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**Dating and Adolescence:
The Influence of Peers on Self-Presentation of Adolescent Girls**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the ways in which peers affect the self- presentation of female adolescents within the context of romantic relationships. A total of 10 females in Grade 10, with a mean age of 16 years, were randomly selected from a public high school to participate in the study. Semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted and the discussion was initiated and stimulated by using a vignette. Data was analysed by using thematic analysis within the framework of grounded theory, which aimed to develop a set of themes and associated characteristics that was then integrated by theorising them. The analysis suggested that female adolescents rely on their peers' support and feedback, with regard to romantic relationships as well as other personal issues. This feedback was used to make decisions and choices that ultimately affect image, reputation and the way in which they present themselves. It therefore provided them with feelings of acceptance or rejection within the microcosm of the school context as well as in their wider social contexts. This data supports the value of understanding adolescents' social worlds in health crisis prevention programmes that are designed to reduce teenage pregnancy and the spread of HIV and suggests that such programmes will be strengthened by also focusing on peer influences.

Keywords: adolescence, peers, self-presentation, romantic relationships, reputation, image, identity

During adolescence the amount of time spent with the peer group increases substantially and romantic interests tend to gain importance and significance. The role of the peer group is particularly important to girls, who tend to spend most of their time engaged in conversation (Buhrmester, 1996; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Girls' peer networks, through the expression of validations or critiques play an important role in determining which behaviours are acceptable and unacceptable in romantic relationships (Buhrmester, 1996; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999). As a result of being socialised to present themselves in a particular manner, girls show greater sensitivity than boys to the opinions of others (Gilligan, 1982; Harris, 1995; Maccoby, 1990). The understanding, development and experience of romantic relationships tend to be influenced by the adolescents' peer group as they provide advice and support, while also allowing for the development of an identity within the peer context (Buhrmester, 1996; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999). Adolescents, more than any other age group, display differences as well as normative patterns with regard to identity, image concerns and the way that they relate to other people (Erikson, 1963; Sullivan, 1953). This study therefore seeks to explore these factors within the context of romantic relationships.

The proposed study will draw on two theoretical frameworks: 'Erikson's psychosocial theory of development' and 'Goffman's dramaturgical model' in order to conceptualise female adolescents' ideas about the influences that peers have on romantic relationships. These frameworks will be elaborated upon in the following section as the literature related to these topics is explored. Thereafter the details of the study will be discussed; this will include the aims, the rationale for selecting this study, the method of data collection and analysis as well as a discussion of the results and directions for future research.

Erikson's Psychosocial Theory

Adolescence is defined as "the transition between childhood and emerging adulthood" (Berk, 2005, p. 515). Adolescence is commonly divided into three phases: early adolescence (11 to 14 years), middle adolescence (14 to 16 years) and late adolescence (16 to 18 years). Erikson (1963) identified the adolescent years as the period of "identity

versus identity confusion”- the fifth stage in his psychosocial model. Constructing an identity involves defining who one is, what one’s values are, and the goals and objectives one chooses to pursue. The development of one’s identity is an important step towards becoming a productive and happy adult (Berk, 2005; Erikson, 1963).

Exploring a Gendered Identity

Through experimentation and imitation of parents and peers, adolescents develop a gendered identity (Connell, 2005; Williams, 2002). This concurs with Erikson’s (1963) theory which suggests that the adolescent will adopt different identities, until the best suited identity is found. During early and middle adolescence a pattern occurs, which emphasises increasing differentiation between boys and girls (Hill & Lynch, 1983). Girls adhere more closely to stereotypical feminine behaviours, such as engaging in expressive behaviours and complying with specific positions/roles in the social system. This occurs with the onset of puberty as adopting specific social roles become important (Connell, 2005; Hill & Lynch, 1983).

Schools provide children with highly gendered environments (Thorne, 1993). Early play styles of girls and boys provide a partial explanation for the differences in intimacy (Johnson, 2004; Maccoby, 1990). For example, boys are socialised to play team sports and other games which require a large number of players, whereas girls engage in dyadic interactions and place emphasis on communication and intimacy. School routines, rules and groups place children into distinct gender groups that are usually characterised by opposition to one another (Thorne, 1993). These gender divisions ultimately extend beyond the classroom, and into casual interactions. Gender in children is thus created, in part, by the gendered structures and strictures imposed by schools and peer groups.

Peer Influences

Affirmation from peers helps the adolescent to determine which behaviours are acceptable and unacceptable (Buhrmester, 1996; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999; Erikson, 1963). Adolescent friendships have two important characteristics, namely intimacy and loyalty (Berk, 2005; Dunn, 2004). Peers provide intimacy by consoling and comforting

each other during stressful times and by offering help and guidance when necessary, thus providing a platform for youth to disclose personal and private information. (Berndt & Perry, 1986; Rose & Asher, 2000). Adolescents express loyalty by not teasing or shunning friends, but instead by supporting them in both social and emotional matters (Buhrmester, 1996).

As the social worlds of parents and peers become distinct, adolescents rely on peers as the primary source of intimacy and companionship (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Harris, 1995; Maccoby, 1990; Sullivan, 1953). Close friends assist adolescents in exploring various identities by providing emotional support, assistance, and role models of identity development (Berndt & Perry, 1986; Buhrmester, 1996; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999; Ladd & Kochenderfer, 1996). For example, parents from some cultures do not place emphasis on specific gender roles; however stereotypical behaviour may still appear as a result of peer influences on the process of socialisation (Harris, 1995). Still, peers and parents serve as a complementary force (as opposed to competitive forces) in facilitating adolescent identity development (Giordano, 2003; Laursen, 1996). Like parents, peer groups therefore serve as a stable base from which to explore unfamiliar settings.

Adolescents are inclined to choose peers who share similar backgrounds, for example, demographic characteristics, hobbies and so forth (Dunn, 2004; Hey, 1997). Erikson (1963) states that belonging to a specific group guards the adolescent against identity confusion - the negative outcome of the fifth psychosocial stage. To gain some sense of identity adolescents “temporarily overidentify...with the heroes of cliques and crowds” (Erikson, 1963, p. 262). Some adolescents appear superficial or directionless, either because earlier conflicts have not been resolved or because society restricts their choices to ones that do not match their abilities and/or desires. Peer groups often provide feedback to each other about different types of interactions, including those with potential romantic partners (Feiring, 1999a). It stands to reason that peers play an important role in helping the adolescent understand the norms and rules of romantic relationships.

Romantic Relationships

Adolescent love is defined as “an attempt to arrive at a definition of one’s identity” (Erikson, 1963, p. 262). In their quest for an identity, adolescents explore and adopt new attitudes, values and skills. Adolescent romantic relationships are dominated by conversations of the self, as this assists the individual to clarify, develop and define his/her own identity. Congruent with adults’ descriptions, a study of 1755 adolescents revealed that romantic love could be defined as having the following characteristics: passion (infatuation or sexual contact), commitment, intimacy and common interests (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 1999). These relationship norms and values are often constructed through dialogue with close friends (Simon, Eder & Evans, 1992).

