes may have on their self-perception,



expectations and behaviour. In this developmental period there is also a shift from the primary social group of the family to the peer group, as an increasingly important source of recognition and influence on socialisation. In many instances the peer group acts as an agent to reinforce set gender norms and heterosexual behaviour as scripted by society.

Relations with peers evolve into friendships that provide adolescents with opportunity for meaningful and intimate relationships with members of the same or opposite sex. Friendship is fairly significant in adolescent development as it acts as a starting point to navigate, negotiate and engage in romantic relationships. Heterosexual romantic relationships during adolescence are considered desirable by the broader society and often occupy adolescents' conversations and thoughts.

The impact of the media on socialisation and romantic relationships is considered in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 3: The media landscape**

The media has become an unescapable part of individuals' lives. It has penetrated every sphere of life. Individuals are bombarded with media and in constant interaction with it. Adolescents spend a considerable amount of time in interaction with the media. This chapter discusses media consumption among adolescents and the impact of the media on their own views and behaviour.

### **3.1. Media consumption among adolescents**

Brown et al. (2006:1019) identified four types of media that adolescents are exposed to, namely music, movies, magazines and television. They argue these media forms encourage particular ideas and behaviour among adolescents, as many ideas are glamorised and romanticised. Although they have linked this to the impact the media may have on adolescents' sexual and risky behaviour, their study provides insights into the media that adolescents are exposed to, the content found within these media forms and the frequency with which they use these media forms.

Adolescents are not passive when it comes to the media, they make conscious decisions without too much influence from adults, when listening to a particular band or watching a film starring a particular actor. For example Miley Cyrus, whose claim to fame was through the Disney channel show Hannah Montana, was regarded as the perfect role model for young adolescent girls. She personified wholesomeness and many adolescents could relate to her character, dealing with 'boy issues' and pressures. However, according to Govan (2014) and Wallace (2014) Miley Cyrus has potentially become a parent's worst nightmare after her 2013 MTV Video Music Awards performance in performing 'inappropriate' dance moves in an 'inappropriate' costume. An online poll conducted in 2013 by the New York Post found that Miley Cyrus claimed the top spot when it came to celebrities who were thought to have a negative impact on children. Adults

feel that sexualised images of girls and young women are wrong. Furthermore parents suggest that this type of behaviour is a cry for help and needs adult intervention. Some authors argue that Miley's behaviour may suggest that she is taking ownership of her own body and sexuality. As a rising female pop star she follows in the footsteps of Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera and Madonna, who became famous for their 'risque' behaviour (Bruinius, 2013; Lamb et al, 2013:163, 180).

Similarly, Justin Bieber, who achieved fame at age 14 and was voted as one of the most influential teens in 2013, transformed his image from being a wholesome boy-next-door to being a bad boy. His behaviour has sparked outrage amongs parents and believers (a term used to refer to Bieber's fans) alike (Anderson & Kay, 2014).

Parents might not want their children to listen to Miley or Justin's music anymore, but they have limited control over their child's music preference. It also happens that adolescents find other ways to access 'forbidden' music or films through friends, or simply listen music in the privacy of their rooms. The fact that their parents prohibit adolescents from listening to a particular artist might only make their resolve stronger to listen to the artist.

Arnett (1995:521-525) suggests that the media provides resources for adolescents to construct their identity, especially with regard to gender identity. Gender ideals are presented through films, images and magazines in particular ways. These ideals and images are then employed into an adolescent's romantic and sexual scripts. It offers adolescents stimulation through specific genre's of film, television programmes or music that may be more appealing to adolescents. Adolescence is a stage filled with pressure, anxiety and discord. In addition the media can provide coping measures as adolescents draw on music to deal with their emotions or contemplate how it relates to what is happening in their own lives. Listening to music, watching television or films, distract them from personal issues or problems and they find them enjoyable.

Furthermore adolescents use media to identify and connect with their peer groupings or a particular youth subculture, wherever they may find themselves.

### **3.2. Interpersonal relationships and online communication**

In South Africa, given its market penetration, cell phones appear to form an essential part of an individual's daily existence. Cell phones are a constant presence in many individual's lives as it connects them to a larger social network through communication such as texting and voice-calling, blogging and accessing social network sites. In addition it is also used for personal convenience such as setting alarms and reminders, taking photos, giving directions, listening to music and browsing the internet (Cupples & Thompson, 2010:1; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008:119).

New forms of communication are now interwoven in interpersonal relationships. Cell phones are necessary as it enables children to contact their parents, which gives parents a sense of assurance by having direct access to their child. A study conducted in New Zealand found that adolescents favour texting to calling as a method of communication (Cupples & Thompson, 2010:2; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008:125).

When adolescents are not in physical proximity to their friends they make use of messaging service such as BBM or Whatsapp to stay in contact or converse with their friends on various topics. Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008:125) contend that electronic communication does play its part in adolescent development with emphasis on relating to peers and being able to form a group identity by connecting with others. Adolescents who are shy seem to be more comfortable conversing with the opposite sex via electronic media. Electronic media services emphasise relationships with romantic partners as it allows romantic partners to converse more

frequently and not be limited to only face-to-face interaction (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008:128).

According to Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008:136) parents are concerned about the time that adolescents spend on electronic communication as it takes away time adolescents spend with their parents, such as cutting into meal times or family activities. Electronic communication gives adolescents more privacy as they can “shield” their communications from their parents. But it is also quite a cause of concern for parents, as many cell phones have internet access. Parents are not always aware of their child’s use of electronic communication, or they may be aware but they have limited information on the various communication mediums. Parents can become involved in their child’s use of electronic communication by means of supervising or taking restrictive measures. Supervising an adolescent’s media usage includes installing software on their computer or cellular phone to prevent them from accessing content that is considered to be inappropriate. By taking restrictive measures parents limit the amount of time adolescents have access to electronic media, the forms they have access to (such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and mediums they have access to (for example a computer in their room) (Cupples & Thompson, 2010:2; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008:137).

Often schools prevent pupils from using cellular phones at school or accessing iPods or iPads, and hand-held gaming devices as they believe it to be a distraction (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008:138).

### **3.3. Social media**

The term social media, popularised in 2005, refers to media that is created by individuals and can be accessed by individuals via the internet. Popular social media include Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, Wikipedia, Instagram and Twitter. Some of the sites are based in text-applications,

whereas others allow the sharing of videos and photo's. Individuals participate in social media sites with the goal to present themselves in a particular way by disclosing their thoughts and feelings. They also tend to manage what they disclose, so that they present themselves in a favourable way (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:60-62).

Adolescents participate extensively in social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and YouTube. Social media sites provide users with the opportunity to create profiles with their personal information, accessing other's profiles and sharing information. Social networks offer individuals the opportunity to share their personal ideas and feelings in a public space, however individuals still have control over their profiles or the information they share and who is able to view that information. Social networking sites provide them with the opportunity to gain information on particular individuals, such as new friends or possible romantic partners without direct contact (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:63; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008:199-123). Subrahmanyam and Greenfield's (2008:119) research indicates that they use social networking sites as a way to strengthen the relationships they have with those closest to them.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

Adolescents are active consumers of media and are exposed to various forms of media. Due to an ever increasing presence of social media platforms and access to the internet the impact of the digital milieu has to be taken into consideration when reflecting on identity, development and intimacy. Through messaging services adolescents have the opportunity to meet new people and make friends or to keep in contact with friends. Thus adolescents are linked to a physical and virtual reality. Not only do they construct an identity in their physical reality, but also in their virtual reality.

## Chapter 4: Theorising on adolescent romantic relationships

Social constructionism enables exploring the meaningfulness of experiences of romantic relationships. Social interaction plays a key role in constructing meaning. It is useful to consider who contributes to adolescents' thinking about romantic relations in a particular way, and how this is communicated and shared. This illuminates the expectations of romantic relationships, and whether they modify their behaviour or expectations to fit in with societal, family or peer norms.

### 4.1. Social constructionism

In human development predefined biological development occurs, but concurrently with the social milieu. This establishes a relationship between the individual's development and societal and cultural arrangements throughout the individual's entire lifespan. These arrangements are not part of the natural world but rather a product (re)created by humans. This has implications for the individual's perspective and actions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:66, 70).

Berger and Luckman (1966:33) contend "Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them in a coherent world." This emphasises the development of meaning in social, historical and cultural contexts and the relations that occur within these contexts. Individuals construct and make sense of their world through every day social interactions. This process occurs within an institutional context (Burr, 1995:3-4). Ridgeway and Correll (2004:512) indicate that the "social relational context is important for individuals to define themselves in relation to others". This occurs through interaction with other individuals and institutions through which they construct expectations and particular ideas (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988:372; Boghossnia, 2001:6).

Social constructionism is grounded in the idea that reality is constructed through meanings that are negotiated in everyday contexts through social practices and interaction. The meaning that is attached to social phenomenon or interaction is also dependent on a particular context in a particular time (Mallon, 2007:94). This places emphasis on the reciprocal influence that individuals and institutions have over one another. Berger and Luckmann (1966:37) refer to this as “intersubjectivity”, the reality within which other individuals participate, which is known to others as well, which then becomes “common-sense knowledge”. This common-sense knowledge forms part of one’s daily life.

What is considered to be the “reality of everyday life” is rarely questioned as it is deemed to be fixed and provides a framework that has prescribed actions and thoughts for specific occurrences. When an occurrence conflicts with what is known in common-sense knowledge the individual uses this knowledge to assimilate this conflict into what they know to make sense of it. When this knowledge fails to assimilate the conflicting knowledge, the individual is faced with another reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:37-39).

Common-sense knowledge is also shaped by meanings that are more significant to the individual. That which they deem as irrelevant might not form part of their constructed reality. However, the individual is also aware of meanings that may be significant to others and will refrain from conversing on certain topics that they may be sensitive about (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:59-60).

## **4.2. Language and interaction**

Language and interaction is a vital part in constructing meaning, as it forms a key part in negotiating meaning. According to Watts (1972:64, as cited in Becvar & Becvar, 1999:11)



“Our private most thoughts and emotions are not actually our own. For we think in terms of languages and images which we did not invent, but which were given to us by society”

Meaning is fluid, so individuals can transmit other meanings and realities when engaging with others. Interaction takes place in different ways amongst other face-to-face, which is considered to be one of the fundamental ways to construct reality. Within this type of interaction meanings are exchanged in the present and create a shared bond between individuals (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988:381; Berger & Luckmann, 1966:43, 51).

Furthermore language characterises occurrences that individuals may encounter and help them make sense of these occurrences. These characteristics also provide them with ‘appropriate’ guidelines or behaviour for these occurrences. Anderson and Goolishian (1988:380-381) identifies six elements that meaning may stem from when individuals engage with one another. 1) the milieu within which the conversation is set; 2) how individuals are acquainted; 3) the knowledge that individuals have about one another; 4) what individuals want to attain from the conversation; 5) collective and cultural norms that are pertinent to the conversation; and 6) the fluidity of meaning. Thus language can give meaning and prescribe certain characteristics to notions of gender and romantic relationships (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:51-52, 55).

### **4.3. Emerging institutions**

When certain actions are repeated and set a precedent it becomes a habit. Habits give meaning to actions which are constructed as part of the individual’s common-sense knowledge. This means that when the individual faces a particular situation, of which they might not have direct personal knowledge, their common-sense knowledge assists them in managing social encounters and situations.

In turn institutions evolve from habits (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:70-72). Institutions exercise influence over individuals by providing a set of roles and norms which shape their thoughts and actions, providing the context within which reality is constructed. These institutions are maintained when individuals continuously perform and exchange these roles and norms. When individuals enter the domain of romantic relationship they are positioned within a set of guidelines for gender appropriate behaviour (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:72; Macleod & Durrheim, 2002:44; Pennington, 2011:2).

Such rationalisation attributes meaning to institutions. Practices and beliefs that are carried over between generations, explains “why things are as they are” providing rationalisation for current practices. Berger and Luckman (1991:91) state that an “individual is not born a member of society, but becomes a member of society”. Individuals internalise these rationalisations to construct social knowledge about other individuals and social practices and this has implications for an individual’s behaviour in a particular context. Primary socialisation (parents and families) contribute to this rationalisation. As parents and families are the first individuals one encounters it can be said that they are the first to communicate and pass on certain ideas and perspectives onto the individual (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:111; Boghosnia, 2001:8). This is highlighted by Berger and Luckman (1991:151) who state that significant others greatly impact upon an individual as the individual associates with the significant others. Through conversing, negotiating and participating in social activities with others individuals construct and interpret their social world (Jackson & Scott, 2010:16).

Peer groups start to play a significant role in communicating social behaviour. Since children select their own peer groups it can be argued that children construct their own social milieu by participating in certain activities with peers that may promote certain gender related behaviour (Martin et al., 2002:905).

#### **4.4. The fluidity of reality**

Even though individuals may share a reality they do not necessarily share the same perspectives and attach the same meaning to this reality. Thus meanings and perspectives are not necessarily fixed, as they are also subjective in nature. Given that individuals are not passive their subjective consciousness is not fixed. By means of interaction, reflexivity and experiences their perceptions and behaviour can change. Through their active participation in (re)shaping meanings through interaction, the meaning they attach to particular ideas and actions are reconstructed (Becvar & Becvar, 1999:10, Berger & Luckmann, 1966:37; Jackson & Scott, 2010:14).

#### **4.5. Gender and sexuality as socially constructed**

Parents, peers and the media provide “cultural and social knowledge” of gendered behaviour. Cultural and social knowledge do not only control the way in which individuals construct notions of gender but it acts as a source of information for how a broader society might view gender (Jackson & Scott, 2010:16).

