

## **KEY WORDS**

- SELF-DISCLOSURE
- INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS
- SELF-ACTUALIZATION
- ADOLESCENCE
- ATTITUDE
- BELIEF
- PERCEPTION
- CONCEALMENT
- INTIMACY
- FAMILY



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## **‘N OPVOEDKUNDIG SIELKUNDIGE PERSPEKTIEF OP SELFONTHULLING IN ADOLESSENTE INTERPERSOONLIKE VERHOUDINGS**

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### **OPSOMMING**

Adolescente het, net soos alle individue, die behoefte om te behoort. Gevolglik sukkel adolessente gedurende die adolessente periode met die vestiging en onderhoud van betekenisvolle verhoudings. Die meeste van hulle behaal egter ongelukkig nie sukses met die vestiging en onderhoud van sulke verhoudings nie omdat die vaardighede by hulle ontbreek. Dit lyk dus asof adolessente interpersoonlike vaardighede geleer moet word indien hulle hul interpersoonlike verhoudings wil verbeter wat hulle dan ook in staat stel om hulleself te aktualiseer. Een van die vaardighede wat geleer behoort te word, is selfonthulling.

Die eerste gedeelte van die literatuurstudie is afgestaan aan die bespreking van selfonthulling op sigself. Die literatuurstudie het aan die lig gebring dat selfonthulling verskeie fasette het, waarvan die belangrikstes die aard van die selfonthullings-inhoud, die selfonthuller se teiken, en verdoeseling is. In die tweede gedeelte van die literatuurstudie is daar aandag gegee aan die aard van interpersoonlike verhoudings met spesifieke verwysing na adolessente se verhoudings. Die analisering van interpersoonlike verhoudings het aan die lig gebring dat die vestiging en onderhoud asook die verbreking van interpersoonlike verhoudings ‘n spesifieke patroon volg.

Data rakende die persepsies, oortuigings en houdings van adolessente teenoor selfonthulling tydens interpersoonlike verhoudings is versamel by wyse van verskeie tegnieke. Die persepsies, oortuigings en houdings van ouers teenoor hulle adolessente kinders se persepsies, oortuigings en houdings ten opsigte van selfonthulling tydens interpersoonlike verhoudings is ook bespreek. Die resultate van die empiriese studie het

adolessente se selfbelemmerende persepsies, oortuigings en houdings opgelewer wat dit vir hulle moeilik maak om selfonthulling te hanteer wat interpersoonlike verhoudings verryk sodat hulle hulself kan aktualiseer. Hierdie persepsies, oortuigings en houdings verander nie oornag nie omdat dit blyk dat hulle ouers, die belangrikste komponent van die adolessent se betekenisvolle andere, selfbelemmerende persepsies, oortuigings en houdings teenoor selfonthulling modelleer.

Laastens word 'n paar riglyne verskaf om adolessente te help om selfonthulling te hanteer op wyses wat hulle interpersoonlike verhoudings behoort te verryk sodat hulle hulself kan aktualiseer.

## **SLEUTELWOORDE**

- SELFONTHULLING
- INTERPERSOONLIKE VERHOUDINGS
- SELFAKTUALISERING
- ADOLESSENSIE
- HOUDING
- OORTUIGING
- PERSEPSIE
- VERDOESELING
- INTIMITEIT
- FAMILIE



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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION, STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM, AIM OF STUDY AND CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Every psychologically healthy individual has a need for an interpersonal relationship (Hjelle,& Ziegler, 1981 : 371). This need is evident from the early developmental years and it continues indefinitely into adult life. It is, however, during adolescence that this need seem to, for the first time in the life of a child, grow in importance. Davis and Benshoff (1999 : 391-392) maintain that adolescence is a developmental stage where various types of relationships, including interpersonal relationships, are established. These authors also point out that it is at this point in time that adolescents start to form the foundations upon which they will built future relationships.

The importance of the establishment of relationship among adolescent was highlighted by a study conducted by Paul, Poole and Jakubowyz (1998 : 76), where it was revealed that interpersonal relationships are among the highest areas of concern for adolescents. It is perhaps for this reason that in one study of prioritization, students rated relationships higher than life goals when the two had a clash (ibid). Bakken and Romig (1992 : 302) attribute this kind of rating to the fact that in the contemporary culture, the building and maintenance of interpersonal relationships are considered to be the important components of socialization. It seems as if the establishment and maintenance of relationships is the area in which adolescents should be assisted to grow by being provided with relevant knowledge and skills for growth.

