

# Young People's Constructions of Partner Violence in Intimate Heterosexual Relationships

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## Abstract

In South Africa, much of the research done on intimate partner violence has centred on the experiences and prevalence in the adult population. However, partner violence is increasingly occurring in young people's relationships. Young people have been considerably left out in partner violence research. This project aims to explore how young people in South Africa talk about violence in relationships and how they understand it. Three focus groups were conducted with young men and women aged 17 and 18 at a high school in Cape Town. Learners responded to a video with an open ended discussion facilitated by the researcher on their views and opinions of partner violence. The data were analysed using thematic analysis and identified three themes of partner violence: *power and control*, *constructions of sexuality*, and *victim blaming*. This study contributes to research on partner violence by: a) providing knowledge on young people's constructions of partner violence in the South African context b) aiding the development of prevention and intervention programmes on partner abuse in young peoples' relationships by providing a better understanding of the meanings they associate with partner violence and c) providing understandings of how young people conform to and construct ideas around power, control and sexuality and its impact on their relationships.

**Keywords:** adolescent relationships; focus groups; partner violence; South Africa; thematic analysis

## **Introduction**

Research from the global north indicates that violence in various forms is often found in heterosexual adolescent dating relationships. Violence occurring in intimate or dating relationships is a persistent problem across a range of different contexts (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009; Erickson, Gittleman, & Dowd, 2010). Although both men and women have been found to perpetrate violence in relationships as well as be victims of violence, violence against women perpetrated by male partners is significantly higher (Gover, Kaukinen, & Fox, 2008; Sathiparsad, 2005). Relationship violence is present between parent and child, siblings, marital partners, and teenaged dating partners (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994). However, this paper discusses teenaged relationships and violence that occurs within the intimate heterosexual relationship, as this area has not yet been researched extensively in the South African context.

For many young adults, dating is seen as a romantic and exciting aspect of growing up. They may view dating as a way for young people to get to know each other before getting involved in committed relationships. Although establishing and maintaining romantic relationships through dating may be an important developmental process for young adults, it comes with the risk of experiencing dating violence (Hamby, Finkelhor, & Turner, 2012). A nationwide study of North American students showed that 8.9% of young people had been intentionally hit, struck or physically hurt by a girlfriend or boyfriend (Eaton, Davis, Barrios, Brener, & Noonan, 2007). The risk of dating violence in adolescence results from their primary source of influence shifting from their parents to peers, which makes them more independent and susceptible to peer pressure (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). Dating violence research was more commonly focused on older college-aged adolescents, until recent years, when the focus shifted to younger school-going adolescents (Hamby et al., 2012). This shift occurred as research showed that the onset of dating violence often occurs before the college years begin (Erickson et al., 2010).

In light of the high prevalence of dating violence in young adults, the importance of conducting research on dating violence in the age group of 17 to 18 years is highlighted, which will be a starting point to embark upon researching this problem in South Africa.

## **Partner Violence Defined**

The term ‘dating violence’ is commonly used in the North American context, from which much of the research in this area comes. However, in the South African context, a more appropriate term is ‘partner violence’, which will be used for the purpose of this research. Partner violence has been defined in a range of ways. The most commonly used definition, and most commonly studied form of partner violence, is that which involves physical force, threats or actions of physical hostility. Other comprehensive definitions include sexual, verbal and psychological violence (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007). One such definition is provided by Lavoie, Robitaille and Hebert (2000), who view teen partner violence as any behaviour that is detrimental to the companion’s development or well-being, by compromising her or his physical, psychological, or sexual integrity.

South Africa’s Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998 grasps the multi-faceted nature of abuse by including in its definition “physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional, verbal, psychological and economic abuse”, along with any other forms of abuse or controlling behaviours that are aimed at harming the victim (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005, p. 29). Partner violence in South Africa is one of the most under-reported crimes, which may be a result of misunderstandings in how people understand what constitutes partner violence (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005). Therefore, to ensure that people understand what constitutes partner violence, an adequate definition is needed. However, to be able to accurately define partner violence, it is imperative that young peoples’ understandings of and meanings associated with partner violence are included in the definitions we derive.

**Partner Violence in the South African Context.** Considering South Africa’s unique political and social history, the prevalence of partner violence needs to be looked at in various contexts. The available data on the prevalence of dating violence in the South African literature is mainly quantitative work, which provides an idea of the extent of the problem. However, there is a lack of qualitative data which captures the meanings, understandings and contexts of violence in young people’s relationships.

The extent of the problem of violence against adult women is made most evident in the fact that in South Africa’s general population of women, 50% of murdered women were murdered by their intimate partners (Mathews, Abrahams, Jewkes, Martin, & Vetten, 2008). Most of the research conducted in South Africa has been done on intimate partner violence in

adult populations, with less work focusing on teenage relationships (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005). Violence in intimate partner relationships in South Africa comes with a unique political history. This history has created a patriarchal society which has for many years seen male violence as a means of maintaining power, as black men were removed of their male authority by means of racial subordination (Gqola, 2007; Jewkes, Vundule, Maforah, & Jordaan, 2001). According to Jewkes, Morrel and Christofides (2009), black African men could not assert their masculinity by way of attaining professional or material achievement and therefore sort to attain it through dominating women, whether it be wives, girlfriends or women in and around the community. According to Wood, Lambert and Jewkes (2007, p. 278) in South Africa, male violence should be understood within the context of socio-cultural ideas about male power, as well as taking into account the legacy of apartheid, political emasculation and “unemployment on generations of black South African men”. Although women have become more empowered since South Africa’s democracy in 1994, many women are still dependent on men for their economic stability, as they often have no other means of achieving it, but by exchanging their bodies for sex (Wood & Jewkes, 2009).

Research by Swart, Seedat, Stevens and Ricardo (2002), found 35.3% of males and 43.5% of females in a Johannesburg sample of 928 students to have reported perpetrating physical violence in their intimate relationships. Of those students who reported perpetration, 27% of the males and 16% of the females reported the assault as severe enough to cause physical injury to their partner. The students who reported perpetration, also reported a higher prevalence of having sexually coerced their intimate partners. In terms of perceptions about violence, this study found that 25% of males and 19.6% of females view physical aggression as a normative part of an intimate relationship. However, male and female adolescents in this study attributed different meanings to their partner’s violent acts. Males were more likely to perceive violent acts towards one’s partner as a way of showing love, whereas females were more likely to perceive violence against a partner as an indicator that the partner does not love them.