Sexuality and romance tend to be common topics of discussion and, when accompanied by the intimacy of friendship, assist adolescents to establish romantic partnerships and solve problems that arise within them (Berk, 2005; Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999; Feiring, 1999a; Sullivan, 1953). Adolescents’ conceptions about and behaviour within these relationships are dependent upon and influenced by the interactions and communication with other girls (Simon et al., 1992). Through gossip and conversation the girls establish specific rules such as it is wrong to date more than one person and heterosexuality is the only acceptable romantic option. Their romantic and personal feelings are therefore socially constructed and controlled through discussion with peers.

Goffman’s Dramaturgical Model

The impressions one makes on *particular* people, rather than on people in general, are the impressions that one is most aware of (Bromley, 1993). This idea concurs with Erikson’s (1963) theory that suggests that adolescents develop and conform to an identity that matches the expectations of peers and friends. Similarly, Brown (1999) discusses four phases experienced by adolescents in the development of romantic interests and skills: the initiation phase; status phase; affection phase; and the bonding phase. During the first two phases adolescents rely on the opinions of close friends, and worry about how the choice of a particular partner will affect their reputation. This issue will be discussed under two headings, namely impression management, and reputation management.

Impression Management

Erving Goffman is considered to be one of the most important sociologists in relation to self-presentation (Billig, 1996). Goffman's (1959) approach is occasionally referred to as the dramaturgical model. This model suggests that one's life is constituted by a series of performances and the creation of impressions upon others. The person with whom one interacts is referred to as the audience or co-actor. Each interaction, whether fleeting or ongoing, is a new performance. The main elements of performance involve the strategies of impression management.

Impression management states that "our actions are constrained by our awareness of the effect that our behaviour might have on the person or persons with whom we are interacting, or on the 'audience' that witness, or might hear about, our performance" (Bromley, 1993, p. 106). For example, the adolescent who often displays or feigns interest in romantic relationships, strengthens and solidifies her¹ ties with the peer group (Feiring, 1999a; Gembeck, Siebenbruner & Collins, 2004). She therefore presents a particular image of herself, to others, by her actions and what she says, thus putting on a performance and creating a particular impression.

Adolescents display different dispositions; these variations are determined by whether the person is 'performing' in the front- or back stage (Goffman, 1959). The adolescent is on the front stage when she interacts with others in a public or professional setting, for example with teachers at school. The adolescent will act in a particular manner that will promote positive impressions. Back stage, at home, this act may be dropped. Girls adopt specific roles within their romantic relationships such as displaying sensitivity, openness, and understanding as well as being compliant in decision making (Feiring, 1999a). This stereotypical gendered identity is thus adopted in order to convey a particular impression, that is, one who conforms to social norms and displays acceptable behaviour, however back stage she may be quite independent and insensitive. If an audience member were to witness this behaviour, the impression that the adolescent wishes to convey would be discredited (Bromley, 1993). Performances that are discredited may result in an impression opposite to that which the adolescent was attempting to convey.

Adolescents tend to avoid displaying behaviours that differ from the norm or are disapproved by peers, as this may lead to exclusion or stigmatisation (Bromley, 1993; Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986; Roscoe, Diana, & Brooks, 1987). Adolescents therefore feel inclined to conform to the norms of dress, grooming, and participation in social activities such as dating (Brown, Lohr, & McClenahan, 1986). They may present themselves falsely to others in a favourable light and may agree with others beyond their own beliefs (Goffman, 1959).

Reputation Management

Impression management refers to the attempt to control the effect that one's actions and behaviour have on other people in face-to-face situations (Bromley, 1993). Reputation management extends from this theory, and refers to an attempt to control the widespread and longer-term effects of one's behaviour. The audience continues to discuss the actor's behaviour long after it has occurred, thus a reputation is formed (Emler, 1990).

Reputation is therefore considered to be "that set of judgements a community makes about personal qualities of one of its members" (Emler, 1990, p.171). As a result, individuals tend to interact with those who are similar to themselves or those they can learn about.

Interactions with others communicate specific meanings, which are understood within specific contexts only (Emler, 1990). The adolescent attempting to settle on an identity will act in a way that is understood and accepted within the peer context (Brown, 1999; Emler, 1990; Emler & Reicher, 1995). Adolescents tend to share, with their peers, actions that are not understood within other contexts, and sometimes openly boast about it. For example, participating in a delinquent act may be considered unacceptable by society, but may be praised by peers.

Reputations are managed in two ways, namely, reputation by proxy and reflected glory (Bromley, 1993). Persuading or encouraging people within one's social network to defend, extend and/or promote ones reputation, in one's absence, is referred to as reputation management by proxy. For example, adolescents are usually loyal to their

friends, even if they have reservations about them (Rose & Asher, 2000). Reflected glory refers to the tendency for the individual to identify and associate herself with successful others (Bromley, 1993). Adolescents tend to worry about how the choice of a particular partner will affect their reputation, and thus are inclined to identify themselves with successful potential partners (Brown, 1999).

Girls in the early and middle adolescent years have a propensity to base their selection of partners on superficial features and opinions of peers (Brown, 1999; Roscoe, Diana, & Brooks, 1987). Older adolescents, in contrast, are more concerned with their potential partners' future plans and are less reliant on the scrutiny and influence of peers. This concurs with Erikson's (1963) concept of identity formation, which suggests that younger adolescents are more concerned with approval from their peer groups, while older adolescents are more secure with their identities and are thus ready to deal with the next 'crisis' i.e. intimacy versus isolation.

The utility of adopting the psychosocial and dramaturgical models is that both identity formation and presentation of the self plays a significant role during the adolescent years. Adolescents have a tendency to choose romantic partners and friends on the basis of their reputation and popularity. Issues such as status and power addressed by the dramaturgical model are therefore relevant. Enquiries about peer pressure and peer influences are addressed by Erikson's psychosocial model. Furthermore, the expression of gendered identity, which is pertinent to the study of adolescent self-presentation as well as romantic relationships, can be explained within both frameworks.

Rationale

The study of self-presentation of adolescent girls, within the context of a romantic relationship is important because of the nuances associated with the topic. As a result of selecting female participants the study gives a voice to girls whose opinions and ideas are often rejected and suppressed by society (Gilligan, 1982). Allowing these girls to express their gendered experiences grants them agency to develop their own constructs around

the topic of romantic relationships and peer influences and further encourages them to explore their own identities.

Understanding the role of peers and romantic partners is also significant as the period of adolescence is considered to be critical for the formation of identity (Erikson, 1963). It stands to reason that because adolescents “try on” different identities and feel the need to impress friends or partners they would display behaviours that may not benefit them or that they may not assent to. This study thus allows for greater insight into issues of conformity to social pressures and explores identity development within the adolescents’ social context.

A study of this kind also promotes the understanding of issues such as teenage pregnancy. According to the Health Systems Trust (HST) (2007), in 2003 14.3% of girls in the Western Cape, between the ages of 15 and 19 years, were already mothers. Approximately 15.4%² of girls under the age of 18 years experienced termination of pregnancies (TOPs) in 2001. This information is relevant as early initiation of romantic relationships is linked to earlier sexual experiences (Manning & Giordano, 2001). In order to further understand the reasons for this spreading health crisis, which is intrinsically linked to sexual behaviour, it is suggested that the social world of the adolescent be investigated.