Connell (2005:71, as cited in Schippers, 2007:86) contends that gender is social and has performative aspects. Heteronormative beliefs define gender scripts of what it means to be female or male. Gender is socially constructed and given meaning through social interactions within different social institutions with social processes playing a role. Gender is thus not an objective universal given, it is rather created through social interaction that assigns roles and hierarchical relations between the sexes. This has an implication for the meaning that is attached to gendered scripts of masculine and feminine behaviour, actions and interactions. Individuals will use these institutional contexts to comprehend and perform their identity and desires in particular situations or in their actions (Biscarrat, 2013:2; Boghosnia, 2001:7; Leap & Anderson, 1997:89;

Lorber, 1994:13; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004:510-511, 515; Ritzer, 2008:511; Robnett & Leaper, 2013:100; Schippers, 2007:90; Wetherell, 1996:321).

Women tend to be socialised to be more predisposed to oblige male desires within the heteronormative “dating game.” Even more so, hegemonic ideas of gender-based behaviour in relationships create expectations that individuals adhere to, such as males having to approach a female to enter into a romantic relationship, or that males should be the key decision-maker for the relationship because males are characterised by these gender notions as competent and dominant.

However, Andreasson and Johansson (2013:3) argue that “gender designations, are, in a constant process of being remade and redefined”. This leads to individuals being able to construct their femininity or masculinity in different ways. Thus everyday experiences with the social world may reinforce or discourage particular behaviour or ideas (Lorber, 1994:13; Wetherell, 1996:338).

#### **4.6. Romantic relationships as social constructions**

Social constructionism contributes to understanding romantic relationships as the notion of romance differs between groups, periods and societies. In different contexts it is given different meanings, and prescribed different norms, guidelines and actions. Thus there are a set of frameworks that individuals use as a point of reference when they think, talk or participate in romantic relationships (Lesch & Furphy, 2013:623).

Collins (2003:13) contends that context, to a large degree, plays a role in an adolescent’s dating age, partner selection, frequency of participating in romantic relationships and becoming

sexually active. Context includes cultural beliefs, which can for example restrict romantic activities. This also impacts what is regarded as ‘appropriate’ romantic behaviour or expectations.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

Social constructionism can be used to gain insight into adolescents’ experiences and meaning they attach to romantic relationships. Even though adolescents have their own ideals and expectations of romantic relationships, these do reflect those ideals and expectations held by society. Agents of socialisation such as parents, peers and the media shape these ideals and expectations.

## Chapter 5: Methodological considerations

Social constructionism is based on the premise that social interaction is important in shaping meaning. Bearing this in mind it is useful in understanding how adolescents' thinking about romantic relationships are shaped. When adolescents engage in romantic relationships they have certain expectations and ideals, which can be reinforced if they experience a romantic relationship as congruent with their ideals and expectations. If they were to experience a romantic relationship in another way it may alter their ideals and expectations. Not only do their own experiences shape their ideals and beliefs but there are wider influences such as parents, peers, the media and their social context.

### 5.1. Research design

Considering the research topic and theoretical orientation, this research is qualitative. A qualitative approach focuses on an emic (insider's) perspective when studying the behaviour of people. This places emphasis on detailing and comprehending social phenomena. A qualitative approach views reality as constructed by individuals. Individuals create their own meaning and adapt their actions to fit their perceived realities and definition of the situation (Sarantakos, 2005:40-41).

#### 5.1.1. *Research site(s)*

The research was conducted at an Afrikaans medium private school in the Ekurhuleni metropolitan municipality selected purposively as the primary research site. This school attended by white pupils from middle to upper class backgrounds is situated in a well-established predominantly Afrikaans-speaking neighbourhood. Several pragmatic reasons guided the

selection of the particular school: Considering that the school is relatively small, it allowed for closer observation of interaction between pupils. Given the focus on the social construction of romantic relations, I<sup>1</sup> could observe nuances in their interaction. Second, I believed that the participants might be more comfortable willing to open up and share their views and experience given our similar characteristics being white, Afrikaans-speaking females. Third, as I had assisted the school on a previous occasion with counselling, I was familiar with the context and felt comfortable approaching the school with a request to conduct research. Fourth, the school is conveniently situated in close proximity to where I live and considering the cost of petrol, e-tolls and travelling it was a cost-effective option.

As the research progressed I felt that I had to approach more white Afrikaans-speaking female adolescents. Hence, a secondary site, a church was identified. The church, like the school is located in Ekurhuleni. The reverend identified the final year Sunday school group (grade 11's) as potential participants. All eight gave their assent to participate in the research and their parents gave their consent as well. These participants were recruited for a focus group discussion.

### *5.1.2. The participants*

White Afrikaans female adolescents from middle to upper class backgrounds, between the ages of 13 and 19 were selected for this study. In planning the study, it was determined that all the female adolescent pupils from the school would be invited to participate given the limited numbers enrolled at it. Of the 20 female pupils, I initially received 11 consent and assent forms from the parents and pupils.

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I chose to write in the first person as I as a researcher am an active participant in the research process. Furthermore I approach the research with my own views and expectations and contribute in constructing and interpreting meaning.

However, when I started to make arrangements to meet with participants, only six of the 11 initially responded to my request and were available for appointments. I respected the decision of the others not to participate. The older pupils showed greater interest and were more willing to participate.

As the research progressed more female adolescents at the school indicated that they wanted to participate. At the end of the fieldwork stage 14 from the school had participated, and all eight from the church. More than two-thirds of the participants were in their late adolescence (15 years and older).

### *5.1.3. Data collection*

Observations, focus groups, semi-structured qualitative interviews and visual representations were used to gather data for the study.

Observations afforded me the opportunity to examine adolescents in a natural social setting where they engaged with their peers at school. Because adolescents spend a considerable time at school, it is an important site that contributes to their socialisation. Fieldwork at the school enabled me to observe the activities adolescents participated in with their peers, who they interacted with and how they interacted with each other. Fieldwork took place during break times when pupils had the opportunity to socialise outside the classroom and participate in activities. Pupils were not aware that I was observing them in this initial phase of the research. This was beneficial as they might have modified their behaviour if they knew that they were being studied. The purpose of the initial observation was to familiarise myself with the setting.



Focus groups were chosen bearing in mind the social and collective context within which adolescents converse with one another. Focus groups create opportunities for interaction and engagement on a particular topic to provide insights on how meaning is constructed through interaction. Focus groups can “generate diversity and difference within or between individuals, and so reveal the dilemmatic nature of everyday arguments” (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996:96, as cited in Sarantakos, 2005:195). Participants were able to respond on comments other participants made even to the extent of contesting and contradicting them.

Youth tend to feel more at ease within a group setting as they are surrounded by their peers. I found this especially true with focus group 1, who was already close friends. Their relationships made them more comfortable to discuss their feelings and experiences. My role was to facilitate the group sessions and encourage interaction among participants. It became apparent during this session that my presence was barely noticed when the participants carried on with their own conversations (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:292).

I also chose to conduct in-depth face-to-face individual interviews to converse with participants on the topic of adolescent romantic relationships. I wanted to hear of their experiences, opinions and expectations about romantic relationships. Interviews allowed me to probe responses and for participants to elaborate on these responses. I did not adhere to a set interview schedule as I wanted participants to feel as if they were conversing with me like one would with a friend. Modern technology provides new ways of communicating and new ways of expressing oneself. This created an opportunity for participants to engage in online interviews.

Research suggests that young people are more comfortable with online communication and it reduces anxiety that may occur with face-to-face interaction. In addition it provided them with the privacy to interact more freely and openly (Faulkner & Culwin, 2005; Pierce, 2009). The online interviews consisted of conversations via the social messaging platform Whatsapp.

Themes identified from the literature and that arose during the research process were formulated into questions used during the focus group sessions and individual interviews. Topics of discussion were based on participants' experiences of romantic relationships and various influences that shape these experiences. Further questions for the focus group discussions were based on film clips I showed them.

A fourth method I used to collect data was visual representation in the form of collages. This method was applied in one focus group and some of the individual interviews. This method allowed participants to reflect on the topic and how they would respond after careful consideration. Participants were asked to visually construct their ideas of romantic relationships, after which a discussion was held. Collages are constructed from various images, and this provided the opportunity for participants to express numerous thoughts and ideas on this topic. It was mostly the younger participants who constructed collages as it enabled them to open up more and participate in a discussion.

## **5.2. The course of the fieldwork**

In October 2013, after obtaining ethical approval from the University of Pretoria, I had a meeting with the principal of the school to set up dates for data collection at the school. We agreed that I could conduct my observations of pupils (phase 1) during break times on the school grounds until their examinations started. We agreed continuing the data collection i.e. focus groups and interviews (phases 2 & 3) in January 2014, when the new school term started. These arrangements suited the school's programme as assessments commence later in the year.

To familiarise myself with the social milieu and interaction among adolescents I observed interaction (phase 1). During break times I positioned myself on a bench in the designated play

area for the high school pupils. From this vantage point various adolescent groups were visible and I assumed a role of a complete observer.

The principal invited me to the parent information session the school has at the start of the year. This allowed me to directly speak to the parents and inform them of my study and answer any questions that they may have with regards to the study. I was able to distribute consent forms to the parents at the information session.

A week later I collected the forms from the principal. After receiving 11 signed forms, I texted each participant to thank them for their willingness to participate and to set up dates for the interviews. Initially I had replies from six of the 11 participants. They were all very keen but asked for further information. Some were under the impression I was going to give them advice about romantic relationships. Anne Oakley (1981:42-44) experienced similar situations where her participants asked her for advice or information. Her response was to answer honestly and by being responsive it became an interactive conversation.

Nine semi-structured face-to-face interviews, two Focus Groups and two online interviews were conducted between February 2014 and June 2014 with participants.

The first online interview lasted an hour and a half whereas the second interview spanned over a period of three consecutive days. In the first interview the participant took the opportunity to discuss her current romantic relationship. This was also the only discussion I ever had with this particular participant as a second attempt to engage further was not successful. Again, I respected her choice not to engage further on the topic. Nevertheless, our discussion was quite insightful into the experiences adolescents have with regard to their relationships. I believe that she just wanted to express her feelings to someone who did not know her and would not judge her about her feelings. The second participant was very willing to converse over Whatsapp, as she

explained her personal circumstances did not allow her to go out much and she felt more comfortable conversing in this way. These interviews were conducted with written permission from parents and written and verbal assent from participants. During the course of our conversations I typed out transcripts.

At a stage during the research where it seemed that I only had six participants from the school, I decided to select additional participants as part of my contingency plan. I contacted a local church to enquire if they could assist me in approaching parents and adolescents to participate in a focus group. The reverend was very willing to assist and after a short, informal meeting, indicated that he would speak to his final year class and their parents. A week later he contacted me to indicate that all the females in his final year class were willing to participate and that the focus group could take place during one of their classes on a Sunday.

I started each focus group session by introducing myself to the participants and giving a bit of background on my research. I enquired whether all the participants had signed and handed in their consent forms. I reminded the participants that they could leave at any time and they could refuse to answer questions. I asked the participants if they would be comfortable with me making an audio recording of the focus group session. They indicated that they didn't have a problem with this. After ensuring all ethical requirements were met, I made use of an ice breaker to create an atmosphere of openness and cooperation. Each participant was asked to introduce themselves and to tell something to the group about themselves that the others did not necessarily know about them.

During the course of the focus group session I showed six clips from the film *LOL* (2012) which was used as the central point of discussion. The chosen clips depicted the main character's relationship with her friends, boyfriend, love interest and mother. In some of the clips the main character experienced situations similar to what some participants experienced such as being cheated on, breaking up, being in love. In the first clip I used a voice over from the character

“Friendship with the opposite sex entails care and to just be yourself and a relationship with the opposite sex entails not caring and not being yourself?” This opened a discussion on the extent of being yourself in a relationship and openness with a partner. The second clip showed the main character’s boyfriend telling her that he “hooked-up” with another girl. This clip led to a discussion on commitment in a relationship and responding to a breakup. The third and fourth clip highlighted the relationship between the main character and her mother. This was used to understand the participants’ relationship with their parents, especially when it comes to sharing about romantic relationships. The fifth clip depicted the infatuation of the adolescent female characters in the movie with their male teacher, which in turn led to a discussion on dating older guys and the appropriate age difference between partners. The scene in sixth clip showed another character, who was very popular among the boys as she was referred to as a “post-it girl, who gave it to everybody.” This scene led to a discussion on sexting.

I held two focus groups, one with three participants (from the school) and a second one with eight participants (at the church). There were clear contrasts between the two focus groups such as the relationship of the participants, the setting of the focus group sessions and the size, all which had implications for the research.

Focus group one was intimate as the three participants had a very close relationship. Two of the participants were siblings, who were close in age, and the third participant was a mutual friend. The result was a much more dynamic and engaged discussion on the topic as participants felt comfortable to share their views and experiences and to comment on each other’s views and experiences. This focus group represented a naturally occurring group and reflected a potential situation in which they may initiate discussions of the topic. I asked the focus group to create a collage based on their views or experiences of romantic relationships. It was during the creation of the collages that the participants held their own discussions rarely acknowledging my presence, which gave me the opportunity to observe them in a more ‘natural’ setting, as if they were at a friend’s house.

Not all participants from the second focus group attended the same school or were close friends. In a sense this limited the discussion as many were not necessarily as comfortable to discuss their views in front of their fellow classmates with who they did not share a close relationship as in the case of focus group one. The focus group at the church also had the drawback of not all participants participating in the conversation fully. Half of the participants actively engaged in conversation whereas the others rarely voiced their opinions and mainly concurred with what the others were saying. To some extent this focus group represents how participants may discuss this topic in a more public place (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 292).

Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours. I only conducted one interview on a day as they were time consuming. Most interviews were scheduled for the evening or weekends due to participants' busy afternoon extra-curricular schedule and homework assignments. Interviews were arranged at the participant's convenience, and in many instances the participants (and especially their parents) found it more convenient that the interviews took place at either my home or theirs, considering that parents had to drive their children around and wanted to ensure their safety.

Six participants from the school who either initially did not indicate their willingness to participate or did not respond when they were texted to set up a meeting subsequently expressed interest in being interviewed. Their initial reluctance might have been due to their assumptions of what would happen or what my agenda might have been. Their interests were probably piqued by discussions with friends who participated.