More recent studies on partner violence consisted of 6,979 students from Cape Town, Mankweng in Limpopo and Dar es Salaam (Wubs et al., 2009). The socioeconomic status of the participants of this study was comparatively higher amongst the Cape Town sample and lower amongst the Dar es Salaam sample. The authors explored risk and protective factors and found that a lower socioeconomic status was associated with the likelihood of being a victim or



perpetrator; being a religious adolescent was found to be a protective factor in the involvement in violent activities and having parents with a high education level also protected against involvement with violence. The data of this study were collected during a HIV prevention intervention and found that 41.1% of males and 24% of females in a Cape Town sample, 37.6% of males and 30.2% of females of a Mankweng sample and 61.3% of males and 52.7% of females in a Dar es Salaam sample to be involved in partner violence, either by perpetration or as a victim. In the Mankweng and Dar es Salaam samples, the males were associated with perpetration against female victims. However, in the Cape Town sample, females were found to perpetrate violence against male victims (Wubs et al., 2009). In other research by Flisher, Myer, Mèrais, Lombard, & Reddy (2007), students were given an anonymous and confidential questionnaire to complete to determine whether they had ever perpetrated violence or had the intention to do so. The study was conducted with 596 Grade 8 and 11 students in Cape Town public schools. It showed that of the adolescents who reported being in a relationship, 20.7% reported having hit, kicked, punched or slapped their partner at one time during their relationship (Flisher et al., 2007).

Furthermore, research by Bhana (2012) focused on experiences of sexual violence young girls in townships undergo in and around the school environment. The research involved interviews with young girls and boys, aged 16 to 17 years. However, the focus of Bhana's research is girls' expression of fear of boyfriends, men in the community, male teachers and the men in their homes who often see girls as objects to satisfy their sexual desires. Girls voicing their opinions is seen as an attempt towards displaying agency, which is ultimately limited by the social and gender inequalities which surround them. Although this research looked at violence in the young adult population, it did not look at violence within intimate relationships. A similar finding relating to satisfaction of sexual desires for young teenage girls is found in a study by Jewkes, Penn-Kekena and Rose-Junius (2005). Their research was conducted in Johannesburg and Windhoek, Namibia. Their findings showed that although most participants thought the idea of adult men finding a child sexually attractive to be inconceivable, they thought that men's attraction towards young teenage girls is 'natural' and therefore normal. The status of men in both communities, in respect to young girls, leads to vulnerability which reduces girls' ability to decline sexual advances. As a result, men create the belief that they should have control over women and children.

Lastly, a study consisting of 1,072 girls and 903 boys at rural schools in Transkei, was conducted on learners in grade 7 to 9 to determine, amongst other things, sexual maturation and sexual behaviour. The results showed that Xhosa adolescent females in rural districts of the Eastern Cape cite being forced by their partners as the most common reason for initiating sexual activity. The boys in this study reported initiating sexual activity at an earlier age than girls and more frequently had more lifetime sexual partners than the girls. Nearly twice as many of the sexually active boys also had a history of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs); (Buga, Amoko, & Ncayiyana, 1996). In addition, many informal settlements in South Africa have imbalanced social forces “as historical inequalities, poverty, poor housing, high unemployment and violence” combine with youths’ vulnerability to HIV (Bhana & Pattman, 2011, p. 962). In South Africa, more than five million people are estimated to be infected with HIV, of which over 50% contract the virus before the age of 25. In the age group 15-25 years old, 8.6% of the population are infected with HIV (Bhana & Pattman, 2011). Therefore, it is important to consider the effects of sexual abuse within dating relationships when looking at the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and possible prevention and intervention programmes.

The above literature shows that there is a serious problem of partner violence amongst adolescents across South Africa, and that violent acts vary in severity as well as in the way they are perceived by the victims as well as perpetrators. The literature also points to the role of partner violence in the spread of STDs and HIV as well as the role of apartheid in creating structural inequalities and a patriarchal society.

### **Feminist Perspectives on Partner Violence**

A predominant perspective found in the writings of feminists on partner violence is that violence in intimate partner heterosexual relationships occurs as a result of inequality amongst the genders and male dominance (Boonzaier, 2006). Some feminists have argued for the understanding of gender as a social construction, as females and males are socialized into very specific gender roles (Prospero, 2007). Gender roles can be defined as the norms and beliefs that govern the way a typical man or woman behaves in society (Jackson, 1999; Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002; Pérez-Jiménez, Cunningham, Serrano-García, & Ortiz-Torres, 2007). Gender is constructed in a way that suggests natural or innate ways of being. Therefore, gender is associated with one’s anatomy and men and women are expected to behave and think within the

parameters of masculine and feminine behaviours. An argument made by social constructionists is that gender is not a fixed property of individuals, but rather a construct that is repeatedly reproduced which emerges from social and historical situations (West & Zimmerman, 1987). These gender-roles are presented as natural and stable, giving masculinity and femininity authority (Harris, Lea, & Foster, 1995). Although many have argued that men and women alike have the potential for acting out violently (Dobash & Dobash, 1979), statistics indicate that women are more likely to be victimized in an intimate relationship than men are (Gover et al., 2008). This would suggest that heterosexual relationships are influenced by patriarchal ideologies found in the broader context of society (Boonzaier, 2008). This perspective essentially sees violence in intimate partner relationships as being governed by issues of power and control in the relationship. These issues are created by society's construction of gender roles (Gover et al., 2008). The process of socialization emphasizes behaviours that are deemed socially appropriate for both males and females in a society that is patriarchal and promotes male privilege (Boonzaier, 2006; Prospero, 2007). When power differentials exist in a relationship and decision making is consequently not shared, violence is more likely to occur (Felson & Messner, 2000). As a result, social norms endorse the use of violence in relationships as a way for males to remain in control of female partners (Gover et al., 2008).

It is for this reason that research needs to be conducted on South African youth, to be able to understand how they view their roles within their own relationships, and thereby identify their constructions of gender-roles and their understandings about how and why violence occurs.

### **Rationale for Research**

The gaps identified in the literature are as follows: a) Research needs to be done to provide meanings of what constitutes partner violence. b) Qualitative research that is specific to South Africa and partner violence with our youth is lacking. c) The young adult population in the 17-18 year age group has been neglected in the area of partner violence. Therefore, to better understand violence within this group, more research needs to be done. And lastly, d) since HIV/AIDS is prevalent in South Africa, an issue such as partner violence no doubt adds to this problem as many young girls may be coerced into having sex without the use of a condom. Therefore, knowledge on the severity of partner violence could possibly shed light on the

influence that partner violence has on the prevalence of HIV//AIDS in the target age group of this research.

### **Aim of Research**

The aim of this exploratory study was to explore young adults' (17-18 years) constructions of partner violence. The research aimed to explore how young people as a group, make meanings of and come to understand partner violence.

The research question that was explored is: How do young people in a Cape Town High School talk about and understand partner violence in a group setting?

## **Method and Design**

### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative methods are appropriate to answer the research question posed in this study as it allows for participant-generated meanings to be heard through participant-led practices. Using qualitative research allows for a rich, thorough understanding of what young people perceive as violence within their dating relationships (Willig, 2001). In light of the feminist stance taken towards answering this research question, qualitative methods are particularly useful. Research from a feminist perspective is critical of the way that traditional positivist research is conducted. In contrast to the artificial and decontextualized nature of quantitative research, qualitative research is relatively naturalistic, contextual and attempts to shift the balance of power (Wilkinson, 1999). The most appropriate method to answer the research question would be a focus group as it provides for an exploration of young peoples' collective views of partner violence.