Aims of the Study

The aims of this study are:

- to explore the way in which peers influence the self-presentation of middle adolescent girls’ within the context of romantic relationships.
- to determine the influence of peer groups on issues around image and reputation.
- to investigate the social significance of peers for the adolescent.

RESEARCH METHOD

Design

A qualitative design was used for the collection of the data as it allowed for the exploration of the quality and texture of peer influences, adolescent dating and self-presentation. Through qualitative research it is possible to ask deeper questions as opposed to questions that elicit “yes” or “no” responses (Allen & Walker, 2000). Emphasis was placed on meaning and exposing underlying processes and structures in social relations. This type of design also allowed for collaboration between the researcher and the participants about the meanings they attribute to the phenomena being studied, as opposed to a top-down approach in which the researcher dictates the definitions within the research (Willig, 2001).

Participants

The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) was approached and permission to conduct interviews at 2 schools in the Western Cape was requested. This permission was granted (Appendix A) and the 2 schools were then approached. Only 1 of the 2 schools showed interest in participating in the study. The principal of this school was given a letter (Appendix B) that outlined the study and requested permission for the research to be conducted at the school.

After the permission had been granted, the researcher approached a Grade 10 class and explained that she would be administering interviews around the topic of romantic relationships of adolescent girls. Thereafter, a teacher was asked to distribute 20 consent forms and information sheets (Appendix C), regarding the study, to the girls in her class. Those who were interested were expected to return the forms the following day. The researcher then randomly selected 10 participants from the 15 consent forms that had been returned to her. The final group of participants had a mean age of 16 years and was comprised by 5 Coloured and 5 Black female students. It stands to reason that even though a sample size of 10 is small (and results cannot necessarily be generalised) the topic was an emotionally charged one, which revealed and resulted in a large amount of data that was then carefully analysed.

Materials

A short vignette and semi-structured interview was designed (Appendix D). A vignette is good way to stimulate discussion as the use of an example, rather than an abstract question enables the researcher to gain a more realistic understanding of the participant's beliefs (Kelly, 1999). The vignette used involved having to advise a girl, who time travelled from the future, on a variety of relevant topics. Participants therefore had to explain and elaborate upon common adolescent practices and beliefs. Additional questions were shaped around the participant's responses so that conversation was free-flowing rather than halted by a previously structured set of questions.

Procedure

Individual semi-structured interviews were used in order to obtain the data. Semi-structured interviews gave participants the opportunity to speak freely and openly about particular aspects of their lives or experiences, while still enabling the researcher to guide the interview. It also allowed participants the opportunity to yield novel insights and re-define the topic under investigation. Interviews have been used to gather information from adolescents on a variety of sensitive topics including the perception of romantic relationships (Feiring, 1999b) and perceptions of sexual behaviours (Buzwell, & Rosenthal, 1996). The use of semi-structured interviews within a qualitative framework thus generates a rich understanding of the participants' experiences and beliefs.

A total of 10 interviews designed to elicit adolescents' perceptions of peer influences were conducted. To gauge the efficacy of the questions, 1 pilot interview was conducted. Data from this interview was included in the sample as no changes were made to the vignette and similar questions were used for the entire sample.

Interviews were conducted over a period of 2 weeks. Each participant met with me for one session, which was approximately 1 hour long. The 10 selected participants were required to have parental consent and individual assent prior to taking part in the study. They were therefore given letters outlining the aims of the research and requesting their consent (Appendix C).

The interviews were conducted in a classroom provided by the school. Permission was requested for the interview to be recorded, after this was granted an audio tape was placed in the centre. Participants were informed that their responses would be kept confidential. Non-verbal dynamics (for example, reluctance to speak, indications of agreement or disagreement) were recorded on paper. The discussion opened with a vignette followed by questions that were structured under 2 headings: 'image/reputation' and 'peer influences'. However, given the semi-structured nature of the interview, additional questions were directed by the participant's responses. The tape-recordings were transcribed verbatim and analysed.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed using thematic analysis within the framework of grounded theory. Grounded theory utilises the data to develop theories that represent reality (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data analysis of this sort is initiated by identifying thematic categories, through a process of coding. Ultimately, the data is explained by theoretical categories that occur naturally as opposed to forced pre-arranged theories. This notion is reinforced by thematic analysis, which encourages and allows for collaboration about possible themes and categories between the researcher and the participant (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis within the framework of grounded theory is a suitable method for this study because it recognises and extracts the important data and attributes meaning to it (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It provides a method of data analysis that aims to understand what the participants' main concerns are and the manner in which they attempt to resolve these issues. Furthermore it explores the effect that the participants' actions and words have on interpersonal relations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When considering peer influences on the way that adolescent girls present themselves, it is important to acknowledge that the participants each have different personalities and that the extent to which peers influence self- presentation varies from one participant to another. While one participant stated that she would take friends advice "depending on

what they told you”, another said “no” she would not generally adhere to friends advice. The belief that the personalities and values of these girls are homogenous is to make of them a group that is artificially bound and to ignore the presence of diversity (Scott, 1991). At the same time however, there were common themes in the girls’ relationship narratives that provide clues as to what type of influences peers exert on self-presentation within the context of a romantic relationship as well as the broader social context. These themes include: stance and structure of assessment; image concerns; popularity and status; and the social organisation of girls and boys. These themes will be elaborated upon and discussed throughout the remainder of this paper and where applicable extracts of the participants’ narratives will be used to support the themes.

Stance and Structure of Assessment

Many of the girls stated that their favourite pastime was providing commentary on relationships, the latest fashion and other events. The talk would often occur in the presence of the party talked about; however, there were also times that it would occur in her absence. Commentary was categorised as occurring in 2 different forms: ‘gossip’ and ‘sharing and advice giving’.

Gossip

The talk was classified as gossip when the person being spoken about was absent either physically or symbolically. As one participant stated “Normally we gossip about everyone. About the person walking in front of us: ‘ooh look how she walks’ or ‘look how her hair is today...or...like petty gossip’” (Appendix E). This provides a clear example of the assessments that occur both inside and outside of peer networks. Adolescents are aware of the effect that their behaviour and actions may have on peers and aim to produce a good impression (Goffman, 1959).

During adolescence aspects of dress or gesture are selected as the signs that determine whether a person is in the in-group or out-group (Erikson, 1963). When the girls align themselves with their peers, while speaking badly about others, they demonstrate that they have already adopted a particular identity and thus guard themselves against identity

confusion. Girls demonstrate alignment with their peer group because they are aware that abstinence from gossip may result in negative opinions and impressions from peers. People who fail to present themselves in socially acceptable ways or who fail to conform to behaviours acceptable to a particular group are likely to suffer adverse consequences, such as being isolated from the group (Bromley, 1993).