An interview schedule (see appendix A) served as a guide for my discussion with the participants, but this was seldomly consulted as most of the discussion flowed without problems and key topics were dealt with. After explaining the nature of my research, some participants took their own initiative and discussed topics they thought were relevant. I also adapted my questions following responses I received from participants. For example in the instance where

the participant was in a long-term relationship, my questions centred more on this specific relationship. In contrast my questions focused more on views and expectations when participants had very little experience of romantic relationships.

I rarely had to use prompts or probes to elicit information as the participants were very willing to open up and discuss their views and experiences. Even though some participants were nervous at first, their eagerness to relate their views and experiences (or their friends' experiences) trumped their nervousness.

Before each interview the participants were reminded of their right to not answer questions, skip questions or terminate the interview at any time without any repercussions. When questions of a sensitive nature were asked participants were once again reminded of their rights. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. They gave their permission verbally.

All interviews were conducted in Afrikaans, considering that it is their home language. Interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants. In one instance English was also used periodically, and often participants mixed languages. Immediately after the interview I made field notes regarding my observations and impressions and typed out transcripts of the interviews at the earliest opportunity. A list of participants indicating their relationship is attached (see appendix B).

### **5.3. Data management**

I transcribed all interviews verbatim based on the recordings. Audio recordings were listened to using headphones, to ensure confidentiality. No one other than myself and my supervisor had access to these transcriptions and they were also password protected in a folder on my password protected laptop.

## 5.4. Data analysis

For the data analysis I made use of the recorded and transcribed data based on the focus group discussions and individual interviews as well as the observations that I made when collecting data. Themes were identified from the transcripts. I re-read the fieldnotes and transcribed data numerous times and made notes (memoing) during this process, which allowed me to critically examine the data for greater insight. When writing up the findings I used excerpts from participants to voice their views. The themes in the study focus on adolescent females' experiences of romantic relationships and various influences that shape these experiences.

## 5.5. Ethical considerations

It is important with any research to consider ethics with regard to participants as the researcher must not cause any harm or discomfort to them. It was also important in this research to adhere to ethical considerations as participants were minors.

### 5.5.1. *Formal ethical requirements*

I obtained formal ethical clearance from the UP Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics committee. I also gained permission from the principal of the school and the reverend.

I informed the principal and reverend that in identifying potential participants, the participants should not be coerced into participating and had to participate willingly. Prior to the interviews a participant information sheet (see appendix C) and parental information sheet (see appendix D) was given to each participant, which explained the nature of the study, the process of the study and the rights of the participants. All participants and their parents or guardians had to sign the



form. After parents agreed that their child may participate, the potential participant was approached and also had to give assent.

During the focus group sessions and interviews each participant assured me that she understood the information sheet and was aware of her rights. Participants were reminded of their rights during the course of the focus group sessions and interviews. Participants were also given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym that would be used in the final report.

In their discussion some of the participants included the names of their friends and families and even their views of their friends and family. Some of these views can be considered as negative or unfavourable. Thus, it was also important to consider protecting the identities of these individuals as to not cause them any harm. For this reason I also changed the names of other individuals participants mentioned.

Some participants were very eager to participate in the research and quickly wanted to establish a close relationship with me by asking if they could contact me for advice or go for coffee. This was especially the case with the older participants who wanted to discuss study and career options, or wanted to know about student life.

## **5.6. Personal reflections**

This research is intended to give voice to female adolescents and contribute to our knowledge of their views and experiences when it comes to romantic relationships. Considering the critical developmental stage and the emotional context of romantic relationships I had to be very sensitive toward my participants as I did not want to cause them harm. Especially in cases where relating some experiences may trigger emotions talking about it.

My personal background does have an impact on the research and in some instances has proved advantageous. As an Afrikaans female I was positioned as an insider to engage with participants in their mother tongue. Drawing from my own experiences as an adolescent female I could facilitate rapport. These shared characteristics contributed to participants' willingness to share their experiences. Self-disclosure, when appropriate, on my part encouraged participants to reciprocate.

However, my limited interaction with social media in a critical developmental stage such as adolescence positioned me as an outsider. Increasingly individuals are exposed to social media at younger ages, and in adolescents' social world social media plays a large role. My interaction with social media only started in my late adolescent development and it was more of a novelty than something that formed part of my daily existence. The age difference between myself and some of the younger participants may have limited some of their interaction, especially as some of them referred to me as "tannie" (an Afrikaans term to refer to an older adult female). The participants were aware that I was doing research, which may have made them more self-conscious about what they discussed and they may have wanted to depict themselves in a positive light.

I also think that some participants from focus group 2 (the church group) might not have willingly participated if they were asked individually. In addition they might have felt that it was 'required' by the church that they participate. This may also have led them to express what is regarded as socially acceptable in this particular public context of the focus group.

I felt emotionally drained after the interviews, as some participants opened up and related details of their personal and family lives that they have never discussed with anyone. Some of these discussions left me quite emotional, for example I felt angry when participants indicated that they were teased or called names by others or I was sad on the part of participants who still had overwhelming feelings about a breakup or rejection.

After each interview or focus group discussion I asked participants what their experience was of the interview, and if they felt comfortable about what they shared with me. I indicated to participants that if they had the need to speak to someone other than myself, they were more than welcome to speak to a social worker whose details I had readily available. However, no participant indicated they required counselling. I also gave them the opportunity to ask further questions and answered them as fully and honestly as I could. Participants were also thanked for their time and willingness to participate in the discussion.

### **5.7. Limitations**

When listening to the audio recording from focus group 2 there were times when it was difficult to hear what the participants were saying as there was background noise from the church organ. A further limitation was not interviewing focus group participants individually to probe on topics brought up in the focus group. This may have yielded other insights, as participants may hold views that differ from those raised within the group.

Even though the research question is stated in the broadest terms, the selection of this particular site narrows the research to the experiences of white Afrikaans middle to upper class female adolescents. Due to the qualitative nature of the study and the small sample the findings of the research can also not be generalised to white Afrikaans adolescent females as a whole. Nevertheless it does provide insight into romantic experiences that some females may encounter during their adolescence.

## 5.8. Conclusion

Even though there are limitations as stated above, one can still gain a valuable understanding and insight into romantic relationships among female adolescents and their feelings regarding male adolescents. The following chapter discusses various agents that influence on the socialisation process that set the basis for the participants' perceptions of romantic relationships. Furthermore the chapter discusses the participants' experiences of romantic relationships.

## Chapter 6: Experiences of romantic relationships

### 6.1. Agents of socialisation

#### 6.1.1. *The family*

The family is the primary agent of socialisation and provides the first example children have of intimate relationships. Children learn from observing their parents or other adults<sup>2</sup>. Thus the relationship between parents (or guardians) play an integral part in the way that a child will construct ideas and expectations of romantic relationships.

Positive interaction and long-term relationships between parents can result in adolescents viewing their parents as positive rolemodels for their romantic relationships. Christina, whose parents have been married for 20 years, describes their relationship as one of open communication and very little conflict. She sees them basically as being one person as they do everything together and make everything work together. She wants her partner to have the same characteristics that her father has, which she describes as kind and considerate. He helps her mother out when she is tired and buys her flowers just because he wants to. Ester's parents have been married for 24 years and prior to that dated for six years, she wants her own marriage to be as happy as theirs. She stated that her mother tells her frequently that she just loves her father more and more with every passing day.

Other family members may also act as role models for constructing notions of romantic relationships. Jane considers her grandparents to be an excellent role model as they have been

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<sup>2</sup> Participants may not necessarily have grown up in 'traditional' nuclear family, households with a mother and father, so it must be taken into account that participants may have grown up in other types of families such as stepfamilies, single parent households or living with grandparents. In this study there is only two participants who grew up in single-parent households.

married for 45 years, whereas Corlea sees her older brother and his girlfriend of one year, as her role model. She explains that they are each other's best friends and they are loyal towards one another.

Reflecting on their parents' relationship children can learn what they do not want from relationships. Danika does not want an unequal relationship where she like her mother would have the full responsibility of parenting and all other household chores, such as the shopping, planning for vacations, cooking and cleaning. Her observations of her parents' relationship has affected her perception of men and her expectations of romantic relationships.

Maria: What is a man's role and responsibilities in the relationship?

Danika: To protect us, I think that is the main thing. [...] I want a relationship that is equal. It must not be like that (referring to her parents' relationship), the guy must help me decide what to make to eat or even prepare the meal himself, or something like that...discipline children, things like that, what he (referring to her father) doesn't do. [translated – see endnote<sup>1</sup>]

She believes it is important for a father to spend time with his children as it lays their foundation, and feels if he helps around the house, he acts as a positive role model for his son. She believes her father's behaviour influences her brother's views on gender roles.

“My brother thinks it is right, my brother thinks that is how it should be done, your mother does everything, a woman must do everything and a father does nothing.” [translated – see endnote<sup>2</sup>].

### *6.1.2. School/Church*

Social institutions such as the school and the church, within this study, both set in a conservative Christian context, shape adolescents' expectations of romantic relationships. Pious Christianity places a great emphasis on female sexuality remaining 'pure' until marriage. Ester, one of the participants from the school, like many of the other participants, was very vocal on this subject and expressed disapproval of adolescents who engage in sexual relations and premarital sexual relationships in general. She felt that sex is the ultimate symbol of intimacy between two individuals, an intimacy that is only appropriate when married.

The church often emphasises traditional gender roles. Anna-Mart related a talk that she attended, for married couples along with her mother, on finances in a relationship. The female Christian leader spoke of the changing nature of the work environment where women have moved into positions of power and earn more than their male partners. It was emphasised that even though the wife may be more independent financially the man must remain the breadwinner and main decision maker (by implication the head of the household). When it comes to money, which should be paid into a joint account, the advice was that it must only be spent on things from which they both will benefit.

### *6.1.3. Peers*

Considering that adolescence is a critical developmental period, individuals are more sensitive about their body image and the physical changes they experience, especially female adolescents. Society values a slim female figure as this is considered placing pressure on females to be slim and trim. Within the domain of romantic relationships females who do not conform to these norms are rejected by peers and are socially tormented. This can impact deeply on their self-esteem and self-confidence (see section 2.2.2.).

Jennifer and Corlea (Focus Group 1)<sup>3</sup> feel that teasing is the biggest problem that female adolescents of their generation face and this puts a lot of pressure on them.

Jennifer: Like if you're not the prettiest or the skinniest or whatever...

Corlea: You are judged basically, like very badly...

Jennifer: Yes, I think every teenage girl feels pressure, no matter what she looks like, because if you are pretty, they expect things from you, and if you are not then ja you get judged by it

Not only is there pressure to be pretty or skinny, but when someone is pretty or skinny there is still pressure on them to maintain their looks and to meet expectations.

Moreover individuals internalise their peers' views with the implication that they judge themselves. For example Alri stands in front of the mirror and objectifies herself "look at how fat I am, I am overweight, I am ugly." [translated – see endnote<sup>3</sup>]. The self-image can impact on their ability to engage with others in romantic relationships

Peers act as a point of reference for individuals to position themselves within society. Peer groups play a significant role in the way individuals make sense of their social world and contribute to individuals' psycho-social development (see section 2.2.3.).

Peers can act as role models for romantic relationships. Anna-Mart describes her relationship with Pierre as an example for their peers, because he is a youth leader at their church. Others look to Pierre as their guide for how they should treat their partner and ask him for advice. This puts some pressure on Anna-Mart, as she feels she must do things 'right' as others are looking up

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<sup>3</sup> Even though participants were from an Afrikaans school, two participants from focus group 1 had an Afrikaans mother and an English father, and many times conversed in English.



to them. She indicated that they will be at a youth camp with their fellow youth, on his birthday weekend and will not be able to spend time alone, as they have obligations towards their fellow youth.

They might get the wrong impression, or they may think: What can they actually do? Or: Why do they want to be alone? Understand? Now I have to sacrifice this. There are certain things which you have to sacrifice. Pierre and I can't go for a walk on the rugby field because people [will ask], 'Oh, where is Anna-Mart and Pierre?' So you have to sacrifice it to sit there with everyone and socialise. [translated – see endnote<sup>4</sup>]

#### 6.1.4. *The media*

Due to the ever increasing exposure of the media it is not surprising that adolescents will seek role models in the form of celebrities, or fictional characters. This was evident in the collages, I will discuss later. Maryke views the characters Bella and Edward from the Twilight book and film series as role models for a relationship. This franchise has been criticised by feminist scholars as it propagates gendered ideas of dominating males and powerless and vulnerable females. Moreover the novel suggests that women's identity and fulfilment is constructed around the family and motherhood (Silver, 2010:121-123,133).

Role models in the media are not limited to fictional film or book characters, but also real-life celebrity couples. Bill and Giuliana Rancic resonate with Anna-Mart. Her reason for this is that they are cute together, rarely argue and will not shout at each other when they argue. Her view of them as a couple is based on the reality show *Giuliana and Bill* that aired on E! Entertainment. Giuliana Rancic (née DePandi) achieved reknown as the co-host for E! News and Bill Rancic, an American entrepreneur, won the first season of the Apprentice (E! Entertainment, 2009). Reality television programmes claim to document the 'real' lives of for example celebrities and "capture their lives as it happens" (Clissold, 2004:49). Reality shows may seem unscripted but are crafted

to depict socially accepted social roles and norms. Reality shows have a strong performative dimension where characters perform expected gender roles.

## 6.2. Objectifying the other

Very little research exists on the female gaze, as most research focuses on the male gaze. The male gaze, a term coined by Laura Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975:9-10). It refers to women that are subjected to heterosexual objectification by males in films and society. Thus women perform for the pleasure and desires of men. Furthermore the male gaze is associated with a patriarchal structure where men hold the power over the female body. However this is slowly changing as females are more openly subjecting males to their gaze as well. Even more so ideas and expectations of masculinity and male grooming has changed. Men have become more conscious of their own body image with the media and advertising playing a key role. This was apparent when asking the participants to describe guys they were interested in. Their first responses were mostly “hot”, “sexy”, “good looking”. Jennifer agrees that her peers openly display their pleasure in a boy they find desirable such as staring, murmuring, pointing and attempting to get noticed. Her point was also illustrated in our focus group session when they were creating the collages and she became quite excited when there was a feature spread of ‘hotties’ in one of the magazines and she asked whether she could keep the pages. This was also evident in the pictures of boys they selected to use in their collages.