### **Focus Groups**

A focus group attempts to provide a naturalistic context and to avoid artificiality (Wilkinson, 1999). The focus group environment allows data to be collected in context and creates interaction between participants that is more of a simulation of everyday discourses and encounters than that found in an interview (Flick, 2006). In a focus group the balance of power is shifted to the participants as preference is given to the way they want to outline the discussion. This shift in power avoids exploitation of participants, which is essential in feminist

perspectives, and serves as a means to potentially empower members of the group (Wilkinson, 1999).

The main feature of a focus group is the open use of group interaction in order to produce data (Flick, 2006). The liberal climate produced by the focus group ensured that the participants contributed freely about their experiences and opinions. By generating discussion, focus groups reveal the meaning that members read into the topic of discussion and how they negotiate those meanings (Billig, 1998). The focus group has strength in its ability to influence members of the group to respond and comment on the contributions made by fellow group members (Flick, 2006). By doing this, what members said was challenged, developed, undermined or agreed upon in ways that produced rich data for the researcher (Willig, 2001). Using a focus group was ideal for a discussion that is socially constructed as it encouraged learners to share their views with people who may have shared similar experiences to them (Frith, 2000). By using a focus group, participants may decide how much personal information they wanted to share, making it less intrusive than an individual interview (Överlien, Aronsson, & Hydén, 2005).

A vignette in the form of a video from the dating violence website ‘This is Abuse’([thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk](http://thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk)) was shown to prompt discussion on the topic and to encourage the learners to express their opinions. The focus group made use of open-ended discussion in response to the video. Each focus group focused on the same set of broad questions (see Appendix A). Three focus groups were conducted at a Cape Town High School, for a period of 50 minutes each. The groups were co-facilitated by a fellow Honours post-graduate student as well as a PhD student, who has more experience in conducting focus groups. A voice recorder was used to record the focus group discussions, which have been transcribed in full (see Appendix B for transcription key).

### **Participants and Recruitment**

Learners were recruited from a Cape Town High School. The learners are in the age group 17 to 18 years old, in grade 11. The reason for using grade 11 students only was because the principal of the school thought this to be the most convenient and least disruptive route. The learners could be categorised as black, coloured or Asian (Cape Malay and Indian) according to the racial markers inscribed from apartheid which are still prevalent today. Some learners spoke Xhosa and Afrikaans as a first language. To ensure that participation was voluntary, the co-

ordinating teacher informed the learners about the study and told them that if they were interested in the study, they should take a consent form home to have it signed by their parents. The first focus group was a mixed group with eight learners (two male, six female), the second group had eight female learners and the third group had five male learners only. As a token of appreciation, the class teacher was given a R500.00 shopping voucher to organize an event for the learners, including those in the class who did not take part in the focus groups.

### **Ethical Considerations**

**Informed Consent.** Learners voluntarily chose to participate and those interested in the study needed to get informed consent from their parents first, unless they were eighteen years or older (see Appendix C). For those learners who had consent, I explained the process to them and addressed any questions. The students also had to sign a separate assent form (see Appendix D).

**Confidentiality.** Learners were ensured of confidentiality. They were told that the tape recording and transcript will only be available to myself and my supervisor, and when written up any information provided will only be linked to the pseudonym provided to them. Learners were also asked to respect each other's confidentiality by not telling others about what was spoken about in the group discussion.

**Risk and Benefit for Participants.** Focus groups increase the chance of learners revealing more information than they intend to, because of the comfortable nature of the group setting. However, I highlighted that no one in the group was under any obligation to speak about personal experiences, unless they wanted to. Another benefit was that the nature of the focus group put no individual pressure to respond in the group, and if there were times that a participant felt uncomfortable to speak, they had the option of remaining silent (Överlien et al., 2005).

**Debrief.** Upon conclusion of the focus groups, the learners were asked if they have any questions and were provided with my email address for any further queries they may have had. They also received a debriefing pamphlet explaining various aspects of partner violence and the seriousness of the problem, as well as sources of referral if need be (see Appendix E). Ethical approval was granted for this research project by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology at the University of Cape Town.

## **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis can be described as a method that requires identification, analysis and reporting of patterns or themes within the gathered data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At a minimal level, it “organizes and describes your data in (rich) detail” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). However, the method often goes beyond this and interprets diverse aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). An advantage of thematic analysis is its flexibility and its ability to generate unanticipated insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For an exploratory topic such as partner violence, it was beneficial to provide a rich thematic account of the entire data set. By doing this, it keeps the analysis in line with the feminist perspective by providing an accurate reflection of the data set, as well as giving preference to the agendas put forth by the participants. Themes were chosen at the latent level, which went beyond the surface meanings, and starts to identify underlying “ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). From a feminist constructionist perspective, “meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced” rather than being inherent within the individual (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). Therefore, students’ views were interpreted as a construction of their social environments such as school, community and from what is seen as socially acceptable amongst peers and family.

## **Power and Reflexivity**

The use of qualitative methods and thematic analysis requires subjectivity on the part of the researcher and is therefore greatly affected by who the researcher is. For this reason it is important to discuss reflexivity and power when using this method. Reflexivity in research encourages the researcher to focus and reflect on the way in which their identity as a person is associated in the research and its findings (Willig, 2001). According to Parker (2005, p. 25), “reflexivity is a way of working with subjectivity” in a way that makes constant referral to one’s self and your role as a researcher, and how that affects your interpretations and actions in the research process. Qualitative researchers are aware of the fact that the researcher impacts and shapes the research process, as a person and as a thinker or researcher. Traditional methods have always seen the researcher as detached from the research, whereas qualitative methods require the researcher to focus on their own role within the process (Willig, 2001).

My identity as a female, Indian, middle-class educated individual would have affected the way in which I interacted with the members of the group and in turn the way they interacted with

me. My identity as a young woman, studying Psychology may have led participants, especially in the all-male group, to assume that I am an anti-men feminist and that I am most probably someone that opposes violence against women (Barkhuizen, 2011). In the all-male group, there was a definite distinction between myself and the group members, and they may have guarded their true perspective on the topic. I also found that I felt more comfortable and identified more with the learners in the all-female group as well as the mixed group, which only had two boys, than I did in the all-boys group. Nonetheless, I was made aware that things are done in a particular way within the context that the research was being conducted by Ziyanda who said “*you don’t dooo that at [school’s name] if you wanna go home safely...*”.

According to Wilkinson (1999, p.230), focus groups “inevitably reduce the researcher’s power and control” as a result of the number of participants that are concurrently involved in the research interaction. Focus groups essentially place the control over the interaction in the hands of the participants rather than leaving the researcher in control. Although the power relations may be balanced out significantly in the focus group, I cannot overlook the fact that I am not detached from the research and therefore I also participated in the group construction of meaning (Barkhuizen, 2011). Some researchers see this as an advantage in terms of it allowing the participants’ points of view to be emphasised (Morgan, 1988). This in turn allows the researcher to listen to the language of the participants rather than imposing his/her language on participants and to develop the themes that are most important to them (Wilkinson, 1999). In terms of language, my identity as an English speaking individual may have affected what learners said and possibly the meanings they conveyed in English, which was not necessarily all of the participants first language. This can be seen in the following comments “*you mus talk English!*” (Ziyanda), “*she!!! (at Kayla) because she replied...in Xhosa!*” (girls say at the same time), and “*can I speak Afrikaans quick?*” (Ziyanda).