Adolescents need this assistance because some, if not most of them, experience problems in dealing with relationship issues. The main reason for this state of affairs is, according to

Flora and Segrin (1999 : 803 - 804), a lack of social skills. One of the social skill that these adolescents need in order to deal effectively with their interpersonal relationships is the art of self-disclosure since it is of great value to them. For instance, it determines the establishment and quality of a friendship, maintenance thereof and even failure to establish it. In this regard Morgan, King, Weisz and Schopler (1986 : 373) assert that the greater the amount of disclosure, the higher the possibility of friendship formation.

The relationship between self-disclosure and the establishment of healthy, quality interpersonal relationship is also pointed out by Dawis, Fruehling and Oldham (1989 : 268-269). They point out that the basis for a good relationship is mutual trust and liking. Trust and liking develop between two people only when the other person's thoughts, and feelings on various issues are known. The only vehicle to make known thoughts and feelings is self-disclosure. The development of trust and liking is made possible through the process of reciprocal reaction (Dawis et al., 1989 : 269). This process holds that as one partner discloses, the other partner is also motivated to disclose. That is, disclosure encourages disclosure, a process known as dyadic effect.

According to Jourard in Woody, Hansen and Rossberg (1989 : 64) self-disclosure has limits. He points out that there is an optimum level of self-disclosure. Whenever partners do not observe this limit, the quality of friendship may suffer. In this regard Schwab, Scalise, Ginter and Whipple (1998 : 1264) assert that self-disclosure may either reduce or exacerbate a state of loneliness, given a deficit or adequacy of self-disclosure techniques. The relationship between self-disclosure and the quality of a relationship is therefore nonlinear, especially in the absence of self-disclosure techniques.

As a result of the inadequacy of self-disclosure techniques, adolescents seem to engage in various self-disclosure behaviours that seem to be, in most cases, detrimental to their

interpersonal relationships. Firstly, they disclose impulsively (that is hasten self-disclosure). Hastened self-disclosure causes embarrassment and it does not promote reciprocity from the other person. Such disclosure does not inspire trust in most people as it makes them feel the discloser is unable to keep secrets since he is unable to keep his own. Hamachek (1990 : 441) points out that self-disclosure that occurs in the early stages of a conversation, is likely to repel than attract, as people who disclose in this way are perceived as immature and insecure. Morrison and Burnard (1997 : 149) hold the same view. They maintain that although disclosure begets disclosure, perceived hastened disclosure tends to mitigate against mutual disclosure.

Secondly, adolescents either disclose more than it is necessary (that is, they exaggerate self-disclosure) or avoid disclosure completely (Freud, Fong and Cox in Kelly, 1998 : 50) in interpersonal relationships. Wislar and Fendrich (2000 : 77-78) argue that adolescents are among the sub-populations that tend to exaggerate reports when disclosing. In their discussion of the self presentational view in human interaction, Arkin and Hermann (2001 : 501) assert that too much disclosure, no matter how authentic it might be, has a tendency of damaging one's identity, which in turn render an individual unattractive. In the process of the exaggeration exercise, there is also a tendency to engage in impression management so as to construct more desirable identity images in the eyes of their audience (Freud et al. in Kelly, 1998 : 50).

In summarizing the complexity of self-disclosure Kadushin (1990 : 230) points out that 'research on self-disclosure suggests that too much, too soon is as bad as too little, too late.' He argues that the context, the dosage and timing of self-disclosure are the principle factors that determine if and when self-disclosure might be helpful. Too much self-disclosure, which is likely to be out of context and untimely, overwhelms the listener and it is stress inducing than relieving if it is handled tactlessly (Sevovich, Kimberly & Greene,

1998 : 15).

It is not only the self-discloser target that is overwhelmed by self-disclosure content. The discloser, too, is overwhelmed by the complexity of the phenomenon of self-disclosure. Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan (1996 : 69) maintain that when things go wrong in their lives, adolescent self-disclosers throw their arms in the air with despair and blame themselves for the disaster. For instance, a Portuguese American tenth grade student noted that “ what gets me into trouble is my big mouth. Speaking up leads to trouble ”(Ibid).