Sharing and Advice Giving

Another form of assessment occurred when sharing stories with peers. During these conversations the speaker describes an event, which is evaluated (either positively or negatively) by her peers, for example a participant stated “when like one of us is wrong or like did something that we don’t like, we tell them about it...So, we give each other advice and encouragement”. Another participant suggested that they speak about a wide variety of things:

I’d say teenage girls talk about boys, they talk about parties, they talk about, sometimes school, sometimes we talk about fashion, erm, but a lot of topics, mainly about boys, and maybe about our parents, our personal life and stuff at home, erm about the teachers, basically things which are very obvious, maybe sometimes about financial things or when they have financial problems, but, basically, a lot of times it’s all about boys.

In the example above, the participant states that “girls talk about boys...” and at the end she reiterates “a lot of times it’s all about boys”, in doing this the participant emphasises the importance of romantic relationships and particularly the need to discuss and be advised by peers on the matter. Furthermore, recognising that factors such as “fashion” and school can affect their reputation, the girls seek advice and approval from peers (Bromley, 1993). Peers act as a foundation from which the girls are able to voice their opinions, disclose personal and private information and determine whether these attitudes and behaviours are acceptable or not (Rose & Asher, 2000). Talking and sharing with friends is important for emotional development as it promotes self-understanding among adolescents (Sullivan, 1953).

Participants also mentioned that they discuss future events. As one participant stated:

like we talk in future, how we gonna act with our husbands and like what jewellery we gonna buy and how we gonna seduce them and-it's funny man-it's just lekker³, and then when he comes home from work candles is lit and you laying on the bed.

Although the participant says that it is funny, it still appears to be a very serious matter, as she continues to elaborate on her answer. The use of the word 'just' implies that the participant is emphasising that their reason for engaging in such talk can be justified, after all "it's just lekker" she states, thus justifying it because it brings a sense of enjoyment and increases group cohesion within the group. Erikson (1963) suggests that the purpose of this behaviour is to establish a sense of identity as well as social values. The girls therefore discuss these behaviours within the group, advising each other, evaluating whether this behaviour is positive or negative and depending on the reaction of the group, the girls either adopt or reject the morals and social values of that group, thus perpetuating or discontinuing dominant notions of femininity.

Many participants stated that if girls within the group were not sharing they would then be considered to be less a part of the group, than those who were sharing. In response to the question "Why wouldn't it (talking) bring you closer" a participant stated "...like she's not telling you what's happening in **her** love life". Because participants emphasised that talking was one of the main activities, choosing to abstain from this activity would decrease acceptance of the person within the group. Adolescents indicate that the friendship is reciprocated through sharing and disclosing information either about themselves or others (Berndt & Perry, 1986).

In response to the same question, another participant stated:

Sharing stuff... I think so, yes, because I could have this problem and, particularly, my other friends also like X⁶, she's my friend and I tell her about my mother and stuff, that my mother like shouted and stuff, same thing that happens to her, so it does bring us closer and this financial problem, and also she does have this financial problem, it brings out the best, so it does bring us closer.

This participant illustrates that she has one specific friend in whom she confides and talks to about a variety of personal topics. Reciprocal friends know more about each other than do girls who are in non-reciprocated friendships (Ladd & Emerson, 1984). In addition, girls in reciprocated relationships tend to spend a lot of time together and therefore are more knowledgeable of their friends' personality and preferences (Diaz & Berndt, 1982). This participant therefore shares information on a wide variety of intimate and personal topics and when this information is reciprocated cohesion and acceptance within her peer network increases.

In summary, through sharing, advice giving or gossiping the girls align themselves with a particular group, guarding themselves against identity confusion. In addition, as a result of these assessment techniques the girls either accept or reject particular societal values, worldviews and morals. Alignment is also expressed through the shared knowledge and understanding they have with or of the girls in their group. Furthermore alliance with a particular group is emphasised by ridiculing a person with different standards or behaviours that are deemed unacceptable by ones own group. In so doing, the girls maintain good social relations within the group and increase group cohesion (Bromley, 1993; Goodwin, 2006).

Image Concerns

The way in which girls behaved and presented themselves in the presence of female peers as well as romantic partners (or possible romantic partners) was an important theme in all of the interviews. Girls constructed their identities and roles within romantic relationships in relation to the expectations of peers.

Self-Presentation in the presence of the female peer group

The participants emphasised the importance of being themselves in front of their friends. Often the construction of the self was similar or identical to the expectations of peers.

As a participant stated:

Well, I do act myself with my friends, and I, as I said before, I tell them my personal things. I do act me as me, because they my friends and they know best, and they know everything about me. I can't just be cool to say 'You know, I have this car and this thing and thing and thing and thing', they know that I don't have because they're my friends, but obviously when I tell my guy that 'you know, I've got the latest cell phone' then maybe he will say 'oh okay' but my friends they'll say 'no girl, you lying'. So ja⁴, I act myself to my friends.

The participant refers to notions of openness and honesty when she is with her friends. "As I said before..." refers back to the topic of 'sharing and advice giving' thus emphasising that this identity is one that would be pleasing to and accepted by her friends. Through the use of "just" the participant emphasises that the identity adopted in front of her friends needs to be a realistic one and that it cannot possibly be pretence. She compares this to her relationship with a guy and shows that with him she may be able to pretend to be someone that she is not. Her use of comparison emphasises the distinction between the relationship with peers and a romantic partner. Both at the beginning and the end of her statement she declares that 'I act myself with my friends' suggesting notions of constructing an original, authentic identity with peers. Through her discourse then, the participant constructs an identity that is accepted by peers and thus is one that she perceives as 'original'. In dramaturgical terms, in the presence of peers, the girls are backstage, and can let their guard down and be themselves, however in the presence of others, such as romantic partners, they are more guarded and aware of societal norms (Goffman, 1959).

This idea was demonstrated by another participant:

R: Okay, so, Storm⁷ wants to know how you act when you're with your friends

P: I act vulgar (Laughs)

R: (Laughs) How's vulgar.

P: Just joking man. I act normal. I talk to them normal, that's all.

R: Okay, and what's normal?

P: I will like go eat by them and do my work, my school work.

R: Okay, so let's get back to vulgar, so do you mean like being loud and stuff?

P: Being loud ja

R: Okay, and is that acceptable? Is that okay? Like are your friends also loud?

P: Yes, they also loud.

In this extract the participant became aware of what she had said and the possible consequences. She immediately defended herself by saying "Just joking", yet later when the topic was re-approached, she acknowledged that she is loud. In the interview context, her aim was to present herself in a manner accepted by society; however her original identity was one that met with her peers' requirements. This extract therefore provides evidence for identity as a construct, and the adolescent identity as one that is flexible and aware of societal values, yet still meeting the requirements of the peer group (Simon et al, 1992). Social identity theory suggests that the girls' sense of who they are is comprised in part by membership of a particular group (Weatherall, 2002). In addition, the girls temporarily overidentify with their cliques or social groups in order to avoid identity confusion (Erikson, 1963). For the girls therefore, being loud and talkative helps them identify with and develop a sense of belonging to their peer network.