In addition, it is vital that I take into account the effect that my association with UCT and my personal reasons for conducting this research had on my analysis as it would affect the themes that I identified as well as the way in which the focus group was conducted. My identification of themes has in some measure also been influenced by what I thought I would find and the position I took to analyse and make meaning of the themes (Parker, 2005). Since I drew on feminist perspectives, I may have been inclined to look for themes that support the



results of other feminist work in the area of partner violence. Therefore, I needed to be constantly aware that my identification of themes reflected the agendas of the learners and their views on partner violence, and not necessarily that of previous work (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Hence, the following results and discussion portray a limited representation of my comprehension of learners' constructions of partner violence.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

The first theme identified is 'power and control' and relates to the way young people understand power relations in their own relationships, and that which is constituted as 'normal'. The second theme is 'constructions of sexuality' and communicates the way young people characterise certain behaviours as feminine and certain behaviours as masculine. The last theme is 'victim blaming' and includes the idea that the victim in the relationship (in this case the young woman) is to blame for her victimisation.

#### **Power and Control**

Participants constructed power and control in relation to three sub-themes: the ways in which boys use power to control; correcting female autonomy and constructing dominance as a sign of masculinity.

**Boys use power to control.** Power and control appeared to be a prominent theme amongst young people, and is discussed in terms of gender relations and who should have more power in relationships according to dominant culture in South African society. "Real men" are seen as being able to act violently and coercively in sexual relations with their female partners because social and cultural environments allow them to (Mane & Aggleton, 2001). Participants suggested that allowing a boy to have the power in the relationship gives him power over his female partner, which he will exercise in every aspect of their relationship. Therefore, he would be in control of her and will overpower her in relationship decisions as well. In participants' constructions however, the female is seen as the one who is to blame for giving that power to her partner.

*Thembi: There's no equality, the boy feels like he's more superior...*

*Kyle: You give him that power*

Thembi: *You giving him power, then in all cases his gonna be, his gonna think he's the dominant one, he's gonna control, even if you say no, I have things under control, his gonna still do it, because you let him in the first place...*

Girls are seen as objects in the relationship, who have no authority to make decisions and have control, as that is the duty of the male, who is seen as the subject in the relationship (Sathiparsad, 2005). Young people appear to understand male dominance as something that girls allow and provide their partners with, giving them the space to display their dominance. "*Why didn't they just stay downstairs? [...] Clearly he can do what he wants to her*" (Ziyanda). Another way in which males exhibit dominance is through emotional control, because "*he can threaten to dump you... if you really love the guy then...*" (Kayla), implying that boys would use a girl's feelings towards him to make her do what he wants. However, they ignore the possibility that girls may manipulate boys to get what they want.

Young people also talk about control over female partners by "*swearing or threatening*" (Robin) and mention that "*maybe he'll hit her, or tell her what to do*" (Marlon), but if she does not listen after that "*then he abuse her*" (Marlon), indicating that control by swearing, threatening and physically hitting her do not actually count as abuse, if it was used to ensure that she listens to her partner. This is similar to research by Felson and Messner (2000) who found that males threaten their partners as a means of controlling them before they use physical violence. The person threatened by the perpetrator will be harmed except if she or he submits to the demands of the offender, as the essential goal is to control the victim (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005). Feminists have pointed out that violence as a means of control is a result of patriarchy as men have been led to believe that they are supposed to prevail over their partners (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

Another way in which males dominate in relationships is on decisions of when to have sex, as Ziyanda and Robin describe "*(he) made up his mind his gonna...have sex with her...then she tries to change his mind and his like nah, I'm not up with it, and then he does it*" (Ziyanda), "*she wanted to, but had a second thought that she's not ready for it... So he forced her to, he forced her*" (Robin). There is no power given to females, who in a sense have to do what their partners want. Both young girls and boys appear to understand sex taken from girls by boys as a completely normal occurrence. Research by Wood and Jewkes (2009) found similar results wherein men expect women to provide them with sex when they want it.

**Female autonomy should be corrected.** Using power and control to correct female autonomy came across very strongly in the discussion. The participants, although disagreeing with outright abuse of female partners, still held strong beliefs about the structure of a relationship with a woman. The ‘correct’ structure as indicated by young people is one in which the female is subordinate to her male partner. The participants, particularly those in the all-boys groups, found it hard to believe that the idea of a woman overpowering a man could even be mentioned, displaying disbelief and complete disagreement with the notion. According to them it is impossible, and if it were to happen, it could only happen if a girl used violence to get her way.

Marlon: *The male will over power!*

Alan: *If the girl forced a...the boy?*

Aneeq: *It can't happen!*

Alan: *Sometimes it can*

Robin: *With violence!*

According to Bhana (2012) the choices and opportunities available to young women are lessened by male power and daily practices of subordination that interact with political, cultural and economic powers to continuously reproduce gender and sexual violence. The societal influence of male dominance can be seen in the comments by Alan “*a girl can't over power*” its “*just the way society works*”. Therefore, male power and female subordination is clearly demonstrated as a product of social norms that was produced and is currently reproduced by a society that legitimises such gender equality.

The participants also suggest that a man is naturally dominant over a woman which is indicated by Alan’s comment that “*it's in my genes*”. Participants in the all-boys group suggest that this natural dominance allows a boy to set his partner straight if she steps out of line. The participants view a girl’s autonomy as problematic and indicate that any boy who has a girlfriend who is too opinionated can seek help from his friends on how to deal with this ‘problem’. This is consistent with the argument made by Moffett (2006) who shows that men use rape as a means of punishing and ‘correcting’ a woman who demonstrates autonomy.

Alan: *ya, not like that, but like if we speak like this... to all boys... if we have our normal conversations, and if his girlfriend control him, we will like make fun of him and all that*

Robin: *and we will also give him helpful information on how to sort this problem out*

However, Alan points out that the advice provided will not encourage the friend to “*abuse her...*” but rather, as Robin suggests “*stand up to her*” suggesting that ensuring that she is submissive, as long as it only involves verbal commands, is not abusive. Similar corrections of female autonomy was found in young men’s relationships in Kwa-Zulu Natal, who assert that women who display autonomy will be put in place by their partners, thereby making them ‘humble’ (Peterson, Bhana, & McKay 2005, p. 1238). Therefore, autonomy is clearly seen as a trait exclusively set aside for the display of masculinity in males.