Alri and her friends frequently engage in conversation about a boy at their school, who they refer to as “sexy boudjies” [sexy butt]. She explains that he received this nickname based on one friend’s observation of his “sexy butt, it is so beautiful, tight and round,” [translated – see endnote<sup>5</sup>]. When speaking of him in her friendship group, she would refer to him as “sexy boudjies”, soon this nickname spread throughout the small school community amongst female pupils.

It seems that participants tend to place a high premium on physical appearance of their ideal guys in many instances referring to features of well-known and ‘desirable’ celebrities such as Justin Bieber’s hair or Adam Brody’s eyes. This in turn led to a conversation initiated by Jennifer on the ideal of building the ‘perfect guy. She wished that there was a shop ‘build-a-boy’. It was also at this point that Jennifer took out her phone to show me photos of guys that she would use to construct her ideal guy. She showed me three photos and indicated what she would use to construct her ‘ideal’ guy.

Furthermore participants were likely to express their displeasure at guys they found to be ‘ugly’. Their displeasure in his appearance would lead to him being rejected as a potential romantic interest or ideal. Corlea (Focus Group 1) exclaimed in disgust when she came across a picture of a guy she didn’t find attractive at all, “that guy is just disgusting”, and Jessica’s response was that “he looks like an elf.”

Males are increasingly objectified are subjected to pressure to conform to these expectation as they must be desirable as the response of the participants suggest. This turn to physique suggests the increasing importance of visual cues and consumption of media ideals, a process that probably started in the mid-twentieth century.

### **6.3. Perceptions of difference in parents’ experience of relationships and their own**

I asked the participants if they thought that their experiences of relationships differed to those of their parents. Their perception is that their experiences are different than their parents and that today’s adolescents face more challenges than they believe their parents did. It can be argued that these challenges they refer to are not new, but are challenges that were faced by most adolescent generations over the years. However the prominence of social media in this generation of

adolescents social world does pose new challenges particularly with regard to the pervasiveness and immediacy of digital communication and visual stimuli.

It can be argued that parents do not necessarily share all of their experiences as adolescents with their children as they feel they need to protect them or that their own experiences may differ from the wholesome and innocent ideal aspired to. This can lead to children seeing their experiences as significantly different from their parents.

Participants believe that today's adolescent's are more mature, have a disregard for boundaries and place more emphasis on physical appearance than in previous generations. They feel that adolescents of today are more mature, but that their maturity can have a negative impact. Some participants felt that their peers believed it acceptable to do what they want, when they want, such as getting drunk at the age of 15 or 16 or going to parties, which they believe their parents did not participate in.

Jennifer believes that her parents and other generations spent more quality time together in their romantic relationships under the watchful eyes of their parents in their homes. Cell phones connect partners at a distance in the privacy of their own rooms, which she believes may have more negative consequences. She claims in the past guys' priorities were better as they rather focused on a girl's personality traits rather than on her appearance. Jennifer fallaciously believes that considerably more conservative norms were enforced in previous generations, that it was inappropriate for girls to wear clothing that was too short or too tight or showed excessive skin and nowadays it is the norm.

## 6.4. Experiencing romantic relationships

### 6.4.1. Showing interest

For any relationship to commence individuals must be interested in each other and show interest in each other. According to the participants they have a sense of when someone is interested in them or they just know, they refer to this as you ‘get a feeling.’ The other person may not necessarily have to say anything, but their body language and the manner which they engage in will be able to give this away [Bianca, Ester].

I don’t know, I think a person just gets a feeling, like uhm, a person smiles the whole time and giggle the whole time, you are happy...[Ester] [translated – see endnote<sup>6</sup>]

When you are with him and your stomach turns [has butterflies] and you don’t know what to do and you can’t get him out of your head like permanently, that is how I feel. [Focus Group 2] [translated – see endnote<sup>7</sup>]

If you can see yourself spend more time with that person, and you halfmiss that person if you are not with him, or something like that, yes. [Karlien] [translated – see endnote<sup>8</sup>]

Participants adopt strategies to show their interest in someone such as getting their attention or engaging them in conversation.

Adolescents also feel rejection when someone they may be interested in (even if it is from afar) shows interest in someone else. Even if they are considered not to be in the same league as the person or believe that they will ‘never’ stand a chance to be considered as a candidate for a

possible romantic relationship, it still hurts the particular individual. The implication of this is that they may shy away from future or possible encounters in fear of being rejected or hurt again.

#### 6.4.2. *Making the first move*

Initiating a relationship is stereotypically regarded a male's role. These gender based expectations alludes to females who make the first move as inappropriate or having little self-respect.

It can possibly be so, but it is not right.[...] it creates the impression that the girl is more dominant than the boy and in my eyes it not right. [...] it shows that the boy is partially not man enough to do something. [...] I think that if the girl were to ask him out, she would always hold the reins and he would feel as if she is the boss in the relationship, but if the boy asks her out, then he is man enough to say yes or no [to the girl]. [Jane, translated – see endnote<sup>9</sup>]

She implies that roles in relationships are gendered and that it is appropriate for a male to be dominant, but as soon as a female assumes the role of the dominant partner she is considered to be bossy.

However there is some flexibility with regard to approaching a potential romantic interest. Females are not passive and without agency, as they interact with their romantic interest and might even hint at the possibility of a romantic relationship. By way of their friends or their romantic interest's friends they attempt to find out about their interest and whether their feelings might be reciprocated. But there is still the expectation that a male must ask a female if she wants to be in a relationship with him.

### 6.4.3. *Starting a relationship*

Prior to adolescent development males and females have less frequent interaction. During this development phase peer groups expand to include members of the opposite sex. Friendship with the opposite sex is considered to be one of the first steps to engage in heterosexual romantic relationships. Most participants felt it was acceptable to enter into a romantic relationship upon entering high school.

Adolescents are considered to be more mature in their emotional and physical development. Considering that they are developing towards adulthood is it seen as ‘natural’ that they pursue romantic relationships which acts as a stepping stone for future adult romantic relationships. In high school there is a greater awareness of romantic possibilities and more opportunities to engage with peers in romantic relationships.

Peer expectations and pressure to date increases which can persuade individuals to enter into romantic relationships to fit in. At first Jennifer (focus group 1) said that individuals shouldn’t start dating before the age of thirteen, however she changed her statement to twelve going on thirteen after her sister laughed and pointed out that she started dating before she was thirteen. Her comment on this is that

I think you can like a person a lot but the best age to start a relationship, probably like 13 up. Because I mean, you’re not in the olden days, you’re not gonna wait until you’re 16 to date, like my dad thinks we should. Sorry, but really, you can’t just sit and wait until you are 16, cause by the time you are 16 guys will be like okay, she’s never gonna date anyone, just leave her so.

To which Corlea responded that you will be turned into an outcast by your peers, because you are then seen as undateable.

#### 6.4.4. Dating age

In early adolescence individuals can explore different types of relationships with different partners, to decide what they want or don't want in a relationship. Serious relationships or long-term relationships form part of late adolescence when individuals start to focus more on their future and aspirations and move towards early adulthood.

##### 6.4.4.1. Ideal age for dating

Participants who were in relationships perceived the appropriate age to enter into a romantic relationship differently to their counterparts who were not in relationships or had very little experience of relationships. Maryke, who is thirteen years old, who had never been in a romantic relationship stated that girls who date before the age of fifteen are “too big for their shoes” [translated – see endnote<sup>10</sup>]. Her statement might have been different if she was in a relationship or had experience of a relationship like Jennifer, mentioned earlier. Similarly Jane, who had limited experiences of romantic relationships and suffered rejection with her first romantic relationship, felt that one had to be older (at least eighteen). At this age she contended individuals make better and wise choices that are based on experience. However it can be argued to gain experience individuals must participate in romantic relationships. Jane's statement may serve as a defence mechanism as she was hurt once before. Whilst, she might portray herself as not being interested in romantic relationships at this moment in time, it may be a way to rationalise why she is not in a relationship.



#### 6.4.4.2. Dating age of partner

All participants agreed they would prefer to date someone either their own age or older than themselves. They were adamant that they would never date someone younger, their main reasoning being that males who are younger are childish and immature. Age differences between those with partners varied between two and six years.

Individuals, especially younger adolescents who are still in primary school and are interested in pursuing romantic relationships have little choice of older partners. In this case they might engage in a romantic relationship with someone from their own grade group. Younger adolescents may also feel more 'safe' with someone from their own grade group, considering that older males are more mature and may have different expectations than younger males have. In addition it seems that parents prefer it when their children don't date individuals who are a lot older.

It is when individuals enter high school that they have a greater choice of partners from older grade groups. Older partners are deemed more attractive as they may have a higher status than partners from the same grade group. Older partners, especially those who have a driver's license, are seen as more independent and enjoy a sense of freedom. Some females consider this as an asset, especially when they are still in school and dependent on their parents for transport. Nevertheless there are also challenges in dating someone older, especially if one partner is employed and the other still in school. One of these challenges include quality time partners can spend together that is limited due to the one's work schedule and the other's school activity and homework schedule. Parents are not necessarily keen that their children socialise during the week. Individuals in school are reliant on their parents for money, whereas the employed partner makes their own money. Anna-Mart find this a challenge, especially when she wants to buy Pierre a gift and this places a limit on what she is able to buy him.

Expectations from older partners such as Pierre who is settled into his life and ready to take their relationship to the next level (marriage) also differ, whereas Anna-Mart feels that she still has to gain a lot to experience before she is ready for marriage.

It seems as though when individuals enter young adulthood there is less emphasis on dating someone older as it is believed that males and females are on a more equal basis of emotional development.

#### *6.4.5. The ideal partner*

“Well, I think every girl’s got her dream guy she’s hoping is gonna come along one day” [Jennifer, Focus Group 1]

All participants could identify characteristics they look for in a partner. This shows that it is something they think about and what they use to set the bar for a potential partner.

In their conversations participants highlight several characteristics they deem important. First and foremost great importance is placed on a shared value system. This underlines the influence of parents, the school and the church in constructing and encouraging a Christian based value system. It may be regarded more appropriate to engage with someone from a similar background. It may also be easier as there is little conflict over religious background. Similarly a second important characteristic is the foundation of the relationship must be based on friendship. Participants felt that they must be able to communicate openly with their partner as with a friend. A third characteristic that was mentioned frequently was having a personality, which apparently can mean a range of things, such as making the girl feel good about herself, someone who makes others happy, and someone who is nice and is approachable. Other characteristics that were

mentioned include respect, intelligence, sense of humour, friendliness, honesty, being themselves.

At first none of the participants claimed that physical appearance played a role in what they looked for in a partner but as the conversation evolved it became apparent that physical appearance did matter. Many of the physical aspects mentioned focused on a masculine build and specific bodyparts.

Participants could also list what characteristics they didn't want in a partner. These lists were based on experiences they had with previous relationships (or in one case a current relationship) like Danika who does not want a partner who is dependent on anyone but himself. She expects from her partner "he must be able to stand on his own feet" [translated – see endnote<sup>11</sup>]. Anna-Mart would dislike a partner who is jealous, childish or would cheat, like her previous boyfriend. Karlien is also adamant that she won't ever be able to be in a relationship with someone that is a very strong right-brained as it will only irritate her.

#### *6.4.6. Entering into a relationship*

At the start of a relationship there is excitement and anxiousness. Individuals only want to show their best attributes or look their best to impress their partner. Because partners are also getting to know each other in an intimate context they talk and share a lot. As the relationship progresses some of the novelty wears off and expectations may change. Such as in the case of Danika and Henko's relationship where they constantly text messaged each other, to get to know each other and sharing things. They wanted to be together constantly to the extent that they fantasised of being together on their own private island, separated from others. Danika also related how she made a lot more effort with her appearance in the beginning, because she had to impress him and to keep a hold on him. She even got up before him, when he visited and stayed over, to put on

makeup, so that when he woke up she still looked her best. But as the relationship progressed some of their behaviour changed as well. Now Danika and Henko's messages consist of short sentences or single answer replies. Danika places less emphasis on her appearance especially because Henko arrives late on Friday evenings at her home and by that time she is already in her pyjamas. Some participants from Focus Group 2 agreed with Danika when it comes to making more effort on appearance initially, but that this fades as the partners become more acquainted and comfortable with each other.

Parents' perceptions also seem to change when their children are involved in romantic relationships. Initially when adolescents start to date, parents might not necessarily be comfortable with it, especially if the adolescent is in their early adolescence and if it is their first romantic relationship. Some parents might even be uncomfortable with the idea of their children's' romantic pursuit and might suggest that the romantic interest rather visit them at home under their watchful eyes. Especially in the case of adolescent females, parents might insist that the boy visit at their home rather than the girl visiting him.

Mothers and fathers have different reactions to their children, especially daughters who pursue romantic relationships. Mothers are seen as more relaxed and open to the idea of their daughters visiting boys and engaging in romantic relationships. Furthermore daughters are keener to discuss romantic interests with their mothers and this creates a closer bond between them. In contrast fathers seem to be stricter and uncomfortable if romantic suitors visit their daughters. Anna-Mart's father is quite obvious in his dislike for potential suitors who visits her, as he will have very little to say to the suitor.

The longer the partner is part of the family's life the more accepting and open they become towards the possibility of their child's future with the partner. If the partner is a constant presence in the family life and attends family events, a breakup not only affects the individuals involved but also rest of the family.