The complexity of self-disclosure has prompted Shalhoub-Kervorkian, Cooper, Amos and Faranger (1999 : 1277 & 1289) to argue that adolescents should be equipped with appropriate disclosure methods to assist them with this complex phenomenon. These methods should enable the self-discloser to disclose appropriately (Chelune, 1979 : 163), that is tactfully, so as to enable them to reduce stress associated with self-disclosure ( Wiener, Battles & Heilman (1998 : 116) and consequently enhance their emotional investment in their relationships (Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000 : 149). These methods should assist them, among others, to strike a balance between voice and silence. That is, while voicing their inner feelings appropriately, concealment, too, should be controlled.

The control should take place at all times to ensure that disclosure and vulnerability are equal and not one-sided, so as to maintain a balance of power in a relationship. A partner that discloses more than it is necessary might end up being a burden to the other partner since such a behaviour renders an individual vulnerable and therefore weaker in a relationship. (Calhoun & Acocella, 1990 : 37).

Likewise, Bornstein and Lamb (1988 : 572) noted in their argument for their interpersonal problem solving approach, that children's social skills should be improved if they are to be

successful in their interpersonal relationships. Hoeman (1996 : 608) too, maintains that if an individual lacks the social skill to express personal feelings, intimate relationship is threatened. Adolescents, therefore, need coping strategies because it may be the first time that these young people confront many different types of life stressors, like the establishment of relationships.

It is therefore imperative that professionals engaged in assisting adolescence with their problems should understand the reasons why adolescents deal with self-disclosure the way they do (Berson & Meisburger, 1997 : 427). The need to understand the adolescents' attitude towards self-disclosure is made necessary by, among others, complex composite of behaviours and attitudes that vary across individuals and sociocultural groups (Feldman, Turner & Araujo, 1999 : 26-27). Gaining knowledge and understanding issues surrounding adolescents' self-disclosure enhances sensitive assessment and intervention approaches (Keller, Von Sadvosky, Pankrantz & Hermsen, 2000 : 287).

## **1.2 ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM**

### **1.2.1 Awareness of the problem**

The phenomena of self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships among adolescents fascinated the researcher when, on one occasion during a therapeutic session, an adolescent client demanded assurance from the researcher that the information that he was about to disclose was not be made known to his peer group, despite the researcher's emphasis on confidentiality at the beginning of the session. In this session, this client continuously indicated that he feared to disclose particular information that could make life difficult for him.

In the subsequent sessions, this adolescent indicated how much he valued and wanted to maintain his relationship with his friends as they were the only source of happiness for him. It also became apparent that he had decided to maintain his friendship with his peer group by adhering to its sub-culture at all costs.

It was only during the discussion of the tests results that he must have been pressurized to come out of his shell. When self-disclosure was ultimately made, it became clear why he was hesitant to disclose. He feared that the self-disclosure content would stigmatize him and thereby lose the support of his friends. At this stage the researcher felt that there was knowledge with regard to the adolescents' perceptions, beliefs and attitude towards self disclosure in interpersonal relationships that needs to be understood if these adolescents' self-disclosure is to be enhanced.

### **1.2.2 Preliminary literature investigation**

It appears as if man is motivated to seek company. There are various reasons advanced by different researchers to account for this motivation. According to the stress and affiliation-effect theory as expounded by Luminet, Bouts, Delie, Manstead and Rimé (2000 : 662-663), people are motivated to establish interpersonal relationships as a result of, inter alia, a need to talk about stress inducing factors. According to this theory, when people are exposed to an emotional condition, they are motivated to seek social contact. Studies have shown that "any negative emotional episode, even if it is mild or moderate, is generally associated with an urge to talk and to share the emotional experience with others. Talking about one's experiences, affords an individual with a sense of having unloaded a burden, resolved inner conflicts, including plans for suicide (Palmer, Brown, Rae-Grant & Loughlin, 1999 : 263). Talking, therefore, has the potential of reducing stress, and since stress reduction is rewarding, individuals are motivated to seek contact, and in this way

establish friendship (Pennebaker, 1998 : 359).