**Dominance is a sign of masculinity.** In relation to correcting female autonomy, dominance is seen as a sign of masculinity. Young people associate negative terms such as being a ‘nerd’ with males who do not display dominance over female partners. Therefore, in the event that a girl does overpower a boy, the boy is seen as ‘weak’, and therefore could only be a ‘nerd’, who did not learn about how dominance should be carried out in a relationship, resulting from a lack of experience in intimate relationships.

*Alan: At our age, there’s not much relationships in which girls over power... as they grow older maybe... because like the nerds of today, they not interested in girls, but as they grow older, and they get a girlfriend, then they too soft to face the girlfriend... then the girl would obviously overpower...*

As seen in research by Sathiparsad (2005), young ‘masculine’ men do not allow female partners any form of dominance within the relationship, as dominance is a position reserved entirely for men. Hegemonic masculinity is outlined by subordination and disregard for women as well as a link between masculinity, strength and competitiveness (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). Therefore, any male who does not subscribe to this type of masculinity is seen as less of a man or a ‘weak’ man. In summary, power and control is seen as legitimated in young peoples’ perceptions of partner violence. Dominance and control in the hands of males leads to and is a consequence of constructions of sexuality, which is the next theme addressed.

### **Constructions of Sexuality**

Participants’ constructions of sexuality were discussed in relation to female and male sexuality.

**Constructions of female sexuality.** A very prominent theme is the construction of female sexuality, which is produced by society and its portrayal of women as sexualized objects, who are always ready for sex. A girl may be unsure of or oblivious to what makes her behave the

way she does, but nonetheless comes across as willing and ready, as a result of representations of women in general. This is clear in the comments by Kyle, a participant in the mixed sex group “*she lead him on...if she really wanted to stop it, she would have put up a fight*” and Linda “*she knew it would have led to something like that*”. According to Gqola (2007) the assumption that teenage girls ‘play hard to get’ and should therefore be pursued at all costs, regardless of what they say, depicts gender inequality of the society we live in; one that describes women as unable to know what they want sexually. This suggests an oppressive claim that women can neither “say what they mean” nor do they “mean what they say” (Gqola, 2007, p.117).

Wood et al (2007) found that young women frequently used strategies to delay involvement in a sexual relationship for various reasons such as finding out if the suitor is serious about them or to protect their reputations (as being too direct is seen as promiscuity). Many young men however know that women often employ such tactics, and therefore do not accept a woman’s rejection. This can be seen in a comment by Robin, “*she wanted to, but she had a second thought that she’s not ready for it... so he forced her to...*” which indicates that sometimes boys need to use force because girls do not know what they want, and may just be pretending to not want sex, because she does not want to seem promiscuous. Young people appear to understand that girls need boyfriends to comfort them and make them feel secure. Females are seen as needy for attention from a male other who makes them feel loved. In constructing female sexuality in this way, young people draw on the have/hold discourse, as illustrated by Hollway (1998), which constructs female sexuality in a way that women need men in their lives to comfort them and provide them with a sense of security.

*Thembi: or maybe like you don’t feel love at home, and then he is your boyfriend and he makes you feel loved... then you maybe feel like you have to do it, coz otherwise you gonna lose him.*

According to Jackson (1999) relationships initiate young people into the ‘appropriate’ gendered roles, identity formation and power relations, which in turn maintain the gender hierarchy. As part of the female gender roles, females are seen as nurturing and caring, and would give in to sex to “*consol(e) him*” and thereby “*mak(e) him feel better about the decision...*” (Thembi). Participants construct the role of women as a caregiver to men, who do not know what they are doing. Instead of maintaining that “*she should have taken control*” as commented by Kyle, most girls agreed that she was consoling him. The idea of women as caring,

nurturing beings, is in line with traditional gender roles adopted by women in a study by Wood (2001) in which women justify abuse by their partners and nurture them as a result of culturally produced ideas about gender and romance.

Women are expected to be submissive to their male partners, “*it is... boys must overpower girls*” (Alan) and should allow their partners to control their actions “*if you normally say ‘you can’t go out tonight’, then it will be normal...*” (Alan). This is similar to research by Chung (2007), in which young women are expected to not go out with their friends and rather to privilege male presence, which is arguably the same as adult women who are isolated and stopped by their male partner from seeking support from female friends. This can be seen in a narrative analysis which showed that an ‘acceptable’ identity for some women entailed the adoption of what is known as the ‘femininity’ narrative, which requires women to be passive and accept blame within their relationships as well as minimizing violence perpetrated by their partners (Boonzaier, 2008).

Young people appear to understand girls as vulnerable and affected by their male partners objectification of women, who treat women as achievements. “*Guys always want to score*”(Kayla), “*exactly, then they discuss it with their friends, making you feel like you, uhm, what you call it? Like you not worth being a female anymore [...] they always tend to score*”(Silvia). Therefore, young girls feel that young boys tend to objectify them and discuss events within their relationship with their friends, which they feel is degrading. According to Page (1996) young males’ objectification of girls as well as their boastfulness about sex with female partners potentially increases the likelihood of partner violence.

**Constructions of male sexuality.** Men’s sexuality was identified as a dominant theme, suggesting strongly that men, once ‘turned on’ cannot turn it off, until their desires have been met. Therefore, they cannot be blamed for their actions, especially if a girl leads them on or entices them. Young people seem to understand constructions of masculinity that suggest that men have no control over their sexual urges and a girl should not touch or kiss a boy unless she wants to have sex with him. This would imply that any wrong doing done to her is undone by the mere fact that she provoked him by kissing or touching him, which led to his actions.

Thembi: *Because you don't do that if you don't want it to happen, you make sure that you are like, you make sure that you are firm when you say no, and you don't keep on touching and kissing him. Because boys has feelings and needs...*

According to Peterson et al (2005) such beliefs of male sexuality are a result of patriarchal ideologies which see women as a source of pleasure for males. In an exchange between Alan *"he was turned on already..."* and Aneeq *"and he couldn't turn it off..."* it is evident that they think boys/men cannot control their hormones. Many young men draw on the male sexual drive discourse as they believe that they are entitled to relieve themselves of their sexual desires every time they are aroused and that the responsibility for releasing such arousal is on their current female partner (Hollway, 1998). Similarly, in their study, Peterson et al. (2005) also found that participants felt strongly that boys cannot control their sexual impulses and that it is the duty of the girl to ensure that he is not aroused.

On the other hand Ziyanda questioned how a boy cannot control himself and also said that *"he needs to see a doctor, if kissing turns him on"*, indicating she thought it was a problem that others thought he could not control himself. However, most participants felt that males cannot control themselves, evident in the comment by Joy *"how can he control himself?...he's horny"*. Others suggested that hormones are in control, and may make you do things which you cannot help, *"it's a time of your hormones mos..."* (Alan). Also, being a man, it is only normal to think about sexual relations with girls *"you have the thoughts, of doing that kind of stuff"* (Marlon), and if a man were to refuse a willing woman he must be *"gay bru, there's no other way!"* (Alan), because no man would give up the opportunity to have sex. However, if he were to think twice about it, it would be in the interest of *"protecting himself"* (Lindsay) from sexually transmitted diseases *"he don't know if she have Aids"* (Robin), but that would not stop him from considering *"must I or musn't I"* (Robin) have sex with her. This idea of having to protect oneself from willing girls is similar to what Wood et al (2007) reported in their study of young township boys who spoke about girls who approach sexual intercourse with enthusiasm. Boys saw these girls as having 'evil' intentions, either wanting to give them a sexually transmitted disease, or that they were looking for "an 'owner' of an 'unowned' pregnancy" (Wood et al., 2007, p. 286).