#### 6.4.7. *Expectations of romantic relationships*

Males and females differ in their expectations of romantic relationships (see section 2.3.4.). Participants attached significant romantic ideals to romantic relationships such as spending quality time together, making romantic gestures and envisioning a future together. However when certain romantic expectations are not met or partners' expectation differ it can leave one or both partners disappointed. An example is Pierre's disapproval of celebrating Valentine's Day which is not in line with his religious beliefs. For Anna-Mart this is a very depressing day as she cannot participate in this day like many other couples do. Even in a long-term relationship, where the female is aware that her partner lacks a romantic side, she is still left disappointed when he makes no attempt at romance on special occasions such as birthdays or anniversaries.

Participants felt that boys have a different notion of romantic relationships and what it means for them to be in a romantic relationship. Compared to girls, boys put less effort into relationships and are not as keen as girls to spend most of their time together. Moreover boys do not necessarily regard a romantic relationship as exclusive as they will look for alternate partners or flirt with other girls whilst in a relationship. Anna-Mart's previous boyfriend (Steven) was in a relationship when he started showing interest in her. His relationship status did not dissuade him from pursuing Anna-Mart. Anna-Mart experienced two problems in this case, even though she attempted to take no notice of his advances. First this was made difficult as he was her brother's friend and she would see him regularly at their home. Second his girlfriend at that time confronted her and told her to stay away from Steven.

Some girls see this type of behaviour as very disrespectful and will rather sever ties than attempt to enter into a romantic relationship, if they find out, as the boy is likely to do the same to them. Jennifer disclosed an incident where she was "having a thing" with a guy and at the same time he was engaging in a sexual relationship with another girl. Jennifer only found this out when the

guy's brother showed her a chat message between his brother and the other girl. In this chat she told him that she was pregnant after their first sexual experience and his reaction was "well, it was a one night stand so get an abortion." Jennifer found his reaction to be repulsive and severed all ties with him.

The participants felt that boys who are considered to be 'good' looking will use their looks as a reason to have numerous partners at the same time. These boys don't consider the feelings of the girls as they trade on their looks and assume that the girls will be fine with it.

Romantic relationships have gendered dimensions, where the females have gendered expectations of males and vice versa. These expectations are constructed through socialisation by social institutions. Traditional gender ideals encourage men to be dominant in the relationships and these ideals are embedded within societal norms and practices (see section 4.5.). Religion provides a script for roles that males and females have in romantic relationships. Anna-Mart firmly believes that wives must be submissive to their husbands, echoing religious teachings she has been exposed to

"...if you, like the man must carry the family and he must keep them together, he cannot expect his wife to do that because she is possibly able to, but he has to carry the family and so on. Yes, I do not know how I can put it. Ah, I do not know. I think the wife must be [take her position] beneath the husband. [translated – see endnote<sup>12</sup>].

She feels even though females have the freedom to make choices and have the same rights as males, the main or final decisions should still be left to males. Females may have the ambition to obtain a tertiary qualification and to be financially independent but is still the male's responsibility to look after them when they get married according to Danika.

Traditionally there is a division of labour between men and women. Women are positioned in the household and responsible for everything that occurs within it, whereas men are the breadwinners and enter employment. Even though women can enter into employment, they are still mainly held responsible for the household (Bradley, 2007:91, 95). Anna-Mart firmly believes that it is only natural for women to do household tasks. Her reason for this was

Ah, I don't know, look here Pierre often says to me, he, like he now [with regard] to my future, he thinks that I must go and study and he will obviously work and then he would like me to work for him, for instance do his admin. Then I must keep the house in order, I must do, and I will love it if I know I have work, I have at least an income that he will obviously pay me. It is not as if I am going to sponge on him like those women whose husbands do all of the work and then they just spend their money, it is not like that, because then I can also contribute something. But yes, I would say that the wife or girl is more responsible for the finer things or now. [translated – see endnote<sup>13</sup>].

Some participants indicated that the division of labour in their households were shared, such as the father cooking dinner or cleaning the dishes, when the mother was occupied with work or was too tired or sick to attend to household matters. Alri, who grew up in a single-parent household felt more strongly about household tasks being divided

Yes, I say yes and no, because see here, obviously a mother, I'm not saying all men must be able to do it, but a man must be able to iron and do the washing sometimes. Let us say if you are ill or you cannot walk, your back is sore, must he also look after the house. I can iron, so he must also be able to iron and he must be able to cook. My husband must be able to cook, because I am not going to be the one that is going to cook the entire time and then no, he must also be able to cook. My mother taught me, but a man must at least do some stuff. [Alri, translated – see endnote<sup>14</sup>]

Ester feels that any romantic relationship must be viewed as the start of something, something that may potentially lead to matrimony. Thus it is important when considering a relationship with someone that has the potential to become long-term partner. Anna-Mart contends

When I was younger, I thought that 22 or 23 or older, now my situation is that by the time I am 23 or 24, we've been together six years, it is so long. You can get married earlier if you are ready to get married. So I thought, I am just thinking now, that he must probably ask me [to get married] next year when I am settled in Potch [at the university] and have a routine. So then he can ask me half late next year and then late in the year after that we can get married, then I also have a long time settle in and become accustomed to things. [translated – see endnote<sup>15</sup>]

Before her relationship with Pierre, who is much older than she, she didn't have a view of being married at an early age. Anna-Mart was looking forward to her university experience and being able to explore different relationships. This view has changed because she has attached a different meaning to marriage. Carroll et al. (2007:221-224) refers to the marital horizon theory as “a person's outlook or approach to marriage in relation to this or her current situation.” Pierre, who is at the age where people start to think about getting married and is keen to marry Anna-Mart, through their communications on the future impacts on her view on the matter. Thus the significance that is attached to marriage and the willingness to get married all has implications for the perceptions that individuals have of marriage.

Parents also express their views on when it is appropriate to get married, however parents are not necessarily in agreement on what age is appropriate as illustrated by Ester

“my mother thinks that 25 is the right age to start getting married, my father naturally says that he doesn't want me to get married and he will buy me 40 cats.” [translated – see endnote<sup>16</sup>]



It seems fathers are more reluctant that their daughters engage in romantic relationships or in some instances consider marriage. Ester's explanation for this is "I am my father's little girl, so obviously he is a bit over-protective..." [translated – see endnote<sup>17</sup>]

Traditionally marriage has been seen as a way for a young person to transition into adulthood which has responsibilities of procreation, individuals also entered into marriage at a younger age. From a conservative perspective living together before marriage is also taboo. Danika's mother consigns significant value on co-habiting before marriage and Danika says she agrees with this view. She feels that it is important to get to know the person before one gets married as living together teaches one another more about each other than just being in a relationship. Even though it is considered to be more romantic to only live together after marriage it does provide individuals with more realistic expectations of married life and being partners. Danika is aware of the conflicting views on co-habitation in a conservative Christian community, as she indicates that she doesn't think the Bible approves of co-habitation and that her mother and father had to wait until they were married. She is also aware that if she entered into a co-habiting relationship in the future, it would not sit well with her father and her grandmother as it opposes their views on this topic. Research suggests that this view is changing and marriage is being delayed and replaced by co-habitation. It is also suggested that co-habitation is less of an institution than marriage as there are no clear defined norms and roles in a co-habiting relationship and partners construct these norms and roles depending on their circumstances (Brown et al., 2014:3-4; Larson et al., 2002:36; Manning et al., 2014:288).

Marriage is believed to ensure stability in one's life. Comments that Danika made suggests that to be married (by the early thirties) and have children is what is constituted as having a normal life. I asked her whether it then was abnormal to be 40 and not married, to which she replied that it was. On trying to understand her viewpoint I asked her why she believed so, and all that she could answer was that "that is how it works, [...] because most people do it." [translated – see endnote<sup>18</sup>]. She also indicated that by the time one reaches 30, one should rather just settle for what is in your life at the present moment.

#### 6.4.8. *The impact of romantic relationships on others*

Romantic relationships can have positive and negative impacts, not only on the individuals in the relationship, but also others who play significant parts in the individual's lives such as parents and friends (see section 2.3.4.).

Some of the participants expressed that their female friends react very positively when disclosing that they are romantically interested in someone. Friends are keen to meet the romantic interest, so that they can express their views on whether they think this may be a suitable partner. Female friends may also encourage individuals to pursue a romantic relationship. Female friendships offer individuals with counsel before engaging in romantic relationships and individuals place a lot of value on the opinions of their friends. Ester feels that it is important that her friends give her their honest assessment of her romantic interest “because people always say that love is blind and when you are in love you don't always see everything that others may see” [translated – see endnote<sup>19</sup>]. Karlien agrees with Ester as she and her friends make it quite obvious if they like or dislike a potential suitor of one of their friends. Thus a negative assessment of a potential suitor might impact the chances of a romantic relationship. More value is placed on a friend's opinion than a parent's opinion.

Individuals who are in relationships might also prefer the company of others who are also in romantic relationships as they can bond over and share their experiences. They may also feel that they have more in common than with their friends who are not in romantic relationships.

Not all reactions to romantic relationships are met with a joyous response from female friends and a romantic relationship can impact the relationship between friends. For example Danika related how her friendship with her best friend became strained due to her romantic relationship. She recounts that her friend hated him, and felt that he was stealing Danika from her. This

potentially suggests that her friend is jealous of her romantic relationship. Danika admits that she would rather spend time with her boyfriend than with her best friend, she feels that they “click” better. The impact of her spending more time with her boyfriend than with her best friend has led to jealousy. This in turn has implications for the way in which her friend constructs her perceptions of friendship and relationships as she might see this as a form of rejection.

Prior to the romantic relationship friends may have spent a great amount of time together which subsequently becomes curtailed. Friendship between female and male friends can also change, especially if the partner of one of the friends sees the friendship as a threat to their relationship.

#### *6.4.9. Types of relationships*

Participants’ narratives suggest that there are two types of relationships, 1) a fleeting thing or fling and 2) more serious dating or being in a relationship. A thing or fling is brief and can lead to a romantic relationship. In essence this is in line with an exploratory romantic style (see section 2.3.4.), where individuals like each other, casually go out together and might even have a physical relationship. Because adolescence is also a developmental and experimental phase it is easy to assume that this is a time when adolescents will expose themselves to numerous opportunities and romantic partners. This type of relationship places limited emphasis on responsibility and commitment towards partners. Partners are open to see and flirt with others. According to Dhariwal et al. (2009:596) this type of relationship is more prevalent among younger adolescents. At a time when Alri was in a relationship she held romantic feelings for three other guys. Nicole, felt that she was in love with a boy one day and the next she was no longer in love with him.

The second relationship is in line with a consolidated romantic style (see section 2.3.4.) where individuals spend more intimate time together and express exclusivity and commitment to each

other. Both individuals make a conscious decision to be an exclusive unit which is accomplished by one asking the other if they will ‘go out with them’. This type of relationship is more prevalent among older adolescents (Dhariwal et al., 2009:596). This is evident in the relationships of Anna-Mart and Danika.

#### *6.4.10. Breakups*

It seemed as though participants experienced strong emotional and physical reactions when they broke up with their partner or were dumped by the partner.

##### *6.4.10.1. Ending a relationship*

Relationships can end in various ways such as where both partners agree to end it. For instance in a long-distance relationship spending quality time becomes an issue or when they decide it would be better to be friends.

Relationships also end when one partner decides to terminate it. Sometimes the other partner may have anticipated it and other times it comes as a complete shock. For example Bianca believed her relationship with Michael was secure. However, he ended it without giving her an explanation. When one partner ends a relationship the other partner might be inclined to think that they were the cause and that they must have done or said something wrong.

Some partners might even cling to a relationship or attempt to revive it. For example Anna-Mart’s previous relationship with Steven was very negative and made her very unhappy, but she found it difficult to distance herself from him. Nevertheless, when Anna-Mart did break up with

Steven, she was still very upset and had an extreme physical reaction. She lost her appetite and lost a lot of weight. She had to force herself to eat.

Such relationships may never end or are only likely to end in the event of severe circumstances such as when the partner is caught cheating. At the time of the interview Christina had broken up with her boyfriend of almost 8 months the month before. The relationship ended as a result of photos a close friend sent to her of her boyfriend who was intimate with his ex-girlfriend. Her reaction was to confront him with the evidence, and his reaction was “oh uhm, just between us, I hooked-up with her, so deal with it” [translated – see endnote<sup>20</sup>].

#### 6.4.10.2. Social media in breakups

Social media and technology also play a part in breakups. Guys can end relationships over the phone. Sometimes individuals will break up over the phone to avoid direct confrontations and explanations. This approach is regarded in a positive light by Sarah and negative light by Elana and Tanya [focus group 2]. Sarah feels that this form of breakup is better as the other individual does not see the devastation or emotional reaction. In contrast Elana feels that breaking up over the phone is pathetic and cowardly. Tanya agrees with Elana but in addition also sees it as insulting to the individual who is broken up with.

#### 6.4.10.3. Dealing with breakups

Mothers play a part in consoling their children after a breakup by being supportive, but sometimes what mothers say when consoling their daughters are not necessarily what they want to hear. Jennifer related an incident where she had broken up with a boyfriend and cried and her mother tried to console her by telling her that she doesn't have to worry, she is still young and

will find someone else. However this is not what Jennifer wanted to hear. She just wanted her mother to hug her.

Jane believes that there are gender differences when dealing with breakups. She believes that boys deal with rejection differently than girls do. Jane contends that boys have a stronger personality and heart than girls do, which allows them to move on swifter to their next romantic interest than girls do. She believes that this is biologically innate due to hormones and testosterone. On questioning her why this is not innate to girls she proposes the idea that girls are more conscious of their actions and the implications this has.

#### 6.4.10.4. After breaking up

After a breakup there is a ‘mourning’ period, where the loss of the relationship is mourned, and the time of this period differs from individual to individual. But after this period there comes a time when the individual is ready to move on and use what they have learned from their previous experience.

Maria: When do you feel that you are ready to move on, when you have dealt with the feelings of the breakup?

Jennifer: You can go out and you don’t think about that person anymore. Like if you go out and stuff, you normally think about him and you become so sad. But if you can enjoy yourself without thinking about that person then you know.

When a relationship has been terminated it does not necessarily mean that they no longer come into contact with one another, especially if they are in the same school or class. In this case it is

very awkward at first and individuals tend to keep their distance from one another. However, many participants indicated they would prefer not to see the person at all.