Self-Presentation in the presence of males

Once again, many of the girls stated that it was best to simply be themselves in front of romantic interests. One participant stated that "I'd tell her like, just to be herself around him so he can really find out what type of person she is. She, you shouldn't put up an act when you around a guy 'cos he won't really know who you are". Interestingly her statement is constructed in such a way that the reason she is "being herself" is so that the boy can get to know her. In other words, the only reason she needs to be herself, is because of him. The relationship and her role in the relationship is clearly about pleasing him, thus adopting a gendered stereotype and subordinating her own interests in the relationship. Girls adhere more closely to stereotypical feminine behaviours, such as complying with specific positions or roles in the social system (Hill & Lynch, 1983). Through the construction of her language the participant evokes dominant ideologies of patriarchy as well as a lack of agency for women (Rogers & Rogers, 2001).

When asked to describe their actions in a relationship, the majority of the participants stated that they were shy and coy in front of romantic interests. Thus, even though it was important to be themselves, the girls often reacted in the opposite manner. One participant stated:

Sometimes you like change, change a lot, like at school I'll be loud, I'll laugh, I will be wild, I will just be whatever and when I'm with my boyfriend I will be like, I will go quiet, giggle or I won't even laugh, things like that.

Once again, the participant distinguishes between the two different types of identities: the loud wild one when she is with her peers (backstage) and the soft, gentle side when she is with her romantic partner (front stage). The behaviour displayed on the front stage reinforces notions of the subordinate female gendered identity as well as roles that are acceptable and modelled by society (Goffman, 1959).

Furthermore, the concept of discredited performance was also mentioned:

...you change, you change a lot, like okay, say for instance, your friends go out, you go out with your friends, and he's with you and he's going, say for instance, going to this one shop and you like stand with your friends while he goes to this shop, you will like change again, and you will like start talking with your friends about this guy and that girl or laugh, and the instant he comes back you like 'okay' 'bye' (coy voice) things like that, you change, you change like that.

The participant is aware that if her 'bad' behaviour were to be witnessed, the impression that she was hoping to convey would be discredited (Goffman, 1959). Performances that are discredited may result in an impression opposite to that which the adolescent was attempting to convey. Furthermore, the participant once again reinforces that the identity of the adolescent is malleable and that the performance and actions in front of one group may differ radically to the behaviour displayed in front of another group.

The behaviours displayed by the girls are generally dependent on their peers influence and suggestions. As a participant articulated:

See, when you have problems in your relationship, there has to be someone that you can speak to, and I think your friends are the first people you actually go to, from their experience you can learn a lot.

Another girl suggested:

They would give her tips on how to act around him, erm tell her...erm, always seeing that she looks neat or whatever, or they could like prepare her, give advice on how to go out with a guy and like, give her some tips on how to actually be a girlfriend and you know, the outcomes or consequences of going out with a guy.

Parallel to the extract mentioned above, friends are presented as the primary source of influence and advice in the romantic relationship context. Once again they are portrayed as nurturing and caring, and emphasis on sharing is reinforced. Adopting an identity, particularly one that matches the expectations of peers (and society) is thus encouraged and accepted. The adolescent attempting to settle on an identity will act in a way which is understood and accepted within the peer context (Brown, 1999; Emler, 1990; Emler & Reicher, 1995).

In relation to both girls and boys, the girls established and demonstrated through their narratives that peers play an important role in self-presentation. When the girls are with friends, they present themselves as loud and talkative, as this behaviour is defined as acceptable within the peer group. At the same time, as result of peers advice and influence they portray a different image within the context of their romantic relationships.

Popularity and Status

Adolescents produce and create their own boundaries, rules and values and in so doing, create their own culture (Caputo, 1995). As result of breaking ties with people or behaviours that represent popularity the girls risked losing their 'important' status and being replaced by other people (Griffiths, 1995). The participants acknowledged that there were distinct differences between certain groups and that some groups were more popular than others. Girls expressed both positive and negative beliefs about popularity. In addition, there were certain things that could be done in order to increase popularity or

status, these include: 'deviant behaviour', 'association with the opposite sex' and 'sexual activity'.

Notions of Popularity

Girls expressed mixed views about whether popularity was admired or disapproved. This is evident in the following quote:

You know, I don't think it's a good thing to be cool and popular, there's a girl in my community who wants to be seen, who wants to be cool, who wants to be popular. She's artificial, she's thinks, you know, everybody knows her, so I don't think it's a good thing, you know, because they call her the 'B' words and stuff, they call her a h%&r and stuff, and the 'S' words, so I don't think it's good...

This participant makes use of words that denote negative feelings and connotations, thus reinforcing that being popular could also have a negative impact on ones reputation. Furthermore the participant suggests that being popular is synonymous with being 'artificial'. Thus being popular is viewed as choosing to present oneself in a manner that is not necessarily true, and more often than not, a manner dictated to the individual by peers. Some individuals avoid popularity because of fear that their reputation would be affected adversely by people's resentment (Bromley, 1993).

Other girls did not say anything, but instead just articulated what needs to be done in order to be popular. By not explicitly stating that they disagree with the negative behaviours associated with popularity, one could infer that, to them, this behaviour was acceptable. Furthermore, choosing to silence their agreement, the girls were managing the impression that they displayed to me, that is they attempted to convey that they were capable of abiding by social norms and displaying acceptable behaviour (Goffman, 1959).

Deviant Behaviour

Deviant behaviours, that is, behaviours that are in opposition to societal norms were encouraged in order to increase popularity or status. When asked what makes girls popular, the girls unanimously agreed that doing things that were out of the ordinary,

such as smoking and drinking alcohol, would make them popular. As one participant who claimed to belong to the popular group suggested:

Erm, she has to take part in the facilities they do like smoking, drinking, erm, some of them smoke dagga, erm like in order to fit in the group, you have to do what they do, if they say you have to go ‘moer’⁵ that girl now, **you have to** go do it, and they say ‘tell this teacher nonsense’ **you have to** do it, cos you have to show them that you actually part of the group.

The participant makes it clear that “you have to” participate in certain activities in order to belong to the group thus emphasising the influence and role of the peer group on self-presentation.

Another participant suggested that clowning around adds to popularity

Like, just do silly things, like put a wig on your hair, like a boy put a wig on his hair or stupid things, like that can make people laugh, that is like one type of way to be cool and whatever, and then the next is like if you get into trouble or you wanna do like, act like you’re a gangster or act things like that, so most of the time it’s out of peer pressure that people will act like that.

The participant uses the words “just do” again emphasising the necessity to engage in these activities in order to become popular. Deviant behaviour affects reputation because recognition of bad, eccentric or unusual behaviour might be preferred to no recognition at all (Emler, 1990). Furthermore, delinquent actions such as daredevilry or clowning are guaranteed to make an impression whereas behaviour that complies with social boundaries is not.

Association with the Opposite Sex

Following the latest trends and having a boyfriend were also suggested to increase popularity. One participant stated:

Like have relationships, they’ll be all intimate on the school and then they’ll be like close friends with boys, and a little to close, and then looks is also important on this school to be popular...Like you have to have straight hair and clear complexion and you have to look like a supermodel and all of that and you have to have nice clothes,

like now (*refers to casual Friday and the girls outside of the classroom*) it's a fashion parade.