When talking about whether a girl would have to force a guy to have sex with her, Aneeq responded that *"she's gonna get what she wanted, she don't have to force it, all she have to do is*

*take off her...(clothing), maybru, if she gonna undress, the boys jus gonna do it*". Participants appear to understand males as constantly aroused and ready for sex, with any girl, who is seen as an object merely for sexual gratification. This is comparable to findings of Bhana and Pattman (2011) who found that young males tend to objectify the bodies of young girl's and place emphasis on their sexual ability. In addition, it also relates to research showing that many young men ascribe to the idea that men are hypersexual beings who are always ready for sex (Santana, Raj, Decker, March, & Silverman, 2006).

Furthermore, according to the participants in the all-boys group, a relationship without sex, is an 'ordinary' one. They suggest that a boy would get bored of such a relationship and would want to take it further. This is indicated by Alan who describes it as "*n ordinary relationship! Without having sex, and all that, then this day he maybe he thought to himself, 'wait, I wanna go further', and she didn't wanna, and then he forced her...*". It is suggested that the boy is almost left with no other choice, but to force his partner, because their relationship was just 'ordinary' without sex. The idea that sex is an important part of a relationship was also found in a discussion held with young males in a study by Sathiparsad (2005, p.80) in which these boys viewed sex as an imperative of a relationship and as a "way of asserting one's manhood". Using sex to assert manhood is a construction of gender roles within the township community of Kwazulu-Natal, in which the research was conducted. Therefore, excessive need to adhere to male gender roles is associated with the maintenance of sexual abuse against women as it promotes male dominance and aggression towards female partners who are expected to be submissive and inferior to their male partners, and may even deserve to be victimized (Murnen et al., 2002). Male and female sexuality is constructed by creating a clear divide between what is acceptable and 'normal' for women and what is acceptable and 'normal' for men, and any overstepping of these 'inflexible' boundaries has consequences. Women are often the ones who 'overstep' the boundaries, and are therefore blamed for their victimization, which emerged in the focus groups and is discussed as the next theme.

### **Victim Blaming**

Participants' engaged in victim blaming by constructing girls as responsible for their victimization when they lead boys on and when they do not respond to violence in particular ways that are seen as 'normal' for someone that does not want to be abused.



**She led him on.** Participants across all groups displayed a particularly strong view that girls tend to lead boys on. The viewpoints expressed suggest rape-supportive attitudes, which along with sex-role stereotyping is said to influence the way in which they perceive date rape (Coller & Resick, 1987). High sex-role stereotyping in women has shown to make women believe that the victim led her perpetrator on, “...*why was she, why would she want to be alone with him in the room if she didn't want, if she didn't want that...*”(Sarah). Sex role stereotyping creates expectations of how women should behave and act, with young women expected to know their place by being reserved. Young people seem to understand that if a girl is “*alone with him (her partner)*” and if “*she chose to be alone with him*” (Sarah) that she is arousing her partner. This is in line with rape myths found amongst young people who believe that girls who get raped deserve it as they have provoked their perpetrator by their actions (Page, 1996). According to Boonzaier and de la Rey (2004) by focusing on women and their experiences in abusive relationships it has led to women being blamed for the violence in their relationships and women being made responsible for eliciting change. Therefore, it takes the focus away from the male who abuses her and places responsibility on her for ensuring that she is not a victim of abuse.

Young people appear to construct the idea that girls pretend to not want sex, when in actual fact, they do. As a result, possibly because they do not want to be seen as promiscuous, they claim that they were raped. Their understanding is that is that if a girl wants to avoid rape, she can, but if she does not, then it is probably what she wanted.

Sarah: *she could have pushed him off aso I think... but she left him.*

Aneesah: *she jus wanted to go with the flow –  
(everyone starts laughing)*

Aneesah: *and then she just blame him after!! (laughing)*

These findings are comparable to research by Holcomb, Holcomb, Sondag and Williams (1991) who showed that men felt that women often falsely cry rape, when in fact it was what they wanted.

When considering whether there is a possibility the girls may be ‘leading a guy on’, Wood et al (2007) found that as a result of the tension between masculinities and femininities, resulting from the idea that the male should pursue the female, that some women although genuinely disinterested pretend to be interested, because they are too afraid to refuse a suitor.

Young peoples' views that she is "*not clear enough*" and that by kissing her partner a girl sends "*mixed messages*" (Thembi) suggests that girls send mixed messages because they do not know what they want and in the process lead their partners on. According to research by Jewkes et al. (2005) males and females alike both felt that girls should know that what they do may provoke and arouse men's sexual desires. Therefore, they are responsible for men's actions if they lead men on by their actions or in the way they are dressed.

**Women react to violence in particular ways.** Young people appear to understand women as acting in particular ways in response to violence. Therefore, any woman who does not act in this 'normal' way, should be to blame for the violence inflicted upon her, because "*I don't think she was trying hard enough*" (Ziyanda). Participants felt that "*she could have pushed him off aso I think... but she left him*" (Sarah), and that "*she can do stuff, push him back...*" (Aneesah). Therefore, participants suggest that considering that she did not try hard enough, she must have wanted it. "*No... but what happened... she didn't pull away, so partly she wanted it*" (Kyle). This is in line with research by Holcomb et al (1991) who found that one in four men of a sample of 407 agree that if a women really wanted to, she could prevent being raped. Young people feel that a girl should make every effort to avoid abuse, and if not, then she is to blame, regardless of factors such as fear for one's safety or life.

Ziyanda: *She then push so sonder lis! (laughing) like she wanted it to happen!*

Martha: *And then she says-*

Ziyanda: *Then she says 'nooo', and then it's like, ok no, jus jus do it.*

Silvia: *She gave herself up after the second no!*

Participants felt that if a girl really does not want to be abused, and in particular, be raped, there are a number of things she can do. Aneesah felt that "*she could have like ran out or something...*" and Silvia thought that "*she could have pulled him towards her, then bite him*" and that a normal way for a female to react is "*she screams!!*" (Ziyanda). Therefore, if a female does not react in these ways, it is seen as though "*she's then doing nothing*" (Aneesah) and that "*she still allowed it*" (Kyle). Contrary to what others felt, Martha indicated that "*it goes both ways*" and that "*they (both) have a choice if they want to do it*" suggesting that girls have a choice to stay in a relationship or leave and that her partner makes a choice to treat her badly or not. This is similar to young women's views in a study by Chung (2007) who spoke about their

individual experiences by discussing how they chose their partners but that their partners also chose to use violence against them.