In support of the motivation theory to establish interpersonal relationships, Baumeister and Leary in Vittengl and Holt (2000 : 53), argue that interpersonal relationships are formed and maintained because of a “need to belong”, as belonging raises hopes of an opportunity to express one’s emotions. Belonging, therefore, gives rise to positive affect (for example, happiness, excitement and enthusiasm), whereas failure to belong brings about negative affect (for example anxiety, anger and guilt). Since a negative affect is an unpleasant emotion, adolescents are motivated to get rid of this feeling by seeking interpersonal relationships.

Consequently, friendship matters a lot during adolescence, too, for various reasons that ensure their well-being (Seifert & Hoffnug, 1994 : 558-559). Friends ease the uncertainty and a sense of insecurity of the adolescent years caused by parental disapproval. Friendship offers reassurance, understanding, advice, emotional and social support in stressful situations partly caused by parental disapproval of their behaviour. In the process of supporting one another through the process of sharing feelings, beliefs and exploration of new ideas and opinions, adolescents are able to define their sense of self which in turn boosts their interpersonal relationships.

Although people seem to be under pressure to seek friendship, the search is, however, not haphazardly done. It is a well calculated process that is driven and dependent on some factors. Hurlock (1980 : 232) for instance, asserts that in choosing friends, adolescents are attracted to people that they can trust, talk to and depend on. They, unfortunately, sometimes manipulate their relationships in an attempt to obtain what they regard as the best for themselves (Epstein, 1988 : 139). As such, their relationships are sometimes characterized by turbulence.



### **1.3 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

As a result of the wide nature of this topic, the researcher devoted attention to only Black adolescents involved in primary interpersonal relationships at senior secondary schools in this study. It was hoped that by paying attention to one cultural group at a time, the study would yield better results than when cultural groups are combined, as self-disclosure varies from one cultural group to the other (Goodwin, Nizharadzee, Lulu, Lan, Kosa & Emel, 1999 : 73). For instance, Americans disclose more than Germans, although the Germans achieved higher intimacy level than the Americans. The manner in which self-disclosure is handled by the Germans could be a possible reason for the higher intimacy, although the discloser level is lower.

Furthermore, cognitively and physically disabled adolescents have not been considered in this study as their interactional skills in friendship formation and maintenance thereof differs from those that are not disabled. Rosenblum (1997 : 226-227) for instance, indicates that the lack of vision or reduced vision affects a child's ability to recognize social interactional skills such as gaze and smiling and to respond accordingly. Perception of others' actions and feelings is also difficult without vision. Moreover, other children have a negative attitude towards them. Similarly, adolescents with impaired communication have also be excluded (Burke, Bedard & Ludwig, 1998 : 87).

### **1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The study of self-disclosure has been a major topic of social psychological interest for some three decades (Goodwin et al., 1999 : 72 & Allman, 1998 : 178). It seems, however, that there are some areas which have not been dealt with adequately as yet. Firstly, a small number of self-disclosure phenomena have been addressed during this period (Collins

Miller in Harris, Desruch & Mittal, 1999 : 406 ) although it is the basis for understanding and formulating theory to explain intimate relations. For instance, Kahn (1976), Keller (1975), Switkin (1974), Wagner (1975) Eisenhower (1977) studied self-disclosure in relation to impression management, self-esteem, sex roles, intimacy and adolescent separation, respectively. Most other scholars concentrated on self-disclosure and sexual orientation (For example, Walder & Magruder, 1999 : 83 - 100; Jordan & Deluty, 1998 : 41-63; Miller & Boon, 2000 : 41 - 63), and stigmatized diseases (for example, Flowers, Smith, Sheeran & Jigal, 1998 : 409-421) and psychological constructs such as self-esteem (For example, Jordan & Deluty, 1998 : 41 - 63).

In some instances, little intensive research has been conducted into some areas. D'Augelli, Hersberger & Pilkington in Henderson (1998 : 372) identified the decision to self-disclose as one of those areas. It looks like currently it is particularly important to conduct research on the decision to disclose because in some cases, the age of disclosure has been dropping in the past years. For instance, most gays disclosed their sexual orientation when they were twenty years old, but now disclosure is made at fourteen, fifteen and sixteen years old to their families.