The girls' alliances and intimacy with boys was treated as a sign of social status. The participant states "a little to close" perhaps suggesting a sense of jealousy or disdain on the behaviours displayed by popular people. It is not only ones personality that plays a role however, the individuals physical and external appearance is also important in establishing popularity. The adolescent's behaviour and actions, i.e. her self-presentation tactics, is not intended to deceive, but instead is used to increase the likelihood of success (Bromley, 1993).

The girls also acknowledged that the type of boy that they were dating would also impact on their popularity within their own peer group. If a girl dated a popular boy, she would become instantly popular, as one participant stated:

I might say that if she like had a guy who's cute and popular, most of the girls like want that guy, when she comes and gets the guy, most of the girls will say like this girls like popular because we really want that guy, but she, she got that guy.

In this situation the girls identify and associate themselves with successful boys so that they can gain reputation and status, referred to as reflected glory (Bromley, 1993).

In contrast, participants suggested that dating nerdy boys would make them less popular. These were likely to be boys who would damage their reputation, if the girls were seen associating with them. Boys were viewed as either prestige symbols or stigmatising symbols that could either enhance or damage their reputation (Goffman, 1959). Girls dating popular boys are also described as having something that the other girls desire and cannot have and the alliance with these popular boys is therefore viewed as a measure of affluence (Connell, 1987). Similarly, western culture emphasises status and physical appearance and acquiring this leads to respect and improved status (Laursen & Jensen-Campbell, 1999).

The participants displayed a largely acrimonious attitude towards girls dating popular boys who were not part of their own, immediate peer network.

R: Now, if she was going out with a popular boy, and she was just a normal girl, how would other girls react to that?

P: Some would be jealous, because they would also like to go out with a popular boy.

R: And how would they act?

P: They would act nasty; say nasty comments to her and ja.

Another participant suggested that other girls would “‘skinder’⁸ about her or talk about her, or wanna hit her or those things” because they would be “jealous” of the person. Through discourse these popular girls are placed lower in the social hierarchy and are accused of being devious and deceitful. The participant does not mention herself, thus portraying herself as the “good” person and superior to these girls who date popular people. Issues of power and social processes are redressed through the girls’ narratives, as participants present themselves as better than the popular group (Goodwin, 2006).

Participants stated that dating “normal” boys would have no impact on their popularity and that peers and others were unlikely to comment on these types of relationships. A participant suggested:

Two normal people? Erm, I don’t think actually people would have much to say about that because they found each other, they both local, and erm, I think the crowd would actually say best for you guys, and I hope you guys actually stay together as long as possible.

In this situation, the girls recognise that if or when someone is in a “normal” relationship it does not threaten their position in the social hierarchy. Threats are intended to generate fear and are constituted by actions that enable an individual to demonstrate power over others (Goodwin, 2006). People in average relationships are not necessarily enhancing their reputation or status, and their actions are often not recognised (Bromley, 1993). As a result the limited power exhibited by ‘normal’ couples are not perceived as a threat and thus people outside of their peer network do not express jealousy or envy toward them.

Sexual Activity

The topic of sex rendered mixed feelings, as girls whose peer groups acknowledged sexual activities, tended to agree that engaging in sex would make them more popular. In contrast, girls whose peer groups condemned the activity viewed it as taboo and something that would be frowned upon. When asked whether having sex would make somebody popular, one participant stated “They only spread rumours, it won’t make her cool and it won’t make her popular...they will look down on her” while another stated “Yes, it would make her popular...it’s a normal thing these days...everybody talks about it”. These contrasting views fit with and relate to the girls earlier narratives where they described their friendship circles and the behaviours accepted within those networks. This concurs with the notion that adolescents tend to avoid displaying behaviours that are disapproved by peers as this may lead to exclusion or stigmatisation (Bromley, 1993).

The behaviours of the girls are shaped by social forces that define appropriate behaviour as well as the behaviours that are acceptable in relationships (Goodwin, 2006). Sexual activities are only considered to be important in the relationship if it is encouraged by peers or the wider social group (Erikson, 1963). Furthermore, their discourses emphasise the need for peer acceptance and reinforces their affiliation with a particular group. Adolescents recognise reputation by proxy, that is, because the girls would like their peers to defend their name in their absence, they engage in behaviours that are acceptable to peers, even though they themselves do not fully support it (Bromley, 1993).

In summary, girls realise that the use of boys as symbols of elevated status is beneficial to their reputation within their own peer group. Outsiders may speak badly about them, however this may be a result of jealousy and the constant talk about them only adds to their popularity. The talk within peer networks certainly influence the types of boys that girls choose to date (as mentioned in ‘sharing, gossiping and advice giving’) and also helps determine which types of boys would most enhance their reputation. The girls’ narrative accounts serve to demonstrate issues of power and superiority within their social network.

Social Organisation of Girls and Boys

The roles of the girls and their male counterparts were demonstrated through conversations about whether girls mix with boys and also through the roles each gender was expected to enact within the relationship.

'Mixing' within the Grade

At school, the girls encounter highly gendered environments that they will be faced with during the course of their lives (Thorne, 1993). School routine, rules and groups place children in the distinct gender groups that are usually characterised by opposition to one another, this was illustrated by a participant "...there's the girls group and the boys group". This distinction between the two different groups emphasises the social differences of each group. The participant is perhaps suggesting that not only, are they 2 different genders, but they also have different ways of socialising and doing things. Furthermore, the 2 groups' awareness of each other as possible romantic and sexual partners as well as their fear of rejection from the opposite sex results in a large amount of informal segregation between the sexes (Schofield, 1981).

Anticipated Relationship Roles

When asked what their expected roles might be in a relationship girls mentioned stereotypical feminine roles, such as being caring, loving, some even mentioned having to do the housework and the cooking. In contrast the males' role was more masculine and girls attributed more power to their male counterparts. The following extract illustrates this:

R: Okay, so in the relationship, is there a specific role that she needs to take on?

P: She has to be lady like, show manners, or even just show your true colours...

R: What would her boyfriend's role be in the relationship?

P: Treating her like a lady, not to actually raise his voice, so hitting her, abusing her and stuff...

R: Would you say that the role the woman takes on in the relationship; would you say that that's the general role or idea that everyone has?

P: ...I think that is the role that you should be taking, because it is a woman's duty to see that the house is spotless and to make the food and stuff like that, and it's always the mans job to see that the yard is clean and look after the garden. Mans work is actually outside, girls work is inside.

The participant uses terms like "lady-like", "show manners" implying feminine behaviours; she also suggests that the men have physical power that may be demonstrated through abuse, thus placing her in a subordinate position. Furthermore, she states that it is the woman's duty to take care of the home, whereas the more difficult "manly" chores should be left for the male. Girls gender roles focus on activities that foster nurturance and affection, whereas boys roles are associated with competition and dominance (Hill & Lynch, 1983). The participants discourse reflects this dichotomy. Interaction and communication with peers result in specific conceptions about the behaviours that need to be displayed in these romantic relationships (Simon et al., 1992). Gender is thus shown to be socially constructed (through interaction with peers and enactment with romantic partners) (Williams, 2002; Connell, 2005).