It is also difficult, once a relationship has ended, not to come in contact with the other person, Christina, who was betrayed by her boyfriend, still had to force herself to keep her distance. Christina even ended her friendship with some of Rickus's friends to maintain a distance between them. Her emotional response was to cry, and she felt as if she was vacuous. She also started to mull over what happened and at first she felt as if she wouldn't be able to live without him.

It does also happen that a relationship breaks up but individuals find their way back to each other, for instance there was a time in Danika and Henko's relationship when they did spend time apart. For Danika this was the worst experience of her life, she cried a lot (even at school) and wouldn't speak. Eventually Henko asked her forgiveness and wanted her back,

He came to my house and the one day he started to cry, and he wants me back, because he made a huge mistake and he was really sorry, and ah shame. Then he cried and that was horrible for me that he cried, he cried, naturally a guy cries, but it was horrible. [translated – see endnote<sup>21</sup>]

Danika accepted Henko's apology and took him back after some consideration, because she was resolved to maintain the breakup. In the period that Henko was not part of her life, she said she found her true strength and she knew that she could live without him, because since they have been in a relationship she believed that she needed him.

#### 6.4.11. Social media

Technological advances in communication have created a new way for individuals to engage in social interactions with one another. Social media and communication applications have created a way for individuals to stay in touch and maintain intimate relationships even when they are physically separated. Many participants indicated that their main method of communicating with their boyfriends or interests were instant messaging applications such as BBM or Whatsapp. These applications are cheaper and faster than placing voice calls, and one has instantaneous contact with the other person.

Individuals even can have an intimate relationship online bypassing restrictions on face-to-face contact. Furthermore online communication potentially provides a sense of anonymity, enabling individuals to construct a persona of whom they want to be thereby acting out their fantasies (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008:129).

The digital enables adolescents to act out fantasies by presenting themselves in ways they believe to be desirable. It provides adolescents who fear rejection based for example on their physical features such as weight or looks a place to be accepted because they do not necessarily meet the person in reality. Alri (who has described herself as fat and ugly) has virtual romantic relationships, with numerous individuals she met online, of these she has only met two once.

##### 6.4.11.1. Facebook

Social media platforms such as Facebook provide individuals with other means to gain access to information on a crush or partner. Many of the older participants indicated that they use Facebook as a method to gain information on potential romantic interest, which they commonly



refer to as ‘Facebook stalking’. Facebook enables them to access photos and post or to look which mutual friends they may have in common in an attempt to analyse them. Ester does however feel guilty about ‘Facebook stalking’, because it is like an invasion of privacy. Even though individuals can choose what they put on Facebook and when they put something on Facebook, depending on their private settings, everyone has access to it.

I asked Nicole whether she ‘stalked’ boys on Facebook, to which she responded she did not, but she did make an interesting statement that male teachers would send her friend requests, but she declined all of these requests. This might have posed a potential ethical dilemma, however Nicole’s response rejecting such requests and not being interested in older men, reduced necessary intervention.

Parents are wary of social media platforms because of limited amount of privacy and the fact that individuals share everything online. Younger adolescents’ Facebook friends also mainly consist out of family members rather than friends because of parents restricting access to these sites. However with the ubiquity of technological platforms through which the internet can be accessed such restrictions could not fully be enforced.

Some parents don’t seem to mind or are not aware of these sites. It didn’t seem as if there were more restrictions on younger participants when it comes to having a Facebook account, from which one can assume that age is not necessarily a factor when parents restrict their children’s access to social media sites. It was only Maryke whose parents prohibited her from using Facebook because of her older sister’s experience with cyber bullying and harassment. Her sister’s friend wrote nasty messages on her wall, and posted photoshopped photos with comments of her being fat and not being able to fit into a dress.

#### 6.4.11.2. The naked truth

Initially in my interview schedule I did not include a question on whether participants had ever been asked to send a nude photo of themselves to a peer. This is what is referred to as ‘sexting’ “an exchange of sexual messages or images” (Livingstone et al., 2011).

When this topic came up in two separate interviews I decided I would ask every participant this question to see how they would respond. In total nine of the participants indicated they received such requests. Most of the time such requests were made by peers and five participants indicated they received these requests quite often.

Some male adolescents were also quite persistent, not accepting a ‘no’ for an answer. This type of coercion may lead to adolescents succumbing to the request just make it stop. When the boy didn’t receive the picture as he requested he would call the girl “a loser” or threaten to delete her number from his phone. Girls might succumb to this request as they may not want to be seen as ‘unpopular’ among boys. In a sense by threatening to delete her, the boy claims dominance over her and having the power to influence her social standing. These requests are not limited to guys asking girls. A participant from Focus Group 2 indicated that one of her guy friends received a naked photo from a girl. Moreover not only did Jennifer receive a naked photo request but was also repeatedly asked if she wanted to have sex. At this point in our conversation she showed me screen caption that she took of this request.

I asked Alri how guys approach these requests and this was her response

It always works like this, you can invite any guy [on BBM], and that is why I am no longer inviting new people, then you invite someone and they say “hi, who are you” and then I say “Alri, and you?” Then they reply “Jaun” or whatever their name may be. “Can I get a pic of you?” Then I send a pic, then he sends a

pic, [then he will say] for example “you are sexy”. Maybe a day or two later [he will ask] “can I get a naked pic?”, [I will respond] “No!”, [and he will say] “okay” and not long after he is gone [has left our conversation]. [translated – see endnote<sup>22</sup>]

I was also made aware by Jennifer that some girls already have photos on their phone in the event that they may receive such a request, because there is an expectation when a photo is sent that a photo must be returned.

But it also seems that once an individual sends one photo, not only does the receiver ask for another, but other individuals start sending the same request. Ringrose et al. (2012:7) contend that “sexting is not an individual practice, but also as a group, networked phenomenon.”

Experiences of participants indicate that it is not strangers who request these photos but rather their peers, who they see on a daily basis. However, it seems as though parents are more wary and issue warnings of not engaging online with strangers, but don’t give the same warning about peers.

Participants who received such a request indicated that they felt immensely disrespected, offended and declined to participate in any further conversation with the boy. Some participants questioned the way in which they portray themselves or the way in which others, especially boys, view them. Boys who made such requests were described as “superficial” and “sick pigs” by participants. In many instances participants told their closest friends, as they indicated that they would rather speak to their friends than their parents. When Jennifer did tell her mother of one such incident her mother became very angry “This is why I don’t like you having a cellphone, I’m gonna take away Facebook and all that stuff.” So in the end to prevent her mother from restricting her access to her cellphone and social media she just keeps quiet.

On asking Focus Group 2 why they thought guys sent such requests

In a way I think it is an ego boost, because you will go to your friend and say “hey this guy asked me for a photo”, do you think he will say to this friend “check here mate, this girl sent me a photo.” So obviously for them it is about how many girls they can get to send them photos [translated] [Elana, translated – see endnote<sup>23</sup>]

Friends share everything, like everything, every little thing. They keep all their chats with girls, because if they say something their friends want evidence. Then he shows what you said to him, you must not say certain things to a guy, unless you know that it will stay between you two, because guys share everything [Sarah, translated – see endnote<sup>24</sup>]

#### *6.4.12. A Picture speaks a thousand words*

Six participants created collages on which they portrayed their perception of relationships. Some made their collages very personal as a reflection of their own feelings or wants, things that they didn't approve of or as a critique on society and the way they are socialised.

Danika and Nicole depicted that couples must do things together whether it is participating in a similar activity, such as Danika and her boyfriend who play Sims together and Nicole feels it is important to spend time together, share things and trust one another. This is what they believe should be the content of a romantic relationship. Sims, a life simulation game, enables players to manipulate their Sims (virtual characters they create) to explore fantasies and satisfy their desires (needs). Danika and Henko take turns when playing Sims, however even if Danika is not playing she will take the lead in what the Sims should do. The Sims enables them to simulate daily scenarios in a domestic space.



Figure A: Danika



Figure B: Nicole

Nicole has a very romantic perception of love and relationships, as illustrated in the picture with the couple holding hands on the beach, walking into the sunset and the picture of the teddybear, a gift romantic partners give each other.

Nicole's inspiration is based on her ideas of what couples must do together as well as observing other couples as she has never been in a relationship. Danika however used her current relationship as inspiration she uses the image of her favourite perfume to depict how little her boyfriend pays attention to what she wants as she makes it fairly obvious when he wants to buy her a gift, what she would like (Figure A). Note the picture of the selfie of the couple – acknowledgement of the digital world and publicly sharing of images and life events on social media.

Maryke views communication as an important aspect of a romantic relationship, which may as a result be of the lack of communication between those that serve as her role models. She associates very strongly with particular values in romantic relationships such as not kissing

excessively or sending naked pictures to one another reflecting norms within a conservative context (Figure C). Note again the cell and text message indicating connectedness of people.



Figure C: Maryke

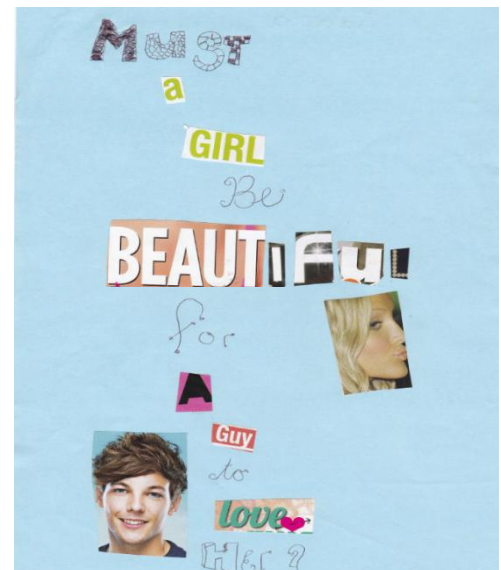


Figure D: Corlea

Corlea's collage (Figure D) contained the following wording "Must a girl be beautiful for a guy to love her?" This sentence reflects Collin's (2003:14-15) observation that younger adolescents place greater emphasis on physical appearance. This sentiment of Corlea is echoed more critically in Jennifer & Jessica's collages. Jennifer indicates "that's a half naked body, cause guys like a girl's body," so I asked her "so then is physical appearance is considered to be more important?" To which she replies:

Because nowadays if a guy wants your number, he's gonna come up to you and ask you based on what he's seen. If you're not what he likes, he's not gonna come up to you, cause they don't know your personality yet, so you have to be pretty...that's just the way it is.

Thus her belief is that male adolescents are more prone to be interested in a female adolescent who has certain physical attributes that are regarded as desirable. It is also clear that the initiation of the possibility for a romantic relationship is based on physical attractiveness as a guy will not approach a girl if she is not deemed to be attractive. By internalising this belief it can have the implication that female adolescents will attempt to achieve this desirable body whether it is by

exercising or dieting to conform to this norm. This concurs with Biscarrat’s (2013:2) argument that women are socialised to oblige to male desires. This reflects a gendered, heteronormative society where women have to conform to males fantasies or perceptions of physical attractiveness otherwise they might be shunned, teased or ignored. Being shunned, teased or ignored by males reinforces the belief that females have regarding physical attractiveness. This reflects on Corlea’s own experience of being teased about her weight. Corlea’s statement is also a critique on females who conform to males’ perception of attractiveness as it suggests that a female must be physically attractive to have a relationship. Asking this as a question highlights what troubles her and raises the issue of of exclusion and male power to determine whether they will have a relationship or not.



Figure E: Jessica



Figure F: Jennifer

Jessica refers to the image of Barbie, a controversial doll, as an ideal female adolescents should strive towards, what they “[are] supposed to look like.” Barbie, a popular toy for young girls, has been criticised as setting unrealistic expectations for girls and confirming sexist ideals. Barbie is a highly sexualised toy, due to her prominent anatomical features such as breasts that are portrayed as desirable. These images contribute to females’ discontent with their own bodies in comparison. In her collage she uses a modern version of Barbie – Bratz – which mimic barbie, and in some instances even accentuate features even more. Young girls, especially, play with

Barbie and Bratz in the form of constructive play, a form of play that encourages children to construct something. This is also linked to exploration and make-believe to make sense of what is going on and to gather information (Banks-Thomas, 2003:117; Drew et al., 2008:38-40). Jessica also believes that female adolescents construct a version of a girl that guys will be interested in, such as their personality, views or mannerisms.

In three of the collages there are images of ‘hot’ (eye candy) male celebrities, even though participants did indicate that appearance doesn’t necessarily matter to them. It does seem that these are the type of males they are interested in. Furthermore Jennifer’s collage (Figure F) has the word “players” next to a picture of an attractive young guy, which could be indicative of her perception or experience that attractive young guys are players.



## Chapter 7: Conclusion

Relationships play an important role in an adolescent's psycho-social development, which in turn shape relationships they may have in adulthood. Part of adolescent development is participation in intimate and romantic relationships. Such romantic relationships to a large extent feature in adolescents' social life and as a result adolescents tend to invest a great amount of time in these relationships. Even when adolescents do not engage in romantic relationships they talk about the subject of romance and dating with peers. Many adolescents have pre-conceived ideas or particular beliefs regarding romantic relationships and dating. Many of these ideas are formed through interaction with peers, parents and the media. In general these ideas of romantic relationships tend to be gendered. Adolescents will to a large extent conduct and navigate their relationships based on these gendered notions. In a contemporary context social media impacts on how adolescents think about and engage in romantic relationships.

This study aims to contribute to qualitative research on adolescent romantic relationships from the adolescents' perspective and experience. It attempts to gain insights into the implications of social media for romantic encounters and relationships.

This study is limited to white female adolescents attending a private Christian school/Afrikaans denomination church and residing in the same geographic areas, and thus not representative of romantic relationships among South African adolescents. However this study does provide insights into the factors that shape their expectations and the experiences they have.