It seems as if, too, that research in these fields has been directed to self-disclosure in general. That is, self-disclosure research focused on all people. (Kadushin, 2000 : 3; Berson and Meisburger, 1997 : 428; Scorzelli & Gold, 1999 : 113). There is therefore a need to conduct research that focuses on particular groups of people, and in particular, adolescents (Green, 2000 : 259).

It appears, too, that there is a need for research in phenomena that seems to be a problem area to adolescents. Phenomena that need to be studied to determine how they influence self-disclosure are perceptions, beliefs and attitudes. Altman & Taylor in Rytting (1975 : 6),

however, warns that studying the relationship between a personality traits such as attitudes, beliefs and perceptions and self-disclosure is not a simple task.

It was hoped that the understanding of these personality traits would enable the researcher to develop guidelines that would equip adolescents with interpersonal competence so as to enable them to deal with their environment effectively (Armstead & Kelly, 1995 : 445). Bochner and Kelly in Armstead, Forehead, Beach, Gene and Brody (1995 : 445) define interpersonal competence as the ability of individuals to interact effectively with others. Its importance lies in the fact that it yields socially valued outcomes to those who possess it. For example, Henderson (1998 : 372) points out that those individuals equipped with interpersonal competence are in a better position to be cautious in making self-disclosures. They also function better in other interpersonal areas. For instance, individuals who are more interpersonally competent have a better chance of acquiring a good job, developing a successful spousal relationship and creating a supportive social network than individuals with less interpersonal competence (Bocher & Kelly in Armstead et al., 1995 : 445).

Armstead and Kelly (1995 : 445) assert that the appropriate developmental period where children should be taught interpersonal competence is adolescence. They raise two reasons for this standpoint. Firstly, Adolescence marks a period during which individuals are separating from their families of origin to start new interpersonal relationships. Secondly, adolescent years are the best predictors of adult functioning.

In the light of the above discussion, it appears therefore that a pertinent question that parents and professionals engaged with the services of assisting adolescence to self-actualize by giving them skills to deal with interpersonal relationships may be framed as follows:

*What are the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes held by adolescents that make it difficult for*

*hem to handle disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their interpersonal relationships so as to enable them to self-actualize?*

## **1.5 AIMS**

### **1.5.1 The primary aim**

The primary aim of this study is as follows:

*To identify perceptions, beliefs and attitudes held by adolescents that make it difficult for them to handle self-disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their interpersonal relationships so as to enable themselves to self-actualize.*

### **1.5.2 Specific aims**

The specific aim of this study, which were achieved by either literature study and/ or empirical investigation, were as follows:

- to investigate the nature of self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships.
- to explore and to understand the extent to which adolescents disclose in interpersonal relationships.
- to explore the nature of interpersonal relationships.
- to develop guidelines to assist adolescents to handle self-disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their interpersonal relationships so as to enable themselves to self-actualize.

### **1.5.3 HYPOTHESIS**

This study's hypothesis may be stated as follows:

*Self-defeating perceptions, beliefs and attitudes held by adolescents make it difficult for them to handle self-disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships so as to enable themselves to self-actualize.*

## **1.6 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS**

### **1.6.1 Self-disclosure**

According to Taylor, Peplau and Sears (1997 : 263) self-disclosure is a conversation, a special kind of conversation which, according to Culvert, Matsushima and Shiomi (2000 : 333) is explicit in nature. In Moon's (2000 : 323) opinion, this conversation entails communication of any personal information to another person. It is self-referring kind of information such as internal states or past events to others (Finkelbauer & Hazam, 2000 : 247). According to Watkins in Ladany, Lehrman-Waterman (1999 : 143) subjects for revelation may be thoughts, feelings and reactions. La Sala (2000 : 69) refers to the disclosure of such information as "coming out". In this study, individuals that engage in self-disclosure are referred to as self-disclosers or disclosers and those to whom self-disclosure is made are called self-discloser targets.

Palmer et al. (1999 : 260) considers self-disclosure as a process, an ongoing process (Henry, 1998 : 35). They argue that self-disclosure does not always come as a clear, one-time statement. Perhaps the reason why self-disclosure is a process is that it is a conscious, intentional technique (McCarthy & Skay, 1998 : 174) where an

individual chooses how she or he would like to disclose.