In summary, young people engage in victim blaming by placing responsibility on girls for leading their partners on as well as by constructing particular ways of reacting to violence that are typical of someone that truly wants to avoid it. This theme of victim blaming was consistent with the others that emerged in this study, including those of gendered power and control as well as aligned constructions of male and female sexuality.

### **Recommendations and Conclusions**

This study aimed to explore how young people construct their views on partner violence in intimate heterosexual relationships. Various themes were identified that illustrate young peoples' perceptions and were structured into three main themes: 'power and control', 'constructions of sexuality' and 'victim blaming', which provided an understanding of their views of violence in intimate heterosexual relationships.

The findings of this study cannot be said to be the views of young people in general, but rather of a select group of young people in a Cape Town High School. The research findings have added towards research on partner violence in a number of ways. Broadly, it has contributed towards addressing the gap in the literature by firstly, producing knowledge about how young people understand partner violence in relation to gender norms and secondly, by generating information specific to South African young people.

Thirdly, it has provided an understanding of how young people view power and control within intimate heterosexual relationships. Young people, both males and females appear to understand power and control within the relationship as belonging to the male partner. Their views centre on males' inherent dominance which provides a basis for correcting female autonomy. As a result of this understanding, it may lead to increased perpetration of partner violence by males, as well as increased acceptance by female partners if violence is as a result of overstepping power boundaries. Young peoples' ideas of gender relations provide insight into the ways in which inequality amongst heterosexual partners is reproduced, and thereby obscured to those who are actively involved in heterosexual relationships. Therefore, young peoples' views of power and control need to be included in intervention and prevention programmes with

the aim of deconstructing the idea of power and control belonging only to males. This deconstruction could be carried out by implementing programmes into life orientation at school level. According to Page (1996) educators at secondary school level have an important role to play in the prevention of partner violence. Therefore, these programmes should explore young peoples' views on partner violence within their specific contexts and then educate learners on what partner violence is. However, it should go beyond that by incorporating ways of informing learners about equal status of males and females in relationships. Young people also need to be educated about the flexibility and fluidity of gender boundaries that should be open to negotiation and renegotiation. In addition, life orientation classes should also aim to teach young people appropriate conflict management and anger management skills, to ensure that they are well equipped in conflict situations that may arise within their intimate relationships.

Fourthly, this study has produced an understanding of how young people construct male and female sexuality within a specific socio-economic society. Young people have conveyed an understanding of male sexuality as constant and enduring, one that is perpetually seeking to be gratified. They construct this idea of male sexuality as natural and therefore diminish any blame from males if violence is perpetrated as a result of their need to fulfil sexual desires. However, female sexuality is constructed as provocative and devious. Females are seen as having 'hidden agendas' and as uncertain about what they want with regard to their display of sexual desire. Young girls and boys view women as pretending as though they do not want to engage in sexual relations, while they actually do. This is a particularly faulty way of thinking that young people engage in that should be adequately addressed in intervention programmes to ensure that young people understand the importance of consent in intimate sexual relationships.

Lastly, the research has provided an understanding of how young people engage in victim blaming and how that may in turn reinforce patriarchal ideas of men and women. Young people blamed women for leading men on, only to refuse his sexual advances, thereby angering their male partners. Young people also construct a certain way of reacting to sexual violence in particular, which includes hitting and screaming. Therefore, any women who does not react to violence perpetrated against her in these particular ways, is to blame for her own victimisation. Young people have also showed that their perceptions of abuse are limited to physical violence, with verbal and emotional abuse seen only as a warning, yet completely acceptable.

This research has presented insight on how young people at a Cape Town High School co-construct ideas of what constitutes partner violence and brought forth areas to be addressed within a South African context and interventions that can be introduced at school level.

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## **Appendix A:**

### **Focus Group Discussion Questions**

#### **General questions – Open ended:**

- 1) What do you think about the video?
- 2) What do you think is happening in the video? How would you describe the relationship between the boy and the girl in the video?
- 3) Why do you think these situations occur? Do you think this is common in young people's relationships?
- 4) What do you think the boy in the video should do?
- 5) What do you think the girl in the video should do?
- 6) What would you do or what would you tell a friend who is in a relationship like this?

#### **Questions to prompt further discussion:**

- 1) Why do you say so?
- 2) Can you give an example of why you say that?
- 3) Does anyone else have a different view?
- 4) Let's try and discuss that issue in more depth
- 5) If you don't see that as partner violence, then what do you see as partner violence?

## **Appendix B:**

### **Transcription/Quotation Information**

- ... Ellipsis have been used where participants have paused in between speaking
  - ( ) Round brackets indicate words that have been added for clarification.
  - [ ] Square brackets have been used where parts of participant's words have been omitted from the quotation
  - Underlining has been used to display emphasis that participants have put on their words
- Sonder lis: An Afrikaans word meaning 'without effort'

## **Appendix C:**

### **Informed Consent Form**

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**



**DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY**

Constructions of Dating Violence in Young Teenage Intimate Relationships

1. **Invitation and Purpose**

You are invited to take part in a research study about Dating Violence. We are researchers from the Psychology department at the University of Cape Town.

2. **Procedures**

If you give consent for your child to take part in this study, they will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion. The questions will be about their opinions on a video clip that will be shown from a Dating Violence website called 'This is Abuse'. The discussion will take about 50 minutes and your son/daughter may decide not to respond to any questions they do not feel comfortable answering and may withdraw from the study at any time.

3. **Discomforts & Inconveniences**

- Dating violence is a sensitive topic and your son/daughter may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed to discuss it. However, the questions asked will be very broad and general and they will not be expected to share any personal information, nor will they be obligated to participate in any part of the discussion that they do not wish to discuss and they are allowed to stop participating at any point without any negative consequences.
- Your son/daughter may be made aware of issues related to dating violence in their own life through this discussion. However, referrals will be made to places where they can get immediate help.
- Your child may be influenced by the views of others regarding partner violence and for this reason they will be given a debriefing pamphlet outlining what constitutes dating violence, statistics and effects of dating violence.
- You might be inconvenienced by having to give up an hour of your time.

4. **Benefits**

- Your child will be given an opportunity to share their views and experiences and their information will contribute to the larger purpose of understanding how learners view dating violence.

5. **Privacy and Confidentiality**

- Focus (discussion) groups will be conducted in a private room in the school.
- Their contribution to the discussion will remain confidential and they will be given a pseudonym (false name) at the beginning of the study.
- They might know other people in the group but they will all be asked to keep what is said in the group within the group
- The information from the discussion will be recorded but the recording will be stored in a safe and secure place and the only people who will have access to this information will be my research supervisor and I.
- The information collected in this research might be used to write a scientific paper.

6. **Money Matters**

- Your son/daughter will be invited by their class teacher to an event organised with money provided by the researcher. However, they will be invited regardless of whether they chose to participate or not.