The findings suggest that key agents of socialisation such as parents and peers impact on the way in which participants will approach current or future relationships. From them they learn what they want or do not want from relationships. Ideologies of social institutions such as the school or church, social contexts where the participants are situated in, filter through in their views and

expectations of their own relationships and in probability how they will express this in a public domain. These ideologies are situated within a heteronormative context and strongly support traditional gender roles which create expectations that the male must make the first move or the female being financially dependent on the male with the latter ‘providing’. No participant referred to same-sex relationships which may be as a result of their assumption that the study was about heterosexual relationships or that they shouldn’t talk about it due to what is seen as socially acceptable in their social context.

Furthermore it also filters through in their views of others such as expressing disapproval of premarital sexual relations. Yet for some co-habitation is a possibility in future.

There is an awareness among female adolescents about their appearance and the impact that it will have on finding a suitable partner, as there is pressure to look or behave in a certain way. This pressure is not exclusively limited to females as females place a high premium on a male’s physical appearance as well.

Older participants seemed to think quite a lot about their future prospects, especially when it came to their partner and whether they are the “right” person to marry. It seems that there are frequent discussions about the future between themselves and their partners. For younger participants seeking an eligible partner to marry was not on their agenda at the moment. They placed greater value on a partner that would gain them popularity among their peers.

Romantic relationships seem to be very important to adolescents, therefore participants who are not in romantic relationships or who have limited experience of romantic relationships feel they have to justify this by claiming how they are “still too young to be in relationships” or “not yet ready”.

Social media has provided adolescents with a new way to engage with others and engage in romantic relationships. Social media sites such as Facebook is a tool to finding out about potential romantic interests. Social media has enabled them to broaden their scope and be in romantic relationships with partners who live in another province or that they have never met. Social media enables adolescents to act out fantasies by presenting themselves in ways they believe to be desirable in a virtual world. Games like Sims provide an opportunity to live out adult roles and relationships.

In a digital world where more and more behaviour is increasingly monitored, notions of privacy changing. A topic that emerged during the course of the research is the prevalence and normalisation of sexting. Such requests were not made by strangers, as many parents would assume, but rather by peers participants were familiar with. In this study no one admitted directly participating in sending naked pictures of themselves – yet they are aware about it and shared clothed or partially clothed pictures of themselves with others.

Participants' narratives are socially influenced by their experiences and constructions of norms within society. They are not passive participants, rather, they are active in creating meaning drawing from these experiences that shape their own ideals and expectations. Whilst what they have been socialised in, in part shapes their expectations and actions, these relationships have their own dynamic, which gives meaning to their experience of romance and how they perceive it.

Whilst this study has given a description of how females express themselves in romantic relationships an alternative study could explore the romantic experiences of male adolescents. A study that explores male adolescents' experiences of romantic relationships would add to a greater understanding of how males are socialised to think about romantic relationships. This study could also prove insightful with regard to sexting considering that female participants

indicated that the sending of nude photos were initiated by male adolescents like other suggestions and propositions of a sexual nature were initiated as well.

Another way of approaching this topic could be to study couples in a romantic relationship. This provides a more holistic approach to studying relationships by including both partners' perspective and experiences of the same relationship. In addition it might be interesting to investigate the age difference dynamic between partners, who are in different developmental stages which can greatly impact on their expectations and the way they negotiate in their relationship.

## Chapter endnotes

### Chapter six

<sup>1</sup> Om ons te beskerm, ek dink dit is die “main” ding.[...] Ek dink ’n verhouding moet, waarin ek wil wees, gelyk wees. Dit moenie so wees nie, (verwys na ouers se verhouding) die ou kan my maar help besluit watse kos om te maak, of kos te maak of so ietsie...kinders dissiplineër, sulke goedjies, wat hy (haar pa) nie doen nie [Danika].

<sup>2</sup> my boetie dink dit is reg, my boetie dink dit is hoe dit gedoen moet word, jou ma doen alles, ’n vrou doen alles en die pa doen niks nie [Danika].

<sup>3</sup> kyk hoe vet is ek, en ek is oorgewig, en ek is lelik [Alri].

<sup>4</sup> nou kan hulle die verkeerde “impression” kry of hulle kan dink wat kan hulle nou eintlik doen of hoekom wil hulle alleen wees, verstaan, nou moet ek dit maar opoffer. Daar is sekere goed wat jy moet opoffer, ek en Pierre kan nie eintlik gaan stap op die rugbyveld nie, want mense kan “o, waar is Anna-Mart en Pierre?” so jy moet maar dit opoffer om daar te sit en tussen almal te kuier [Anna-Mart].

<sup>5</sup> sexy gat, dit is so mooi, styf en rond [Alri].

<sup>6</sup> Ek weet nie, ek dink mens kry net ’n gevoel, soos uhm, mens is die heeltyd glimlaggerig en jy “giggle” die heeltyd, jy is “happy” [Ester].

<sup>7</sup> As jy saam of om hom is en jou maag dop so om en jy weet nie wat om te doen nie en jy kan hom soos permanent nie uit jou kop kry nie, dis hoe ek voel [Focus Group 2].

<sup>8</sup> As mens, as jy jousef meer tyd saam met daai persoon kan sien spandeer en jy half mis die persoon as jy nie by hom is nie, of so iets ja [Karlien].

<sup>9</sup> dit kan seker wees, maar dit is nie reg nie.[...] dit gee die indruk dat die meisie meer dominant is as die seun, en in my oë is dit nie reg nie.[...] dit wys die seun is half-en-half nie mans genoeg om iets te doen nie.[...] ek dink net as die meisie hom sou uitvra dan sou sy altyd ’n houvas op hom hê en hy sal altyd voel sy is die baas in die verhouding, maar as die outjie haar uitvra dan sal hy mans genoeg wees om ja of nee te sê [vir die meisie] [Jane].

<sup>10</sup> Te groot vir hul skoene [Maryke].

<sup>11</sup> hy moet op sy voete kan staan [Danika].

<sup>12</sup> As jy, soos die man moet die gesin dra en hy moet vir hulle bymekaar hou, hy kan nie verwag die vrou moet dit doen nie, want sy is nie, sy is seker daar in staat, maar hy moet die gesin dra en so aan. Ja, ek weet nie hoe kan ek dit stel nie. Ag, ek weet nie, ek dink net die vrou moet onder die man inval en ja [Anna-Mart].

<sup>13</sup> Ag ek weet nie, kyk hier Pierre sê ook baie vir my hy, soos hy nou my toekoms ook, soos hy dit dink, ek moet swot en hy gaan obviously werk en dan sal hy, hy sal graag wil hê ek moet vir hom werk, sy admin byvoorbeeld doen. Ek sal dit doen... dan kan ek by die huis bly, dan is ek soos 'n huisvrou verstaan en die, dan moet ek die huis nou op hoogte hou, ek moet dit, en ek sal dit “love” as ek weet ek het werk, ek het darem 'n inkomste wat hy “obviously” vir my sal betaal. Dis nie asof ek net op hom “sponge” soos een van daai vrouens wat se mans al die werk doen en dan gooi hulle net geld uit, dit is nie soos dit nie, want ek kan ook darem iets bydrae. Maar ja, ek sal sê die vrou of die meisie is meer verantwoordelik vir die fyner goedjies of nou [Anna-Mart].

<sup>14</sup> Ja, ek sê ja en nee, want kyk hier, “obviously” 'n ma, ek sê nie alle mans moet dit kan doen nie, maar 'n man moet kan stryk en wasgoed was partykeer kom ons sê as jy siek of jy kan nie loop, jou rug is seer, moet hy agter die huis ook kan kyk.. Ek kan stryk, so hy moet ook kan stryk, en hy moet kan kos maak. My man moet kan kos maak, want ek gaan nie die een wees wat die heelyd gaan kos maak en dan nee, hy moet ook kan kos maak. My ma-hulle geleer, maar 'n man moet “at least” van die goed kan doen [Alri].

<sup>15</sup> Toe ek jonger was het ek gedink soos op 22, 23 ek wil ouer wees. Nou my situasie is nou so half, teen die tyd wat ek 23, 24 is is mens al 6 jaar saam of, dit is al so lank. Jy kan vroeër trou as jy reg is om te trou. So toe dink ek, ek dink nou maar net, hy moet my seker vra soos volgende jaar wanneer ek nou klaar ingesettle is in Potch en ek het 'n roetine. So dan kan hy my so half laat volgende jaar vra en dan laat die jaar daarna trou dat ek ook lank genoeg tyd het ook om in te settle en gewoon te raak aan die dinge [Anna-Mart].

<sup>16</sup> My ma dink 25 is 'n goeie ouderdom om te begin trou, my pa natuurlik sê hy wil nie hê ek moet trou nie, hy sal vir my 40 katte koop [Ester].

<sup>17</sup> ...Ek is my pa se dogtertjie, so “obviously” is hy maar bietjie “over-protective”... [Ester].

<sup>18</sup> Dit is hoe dit werk, Want die meeste mense doen dit [Danika].

<sup>19</sup> want mense sê altyd liefde is blind en as jy verlief is sien jy nie altyd alles raak wat ander mense raak sien nie [Ester].

<sup>20</sup> O, uhm, nee, net so tussen ons, “I hooked up with her, so deal with it” [Christina].

<sup>21</sup> Hy het na my huis toe gekom en toe het hy die een dag gehuil en hy soek my terug want hy het sulke groot fout gemaak en hy is rerig jammer, en ag “shame”. Toe huil hy, en dit was vir my aaklig dat hy huil, hy huil, natuurlik huil 'n ou, maar dit was net aaklig [Danika].

<sup>22</sup> Dit werk altyd so, jy kan enige ou “invite”, en dit is hoekom ek nooit meer nuwe mense “invite” nie, dan “invite” jy iemand dan sê hulle, “hi, wie is jy?” “dan sê ek “Alri en jy?” dan is hulle “Jaun,” of watookal hulle naam is. “Kan ek 'n pic van jou kry?” dan stuur pic, dan hy stuur

pic “jy is sexy,” byvoorbeeld. Miskien ’n dag of twee later “kan ek ’n kaal pic kry?” “Nee,” “okay” en dan sal dit wees, nie lank daarna nie is hy weg [Alri].

<sup>23</sup> Op ’n manier dink ek dit is ook ’n ego boost, jy sal na jou vriendin toe gaan en sê “hoorie, hierdie ou het my gevra vir ’n foto,” dink jy hy gaan vir sy vriend sê “ “check” hier ou, hierdie girl het vir my ’n foto gestuur.” So “obviously” is dit vir hulle kom ons kyk hoeveel meisies vir ons foto’s kan stuur [Elana, Focus Group 2].

<sup>24</sup> Vriende deel alles, soos alles, elke liewe enige iets. Hulle hou al hulle “chats” met meisies, want as hulle soos iets sê, dan soek daai vriend bewyse. Dan wys hy hom nou dit is wat sy gesê het, jy moenie vir ’n ou sê nie, net as jy weet hy sal dit tussen hulle hou, want ouens deel alles [Sarah, Focus Group 2].

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## Appendix A: Interview Schedule

### 1. Inleiding:

My naam is Maria van Eck. Ek is 'n student by die Universiteit van Pretoria en ek is tans besig met my Meestersgraad in Sosiologie. As deel van my graad moet ek 'n navorsingprojek doen, en dit handel oor tienermeisies se ervarings van romantiese verhoudings. Ek sal graag met jou wil praat oor jou ervarings van romantiese verhoudings.

### 2. Prosedure

Alle inligting wat jy met my deel sal vertroulik gehou word en wanneer enige inligting gebruik word wat jy weergee sal dit gekoppel word aan 'n skuilnaam sodat niemand jou kan identifiseer nie. Jy is meer as welkom om jou eie skuilnaam te kies.

Ek wil ook graag ons gesprek opneem sodat ek jou ervarings en opinies so akkuraat as moontlik kan weergee. Slegs ek en my studieleier sal toegang hê tot hierdie opnames.

Jy mag enige tyd gedurende ons gesprek vrae vra of aandui dat jy nie meer wil deelneem nie.

### 3. Inleidende vrae

3.1. Was jy al romanties aangetrokke tot iemand?

3.1.1. Brei asb uit

3.2. Wanneer het jy die eerste keer begin “date” of in iemand begin belangstel (ongeveer watter ouderdom?)

3.3. Was jy of is jy in 'n verhouding?

3.3.1. Hoe lank het hierdie verhouding geduur/ hoe lank is die verhouding al?

3.3.2. Vertel my van jou verhouding, bv. Jou kêrel, wat julle saam doen, hoe julle ontmoet het, ens

### 4. Romantiese belangstelling:

4.1. Hoe weet jy dat jy 'n romantiese belangstelling in iemand het?

4.2. Hoe vind jy uit of die persoon wie jy in belangstel dieselfde voel?

4.3. Maak jy die persoon in wie jy belangstel bewus van jou gevoelens?

4.3.1. Indien ja, hoe?



4.4.Vind daar enige vorm van direkte kontak tussen julle twee plaas, bv. gesels jul met mekaar of kommunikeer jul bv. oor die telefoon?

4.4.1. Indien ja, hoe?

4.5.Indien jy romantiese teleurstelling ervaar, met wie praat jy daaroor

4.5.1. Hoekom die persoon?

**5. Rolle in romantiese verhoudings:**

5.1.Wie maak die eerste ‘move’ of moet die eerste ‘move’ maak in jou opinie as dit kom by romanse?

5.1.1. Waarom dink jy so?

5.2.Wat gebeur volgens jou in romantiese verhoudings?

5.3.Aan watter aktiwiteite neem paartjies deel?

5.4.Wanneer word ’n verhouding beëindig en wie beëindig dit?

**6. Romantiese verhoudings:**

6.1.Wanneer dink jy is die regte tyd om in ’n verhouding in te gaan?

6.2.Watter eienskappe is vir jou belangrik in ’n romantiese maat?

6.3.Wat is in jou opinie die ‘ideale’ verhouding?

6.4.Wie/wat gebruik jy as ’n rolmodel vir jou idee van ’n verhouding?

6.4.1. Waarom?

6.5.Wanneer dink jy kom seks ter sprake in ’n verhouding?