In order to understand the gender arrangements and the behaviours attributed to or adopted by each gender, we need to look not only at discourse, but also consider the influence of institutions and social structure (Thorne, 2002). The girls are not only influenced by peers in this situation but also by their wider social context such as parents, whom they model and the school context, who imposes specific strictures onto them (Williams, 2002; Connell, 2005). On the front stage these ideological behaviours are displayed (Goffman, 1959). It is thus possible to infer that the participant is also attempting to create a particular impression (on me, the audience), by conforming to normative behaviour.

Through language, the girls do not display a great deal of agency to construct social relations and their position in the social hierarchy. They instead choose to place male counterparts in a higher position, thus abiding by societal norms and subordinating themselves. Furthermore the girls distinguish between themselves and their male

counterparts thus emphasising the ideology of distinct differences between males and females.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Although a range of perspectives are taken in this paper, it is almost exclusively psychological, future research may incorporate historical, sociological and anthropological methods. This would be significant because it could provide greater insight into understanding peer influences and romantic relationships. While this study discussed the peer influences on self- presentation within a romantic context, future studies might be encouraged to focus exclusively on adolescent romantic relationships, their development and maintenance. The gender roles played within these romantic relationships could also be further explored. Due to a limited amount of time and access to only 1 school, the results are not generalisable; however the study has certainly yielded important information with regard to peer influences.

In this paper I have argued that peers demonstrate a large amount of influence on the decisions and behaviours displayed by adolescent girls. Erikson's psychosocial and Goffman's dramaturgical model was used to motivate and explain possible reasons for these influences. Girls are constantly aware of the impact that their actions may have on their reputation. Furthermore, boys and/or romantic relationships are viewed as commodities or symbols of affluence that enhance their reputations. Through extracting specific themes and core categories, I have identified ways in which adolescent girls articulate notions of acting and being in society as well as the factors that influence this.

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NOTES

1. While I am aware of the need for gender inclusive language; female pronouns will be used in this proposal because female adolescents (and their development) will be the focus of this research.
2. Caution should be exercised in interpreting this data due to the high proportion of unknown data (Health Systems Trust, 2007).
3. The word 'lekker' is an Afrikaans word directly translated into 'nice', but is also used as a slang word, or colloquially, implying enjoyment or fun.
4. The word 'ja' is Afrikaans for yes and is also sometimes used casually or in a colloquial sense, to say yes.
5. The word 'moer' is a slang word implying to hurt or to fight with someone.
6. Names have been removed for confidentiality purposes.
7. Participants were asked to name the girl described in the vignette, in this case, the girl was named "Storm".
8. 'Skinder' is slang or used colloquially to denote gossip.

APPENDIX A : Permission from WCED

Navrae
Enquiries **Dr RS Cornelissen**
Imibuzo

Telefoon
Telephone **(021) 467-2286**
Ifoni

Faks
Fax **(021) 425-7445**
Ifeksi

Verwysing
Reference **20070726-0008**
Isalathiso



Wes-Kaap Onderwysdepartement

Western Cape Education Department

ISEBE leMfundo leNtshona Koloni

Miss Chanelle Govindsamy
21 Henley Court
Hemyock Road
PLUMSTEAD
7800

Dear Miss C. Govindsamy

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: DATING AND ADOLESCENCE: THE INFLUENCE OF PEERS IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS' ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS.

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **26th July 2007 to 3rd August 2007.**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December 2007).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr R. Cornelissen at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the Principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the following schools: **South Peninsula High and Rhodes High.**
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Education Research.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

**The Director: Education Research
Western Cape Education Department
Private Bag X9114
CAPE TOWN
8000**

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Ronald S. Cornelissen
for: **HEAD: EDUCATION**
DATE: **26th July 2007**

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Appendix B: Consent Form for School Principle



Department of Psychology

University of Cape Town Rondebosch 7700 South Africa
 Telephone (021) 653435
 Fax No. (021) 6504104

To Whom It May Concern

My name is Chanelle Govindsamy. I am currently completing my Honours degree in Psychology at the University of Cape Town. As part of this degree, I will be researching the influence of peers in romantic relationships among adolescent girls.

This research aims to determine how and how much peers (and others) influence choices made by adolescent girls when initiating and engaging in romantic relationships. It is my hope that this research be beneficial to life-skills educators. I also expect that it would benefit the girls involved, allowing them greater insight into their own behaviours and actions.

In order to achieve these objectives, I require access to adolescent girls who would constitute a sample in this study. I therefore request permission to speak to some of your learners. I would like to run 10 to 15 individual interviews at your school with Grade 10 female pupils. These interviews will run for a maximum of one hour and I will be asking the girls' to share their opinions about the possible influences on dating practices. I intend conducting these interviews at the beginning of the third term. I understand that the school term is busy; the interviews will therefore be run at a time that is convenient for you, the teachers and the pupils.

Given the nature of the topic- the schools identity, the identity of the girls and that which is discussed in the interviews will be kept confidential. Learners' participation in the study will be voluntary and they may withdraw at any time without reason. I will be available to answer any of their, or your, questions about the study and what they are expected to do.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours Sincerely

Chanelle Govindsamy

Adelene Africa
 Clinical Psychologist
 Supervisor

If you have any concerns or questions about this study, please contact either Chanelle Govindsamy on 073 1712 575 or her supervisor, Adelene Africa at the University of Cape Town on 021 650 3425

<p>PERMISSION FORM FOR CONDUCTING OF RESEARCH FOR THE STUDY "DATING AND ADOLESCENCE: THE INFLUENCE OF PEERS IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS' ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS</p>
--

Name of the school: _____

Your position: _____

By signing my name below I, _____ (your name)
grant permission to Chanelle Govindsamy to carry out the above mentioned research during July
and/or August 2007.

Authorisation Signature

Date

Place

Appendix C: Consent form and Information Letter For Students and Parents



Department of Psychology

University of Cape Town Rondebosch 7700 South Africa
Telephone (021) 653435
Fax No. (021) 6504104

To Whom It May Concern

My name is Chanelle Govindsamy; I am a female student from the University of Cape Town. As part of my Honours degree in Psychology, I am expected to complete a mini-thesis and have chosen to study the influence of peers in romantic relationships among adolescent girls. One part of my study involves interviewing adolescent girls about the above-mentioned issues and thus I would like to invite you for an individual interview.

Enclosed in this letter is additional information about my study as well as necessary documents that need to be filled in if you would like to be interviewed. Please read everything carefully.

I hope that my study will be of interest to you and that you are willing to participate.

Yours Sincerely

Chanelle Govindsamy

The Researcher

073 1712 575

Adelene Africa

Clinical Psychologist

Supervisor

021 650 3425

INFORMATION LETTER

Title of the Study: Dating and Adolescence: The influence of peers in adolescent girls' romantic relationships

Researcher: Chanelle Govindsamy

Supervisor: Adelene Africa (Clinical Psychologist)

Institution: University of Cape Town

Why have you received this letter?