7. **Contact details**

- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study or if you have signed up and wish to withdraw from the study please contact the researcher, Zakiya Chikte, on 076 157 5050 or [zakiya.chikte@gmail.com](mailto:zakiya.chikte@gmail.com)
- If you have any questions about your rights as a study participant, or concerns about the research, you may talk to Dr Floretta Boonzaier at the Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa, 021 – 650 3429.
- If you wish to the Chair of the Ethics Committee, you may make an appointment to do so by calling Psychology Admin Assistant Rosalind Adams, Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa, 021 – 650 3417.

8. **Signature**

**Parent/Guardian (if under 18 years of age)**

I have been informed about this research study and understand its purpose, possible benefits, risks, and discomforts. I give consent for my son/daughter/.....to take part in this research.

---

Parent's Signature

Date

## **Appendix D:**

### **Informed Assent Form**

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**



**DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY**

Constructions of Dating Violence in Young Teenage Intimate Relationships

1. **Invitation and Purpose**

You are invited to take part in a research study about Dating Violence. We are researchers from the Psychology department at the University of Cape Town.

2. **Procedures**

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to take part in a group discussion. The questions will be about your opinions on a video clip that will be shown. The discussion will take about 50 minutes and you can decide not to respond to any questions you do not feel comfortable answering and you can withdraw from the study at any time.

3. **Discomforts & Inconveniences**

- Dating violence is a sensitive topic and you may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed to discuss it. However, the questions asked will be very broad and general and we do not expect you to share any personal information. You will not be forced to participate in any part of the discussion that you do not want to and you can stop participating at any point without any negative consequences.
- If you realise that you need help with violence in your own situation we will be able to give you details of places where you can find help immediately.
- At the end of the discussion we will give you information about what dating violence is, how common it is and what the effects of dating violence are.
- You might be inconvenienced by having to give up an hour of your time.

4. **Benefits**

- You will find that you might enjoy sharing your views and experiences, and your information will contribute to understanding how learners view dating violence.

5. **Privacy and Confidentiality**

- Focus (discussion) groups will be conducted in a private room in your school.
- Your contribution to the discussion will remain confidential and you will be given a

pseudonym (false name) at the beginning of the study.

- You might know other people in the group but group members will be asked to keep what is said in the group within the group
- The information from the discussion will be recorded but the recording will be stored in a safe and secure place, in my supervisor's office at the University and the only people who will have access to this information will be my research supervisor and I.
- The information collected in this research might be used to write a scientific paper.

6. **Money Matters**

- You will be invited to an event organised by your class teacher with money provided by the researcher. However, you will be invited along regardless of whether you chose to partake or not.

7. **Contact details**

- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study or if you have signed up and wish to withdraw from the study please contact the researcher, Zakiya Chikte, at [zakiya.chikte@gmail.com](mailto:zakiya.chikte@gmail.com)
- If you have any questions about your rights as a study participant, or concerns about the research, you may talk to Dr Floretta Boonzaier at the Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa, 021 – 650 3429.
- If you wish to talk to the Chair of the Ethics Committee, you may make an appointment to do so by calling Psychology Admin Assistant Rosalind Adams, Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa, 021 – 650 3417.

8. **Signatures**

**Researcher**

{Subject's name}\_\_\_\_\_ has been informed of the nature and purpose of the procedures described above including any risks involved. He or she has been given time to ask any questions and these questions have been answered to the best of the investigator's ability. A signed copy of this consent form will be made available to the participant.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Agreement For Tape-Recording**

I agree to have my voice tape-recorded in the focus group discussion.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participants Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



**Confidentiality**

I agree to keep what is said in the group within the group ensuring the confidentiality of my fellow classmates.

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Participants Signature

Date

**Learner (Agreement to Participate)**

I have been informed about this research study and understand its purpose, possible benefits, risks, and discomforts. I agree to take part in this research. I know that I am free to withdraw this consent and quit this project at any time, and that doing so will not cause me any negative consequences.

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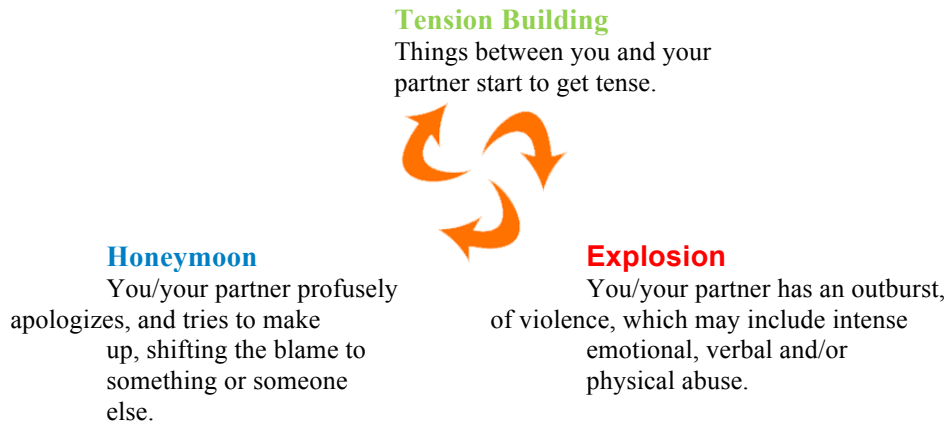
Participants Signature

Date

## Appendix E: Debriefing Pamphlet

### What is dating violence?

Exerting any power or control over the person you are in a relationship with. This kind of behaviour usually happens over a course of time and is seen as a pattern. The way this pattern works:



\* Although every relationship is different, a common factor in abusive relationships is that the violence escalates over time, increasing the danger for you/your partner.

### What the Stats say:

- 8.9% of American Adolescents report being hit, struck, or physically abused by their partner<sup>2</sup>
- 41% of males and 24% of females in a Cape Town sample report being involved in partner violence<sup>3</sup>

### How do I Recognize Partner Violence?

- **Physical Abuse:** Any physical force carried out with the intention to cause fear or injury (e.g. hitting, shoving, biting, kicking or use of a weapon)
- **Emotional Abuse:** Behaviours that are non-physical (e.g. threats, insults, constant monitoring and humiliation)
- **Sexual Abuse:** Any behaviour from a partner that limits sexual activity or the circumstances under which it occurs (e.g. rape or coercion)

### Effects of Partner Violence:

- Your risk of serious physical injury is increased<sup>4</sup>
- Your risk of contracting HIV and STD's is increased<sup>5</sup>
- You may be more likely to abuse alcohol and drugs<sup>6</sup>
- Your risk of having unhealthy relationship patterns in adulthood is increased<sup>7</sup>
- You may suffer from psychological and emotional stress (low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, trauma and suicidal behaviour)<sup>8</sup>

### Help is Near:

**Rape Crisis** – 021 447 9762 (Observatory) | 021 633 9229 (Athlone) | 021 361 9085 (Khayelitsha)

**Lifeline** – (021)461 1111 | 086 132 2322

**Childline** - 08000 55 555

**Nicro Women Support Cape Town** – 0860 10 40 37 | 021 441 9700 | 021 852 562