**7. Ouers:**

7.1. Praat jy met jou ouers oor jou romantiese belangstelling?

7.1.1. Indien ja, wat vertel jy vir wie?

7.1.2. Indien nee, waarom nie?

7.2.Wat het jy al geleer by jou ouers oor romantiese verhoudings?

**8. Portuurgroep:**

8.1.Is jy in ’n vriendekring wat bestaan uit seuns en meisies?

8.1.1. Hoeveel van elk is daar?

8.2.Dink jy dat dit belangrik is om vriende te wees met lede van dieselfde en/of teenoorgestelde geslag?

8.2.1. Verduidelik

8.3.Waaroor praat julle in jul vriendekring met mekaar?

- 8.4.Hoe reageer jou vriendekring as hul uitvind jy stel in iemand belang?
- 8.5.Neem jy jou vriendekring se opinie in ag wanneer jy in iemand belangstel?
- 8.6.Was jy al gedruk deur bv, jou vriendekring om in 'n verhouding in te gaan
- 8.7.Is enige van jou vriende in 'n verhouding?
  - 8.7.1. Indien ja, het dit 'n effek op jul vriendskap (gehad)?

## **9. Sosiale media**

- 9.1.Maak jy gebruik van sosial media?
  - 9.1.1. Watter vorms gebruik jy?
  - 9.1.2. Waarvoor gebruik jy dit?
- 9.2.Het jy al op Facebook of ander vorme van sosiale media gebruik om inligting uit te vind van jou 'crush'?
  - 9.2.1. Hy het al jou 'crush' ge-Facebook 'stalk'?
  - 9.2.2. Watter dele van jou 'crush' se profiel fokus jy op?
- 9.3.Op watter wyses kommunikeer jy met die persoon in wie jy belangstel/tans in 'n verhouding mee is, as jy by die skool is?
- 9.4.Op watter wyses kommunikeer jy met die persoon in wie jy belangstel/tans in 'n verhouding mee is, as jy nie by die skool is nie?

Indien jy graag enige iets ander wil bylas is jy meer as welkom.

As jy enige vrae het vir m.b.t romantiese verhoudings, moet nie huiwer om my te vra nie.

Dankie vir jou bereidwilligheid om deel te neem, ek waardeer dit baie.

## Appendix B: List of participants and their relationship details

Name	Age	Grade	Relationship status	Last relationship	Time span of current/last relationship	Boyfriend name	Interview (I)/ Focus Group (FG)/Whatsapp (W)
Maryke	13	7	Single	Never			I
Alri	16	9	Single	1 week ago	1 Month	Ruan	I
Ester	17	11	Single	1 year ago			I
Danika	18	12	In a relationship		3 Years	Henko	I
Jane	15	9	Single	2 Years ago (grade 7)	1 month		W
Anna-Mart	18	12	In a relationship		1 Year	Pierre	I
Christina	17	11	Just broken up		8 months	Rickus	I
Nicole	13	7	Single	Never			I
Bianca	17	11	Single	2 Years ago (grade 9)	1 1/2 years	Michael	I
Ilse	18	12	In a relationship				W
Karlien	18	12	Single	1 year ago	couple of months		I
Jennifer	14	8	Single	Couple of weeks ago (thing)			FG2
Corlea	13	7	Single	Couple of weeks ago (thing)			FG2
Jessica	13	7	Single	1 year ago			FG2
Elana	17	11	In a relationship		1 Year 4 Months	Johan	FG1
Sarah	17	11	In a relationship		6 Months	Frederik	FG1
Lauren	17	11	In a relationship		2 Months	Cornelius	FG1
Tanya	17	11	Single				FG1
Anel	17	11	Single				FG1
Patricia	17	11	Single				FG1
San-Marie	17	11	Single				FG1
Gerda	17	11	Single				FG1

## Appendix C: Participant information sheet



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### Deelnemer Inligtingsblad

#### TITEL VAN STUDIE

Vroulike adolessente se persepsies oor romantiese verhoudings

#### INLEIDING

Ek is student aan die Universiteit van Pretoria wat tans besig is met my meestersgraad in Sosiologie. Om aan die vereistes van die graad te voldoen moet ek 'n navorsingsprojek onderneem. My navorsingsprojek ondersoek die persepsies wat tiener meisies het rakende romantiese verhoudings. Ek nooi jou uit om deel te neem aan die studie.

#### DOELWIT VAN STUDIE

Die studie beoog om jou verwagtinge en ervarings van romantiese verhoudings te beskryf. Indien jy instem om deel te neem sal jy die geleentheid gegun word om oor die onderwerp te praat en jou gevoelens en ervarings met my te deel.

#### PROSES

Die eerste fase van navorsing behels deelname aan 'n groep gesprek met 6 tot 7 meisies waar idees rondom romantiese verhoudings gedeel word. Die doel van die groepbespreking is om jou en die ander meisies die geleentheid te gee om daaroor met mekaar te praat. Twee

groepsaktiwiteite word ook beplan – die skep van 'n kollage oor romantiese verhoudings en om na uittreksels van die film *LOL* (2012) te kyk en dit te bespreek.

Na die groepsaktiwiteite sal jy gevra word om deel te neem aan 'n persoonlike onderhoud waar ons sal praat oor romantiese verhoudings.

## **GOEDKEURING**

Vir die studie is goedkeuring verleen deur die nagraadse en etiese komitees van die Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe aan die Universiteit van Pretoria.

## **JOU REGTE AS DEELNEMER**

Jou deelname is vrywilliglik. Dit beteken dat jy kan besluit of jy wil deelneem of nie. Ek sal graag wil hê dat jy moet deelneem. Jy kan enige tyd tydens die studie onttrek, en nie meer deel te neem nie. Indien jy ongemaklik sou voel kan jy dit vir my sê en jy is onder geen verdere verpligting om 'n vraag te beantwoord. Ek sal graag wil hê dat jy openlik met my praat oor die onderwerp.

## **VOORDELE**

Jou deelname sal hoog waardeer word. Dit sal bydra tot 'n beter begrip oor hoe tiener meisies oor romantiese verhoudings nadink en so bydra tot akademiese kennis. Alhoewel daar geen direkte vergoeding vir jou is nie, mag wel daarby baat om te praat oor kwessies wat jou kwel.

## **RISIKO'S**

Ek voorsien nie enige risiko's of negatiewe gevolge vir jou nie. Indien ek wel ondervind dat 'n jy in die proses van praat oor romanse of 'n romantiese teleurstelling emosioneel beïnvloed word is reëlings getref om jou na iemand te verwys wat berading sal verskaf.

## **OPNEEM VAN GESPREKKE:**

Buiten die versoek dat ek jou graag wil nader om deel te neem aan my navorsing wil ek jou ook inlig daarvan dat ek beplan om die gesprekke tussen ons, met jou instemming, op te neem. Die doel van hierdie opname is om die gesprek akkuraat moontlik vas te lê. Die opnames sal dus getranskribeer word. In die ontleding van die gesprekke sal daar met die transkripsie gewerk word, slegs ek en my studieleier het sal toegang hê tot die opnames en transkripsie.

## **VETROULIKHEID**

Enige inligting wat jy vir my verskaf sal vertroulik gehou word. Dit wat tussen ons bespreek word sal tussen ons bly. Die inligting wat jy verskaf sal op geen wyse met jou onderwysers of ouers bespreek word nie. Skuilname sal gebruik word, wat slegs daarvoor is wanneer ek iets direk gaan aanhaal wat jy gesê het in my navorsingsverslag.

## **VERSPREIDING VAN INLIGTING**

Volgens die universiteit se regulasies word daar vereis dat inligting wat ingesamel word vir 15 jaar bewaar word in 'n veilige plek onder slot en grendel. Die inligting wat ingewin word, word gebruik vir die navorsingsverslag en moontlik ook in 'n artikel.

## **KONTAKPERSOON**

Indien jy enige vrae het rakende die studie kan jy my gerus kontak of my studieleier Dr Charles Puttergill by 012 420 2715.

Dankie

Maria van Eck

084 899 8849

hpfan13@live.com



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**INGELIGTE TOESTEMMING**

Met ondertekening van hierdie dokument bevestig jy dat jy ten volle ingelig is oor die navorsing, jou regte, risiko's en voordele verbonde aan die studie. Jy verklaar dus dat jy die bogenoemde inligting gelees het en begryp. Jy neem ook kennis daarvan dat die gesprekke opgeneem en getranskribeer sal word en dat jy hiervoor toestemming verleen. Jy is ook bewus daarvan dat die inligting vertroulik verwerk sal word en in 'n navorsingsverslag en moontlik in 'n akademiese artikel gerapporteer sal word.

Deelnemer naam \_\_\_\_\_

Deelnemer handtekening \_\_\_\_\_

Datum \_\_\_\_\_

Navorsers naam \_\_\_\_\_

Navorsers handtekening \_\_\_\_\_

Datum \_\_\_\_\_

L.W. Die ingeligte toestemmingvorm word afsonderlik van die transkripsie gehou. Dit sal nie moontlik wees om te die deelnemer te kan identifiseer nie.



## Appendix D: Parental information sheet



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### Inligtingsblad - Ouer

#### TITEL VAN STUDIE

Vroulike adolessente se persepsies oor romantiese verhoudings

#### INLEIDING

Ek is student aan die Universiteit van Pretoria wat tans besig is met my meestersgraad in Sosiologie. Om aan die vereistes van die graad te voldoen moet ek 'n navorsingsprojek onderneem. My navorsingsprojek ondersoek die persepsies wat tiener meisies het rakende romantiese verhoudings.

Ek sal graag u toestemming wil verkry om u dogter te nader om deel te neem aan my studie. Ek dink dit is belangrik om die jeug se standpunt oor romantiese verhoudings en hoe hul beïnvloed word te hoor deur openlik daarvoor te kan praat.

#### DOELWIT VAN STUDIE

Die doelwit van die studie is om te verstaan wat meisies se verwagtinge van romantiese verhoudings is. Daarmee saam wil ek ondersoek instel oor hoe hul daarvoor dink.

#### DEELNEMERS

Ek nooi leerders tussen graad 8 en graad 11 om deel te neem aan die studie.

Aangesien die meerderheid van die leerders nog nie mondig is nie en op skool is benodig ek u toestemming om u dogter te nader om deel te neem aan die navorsing. U dogter se deelname sal afhang van haar bereidwilligheid om deel te neem.

## **PROSES**

U dogter sal genooi word om deel te neem aan 'n groep gesprek met 6 tot 7 meisies om hul idees rondom romantiese verhoudings te deel. Die doel van die groepsbespreking is om die meisies self geleentheid te gee om daaroor te praat eerder as om pertinente vrae te stel. Binne die groepsverband gaan twee aktiwiteite wees. Met die eerste aktiwiteit gaan hul hul kreatiewe denke inspan om 'n kollage te skep wat romantiese verhoudings uitdruk. Die tweede aktiwiteit behels uittreksels van die tienerfilm *LOL* (2012) wat ek sal wys waarna hul genooi sal word om hul eie kommentaar te gee.

Ten slotte sal ek meisies wat deelneem ook uitnoui om in persoonlike onderhoude in gesprekke met te betree rondom romantiese verhoudings.

## **GOEDKEURING**

Vir die studie is goedkeuring verleen deur die nagraadse en die etiese komitees van die Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe aan die Universiteit van Pretoria.

## **REGTE**

U dogter se deelname is vrywillig. Sy sal op geen manier gedwing word om deel te neem of negatief teenoor opgetree word as sy nie wil deel neem nie.

## **VOORDELE**

U dogter se deelname sal hoog waardeer word. Dit sal bydra tot 'n beter begrip oor hoe tiener meisies oor romantiese verhoudings nadink en so bydra tot akademiese kennis.

## **RISIKO'S**

Die navorsing sal op geen wyse inmeng met u dogter se opvoeding tydens skoolure nie en alle kontak sessies sal na-skool plaasvind. Ek voorsien nie enige risiko's of negatiewe gevolge vir die skool of die deelnemers nie. Indien ek wel ondervind dat 'n betrokke persoon in die proses van praat oor romanse of 'n romantiese teleurstelling emosioneel beïnvloed word is voorsiening gemaak vir berading.

## **OPNEEM VAN GESPREKKE:**

Buiten die versoek dat ek u dogter graag wil nader om deel te neem aan my navorsing wil ek u ook inlig daarvan dat ek beplan om die gesprekke tussen my en die deelnemers op te neem. Die doel van hierdie opname is om die gesprek akkuraat moontlik vas te lê. Die opnames sal dus getranskribeer word. In die ontleding van die gesprekke sal daar met die transkripsie gewerk word, slegs ek en my studieleier het sal toegang hê tot die opnames en transkripsie.

## **VETROULIKHEID**

Inligting rakende die skool en u dogter sal vertroulik gehou word. Soos ooreengekom sal die skool se naam nie genoem word in die navorsingsverslag nie. Skuilname sal ook vir deelnemers gebruik word.

## **VERSPREIDING VAN INLIGTING**

Volgens die universiteit se regulasies word daar vereis dat inligting wat ingesamel word vir 15 jaar bewaar word in 'n veilige plek onder slot en grendel. Die inligting wat ingewin word, word gebruik vir die navorsingsverslag en moontlik ook in 'n artikel.

## KONTAKPERSOON

Indien u enige vrae het rakende die studie kan u my gerus kontak of my studieleier Dr Charles Puttergill by 012 420 2715.

Dankie

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### INGELIGTE TOESTEMMING

Met ondertekening vann hierdie dokument bevestig u as ouer dat u bewus is van die navorsing. Hiermee saam verleen u ook u instemming dat ek u dogter mag nader om deel te neem aan die navorsing. U dogter mag egter besluit of sy wil deelneem of nie. U neem ook kennis van die feit dat alle inligting vertroulik gehou sal word en dat data wat ingesamel word in 'n navorsingsverslag en moontlik in 'n akademiese artikel gerapporteer sal word.

Ouer naam \_\_\_\_\_

Ouer handtekening

Datum \_\_\_\_\_