You have received this letter because I would like you to participate in my research project and would like to invite you for an interview.

What is my research project about?

I am an Honours (4th Year) Psychology student at the University of Cape Town. As part of my Honours degree I am expected to complete a research project. I am interested in finding out more about friendships and dating among adolescent girls.

One objective of this study is to give a voice to girls whose opinions and ideas are often rejected and suppressed by society thus granting them agency to develop their own constructs around the topic of romantic relationships and peer influences and further encouraging them to explore their own identities.

What will the interview be like?

Each interview will last 60 minutes or less. The interview will take place at your school, at a time that is convenient for you, your teachers and me. Interviews will be recorded, however if permission for that is not granted, notes will be taken.

Will other people know about the information that you have given me?

All information that you provide during the interview will be recorded or written down, with your permission. In this way I can perform the necessary analysis after the interview is over.

The information you give me and the names of all participants in the study will be kept confidential and will only be viewed by me, my supervisor (Adelene Africa) and the person responsible for transcribing the tapes.

What do you have to do if you would like to take part in my study?

If you would like to participate, you need to return one signed consent form to me (personally- or by handing it to Ms. X⁶). Alternatively, you could fax the signed form back to me (021 650 4104: Attention it to Ms. Adelene Africa). Please make sure that a witness also signs the form.

After I have received your consent form I will provide you with a date, time and place during which we will meet. **Please state your contact number so that I can get in touch with you.** If the date and time does not suit you, it would certainly be possible to reschedule. You will receive a telephone call from me a few days before your interview, where you will be asked if you would still like to participate in the study or not. If you wish to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any time, without giving any reasons for doing so.

Do you have any questions?

If you have any questions or concerns about the study and what you are expected to do. You can contact me (Chanelle) on 073 1712 575 or email me at chanelle257@yahoo.com OR you can contact my supervisor (Adelene Africa) on 021 650 3425.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this letter and I hope to meet you soon.

With Best Wishes

Chanelle Govindsamy

The Researcher

CONSENT FORM

I, _____ (your name) agree to participate in this study conducted by the postgraduate student Chanelle Govindsamy as part of her Honours thesis on “Adolescent Girls Peer Networks and Romantic Relationships”.

By signing this consent form, I declare that my participation in this study is voluntary. If I wish to withdraw from the study, I may do so at any time, without giving any reasons for doing so. My withdrawal from the study will not affect my relationship with the University of Cape Town or any other organisation.

I understand that all personal information, including this consent form and the names of all participants will be treated with confidentiality and will only be viewed by Chanelle Govindsamy, her supervisor (Adelene Africa) and the person responsible for transcribing the tapes.

I have carefully read and understood the information letter and this consent form. I am allowed to keep copies of the information letter and consent form if I wish. The information in this letter was explained to me in English and I confirm that I have a good command of this language. I was also given the opportunity to ask questions about things I did not understand clearly.

Today's date

Your signature

Your contact number: (cell) _____ / (home) _____

FOR PARENTS: I document my consent by signing below

I, _____ (Parents Name) agree to allow my daughter,
_____ (Childs name), to participate in the above-mentioned research.

Today's date

Signature of parent/ guardian

Today's date

Witness

Appendix D: Vignette and Questions for the Interview

Vignette:

A teenage girl, of about 16 years old, time travels from the future back to 2007. She wants to know about the kinds of stuff teenage girls do and talk about...

Peer Influences:

She meets this guy that she really likes, but doesn't know how to act around him or who she can go to for advice. What would you tell her to do?

Who could she go to?

How should she act?

She is unsure of what type of guy she would like to date and really doesn't know what to do in this relationship, what would you tell her to do?

Would her friends play a role in getting a boyfriend?

Image/ Reputation:

She would like to know how you act when you're with friends.

How do you act when you are with your boyfriend?

What does she need to do so that she can be seen as "cool"?

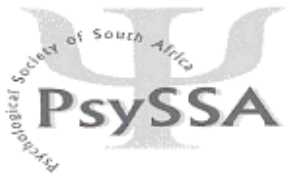
She would like to know, after she has a boyfriend, how will she be expected to behave?

What will her role be in the relationship (what will she need to do)?

Appendix E: Transcription Conventions

R:	Researcher
P:	Participant, whose name has been omitted for confidentiality
...(between lines):	Lines have been omitted to create brevity
bold:	emphasis is placed on those words
(laugh)	actions displayed by the participant

Appendix F: Authors' Guidelines for the South African Journal of Psychology



South African Journal of Psychology

Instructions to authors

Submitting a manuscript

SAJP is a peer-reviewed journal publishing empirical, theoretical and review articles on all aspects of psychology. Articles may focus on South African, African or international issues. Manuscripts to be considered for publication should be e-mailed to sajp@unisa.ac.za. Include a covering letter with your postal address, email address, and phone number. The covering letter should indicate that the manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration for publication in another journal. An acknowledgement of receipt will be e-mailed to the author within a few days and the manuscript will be sent for review by three independent reviewers. Incorrectly structured or formatted manuscripts will not be accepted into the review process.

Manuscript structure

- The manuscript should be no longer than 30 pages and no shorter than 10 pages.
- **First page:** The full title of the manuscript, the name(s) of the author(s) together with their affiliations, and the name, address, and e-mail address of the author to whom correspondence should be sent.
- **Second page:** The abstract, formatted as a single paragraph, and no longer than 300 words. A list of at least six key words should be provided below the abstract, with semi-colons between words.
- **Subsequent pages:** The text of the article. The introduction to the article does not require a heading.
- **Concluding pages:** A reference list, followed by tables and figures (if any). Each table or figure should be on a separate page. Tables and figures should be numbered consecutively and their appropriate positions in the text indicated. Each table or figure should be provided with a title (e.g., Figure 1. Frequency distribution of critical incidents). The title should be placed at the top for tables and at the bottom for figures.

Manuscript format

- The manuscript should be an MS Word document in 12-point Times Roman font with 1.5 line spacing. There should be no font changes, margin changes, hanging indents, or other unnecessarily complex formatting codes.
- American Psychological Association (APA) style guidelines and referencing format should be adhered to.
- Headings should start at the left margin, and should not be numbered. All headings should be in **bold**. Main headings should be in **CAPITAL LETTERS**.
- A line should be left open between paragraphs. The first line of a paragraph should not be indented.
- Use indents only for block quotes.
- In the reference list, a line should be left open above each reference. Do not use indents or hanging indents in the reference list.

Language

Manuscripts should be written in English. As the SAJP does not employ a full-time or dedicated language editor, authors are requested to send their manuscripts to an external language specialist for language editing before submission.

Appendix G: Plagiarism Declaration**Plagiarism Declaration**

1. I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism is to use another's work and to pretend that it is one's own.
2. I have used the *American Psychological Association (APA)* convention for citation and referencing. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this essay/report/project/from the work, or works, of other people has been acknowledged through citation and reference.
3. This essay/report/project is my own work.
4. I have not allowed, and will not allow, anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.
5. I acknowledge that copying someone else's assignment or essay, or part of it, is wrong, and declare that this is my own work.

Signature

Date