## **1.6.2 Interpersonal relationship**

This concept is made up of two other concepts, namely, relationship and interpersonal.

### **1.6.2.1 Interpersonal**

Aardweg and Aardweg (1993 : 201) define the concept interpersonal as “ an association between two referents “ where the two referents have a bipolar or bidirectional effect on each other. This association or connection is characterized by mutuality. Consequently, interpersonal study, according to Anchin and Kiesler (1987 : 5) should focus on interactions and not on the behaviour of individuals. These human interactions are the most pervasive and essential feature of human activity which involve two or more people.

### **1.6.2.2 Relationship**

Reber (1985 : 384 & 657) defines the concept relationship as a connection between two or more objects, events or persons. In Calhoun and Acocella's (190 : 214) view, this connection is mainly between at least two individuals whose connection is characterized by a habitual pattern of transactions extending over time, and which involves its own set of emotional signals.

For the purpose of this study, interpersonal relationship is defined as a relationship between at least two people who influence each other in some ways.

### **1.6.3 Self-actualization**

Maslow in Vrey (1979 : 42) defines self-actualization as development towards the fullest height that man can ever reach. That is, becoming the best that an individual is able to become. Schultz and Schultz (1998 : 205) regard the best individual as one who fulfills all human capacities, whereas Green and Sandford 1983 : 206) describes the best individual as the one who is the healthiest of all personalities, who perceives his environment, people, ideas and oneself positively (Aardweg & Aardweg, 1993 : 215). This is the kind of an individual who finds fulfilment in life as a result of having fully developed his potential (Mwamwenda, 1995 : 268). Such an individual accepts himself or herself. This self-acceptance enables an individual to be free of guilt, anxiety and shame. The absence of these personality traits put a person that has actualized in a position that enables him or her to establish and maintain relationships with no fear of being rejected.

### **1.6.4 Adolescence**

Various authors define adolescence in many different ways. For instance, Buchholz and Catton (1999 : define adolescence as a time of change. In Hurlock's (1980 : 222) view, the time of change starts when a child becomes sexually mature and ends when the age of legal maturity is reached or when an individual attains physiological or psychological maturity. (Reber, 1985 : 15). Rice ( 1992 : 69 ) defines adolescence ( a word that comes from the Latin verb *adolescere*, which means "to grow" or to grow to maturity as a period of growth, which is between childhood and adulthood, although he confesses that there is no single definition of this word. In this study, adolescence is defined as a developmental period which starts from twelve years to twenty one years.

### **1.6.5 Perception**

According to Robbins (1986 : 62) perception is a process by which man organizes and interprets his sensory impressions in order to attach meaning to his environment. In this process, the attachment of meaning differs from individual to individual. It is therefore a subjective process. It is like beauty “ in that it lies in the eyes of the beholder “ (Ibid).

### **1.6.6 Belief**

Hewstone, Stroebe, Codol, and Stephen (1988 : 143) define beliefs as the opinions (including information, knowledge or thoughts someone has about the attitude object. Warr and Knapper (in Millar, Crut & Hargie, 1992 : 29) assert that beliefs originate from perceptions. For instance, beliefs such as negativity towards self-disclosure emanate from perceptions.

### **1.6.7 Attitude**

Boottzin, Bower, Crocker and Hall (1991 : 628) define an attitude as an evaluative response to a particular object, idea, person, or group of people. Likewise, Roediger (1991 : 642) emphasizes the evaluative aspect of an attitude. According to him an attitude may be defined as a “ tendency to evaluate a person (for example, a friend), object (for example, book), or idea ( for example, self-disclosure ), either positively or negatively. Once the evaluation is completed, an individual acts in a particular way towards the person, person or an idea in line with the attitude or attitudes held (Baltus, 1992 : 101).

### **1.6.8 Loneliness**

Hamid and Lok (2000 : 46) define loneliness, which they regard as being a pervasive



phenomenon, as the subjective experience of remoteness and social isolation. Loneliness is also associated with a host of negative correlates such as feelings of anxiety, depression and alienation. In Lauer's (1995 : 242) opinion, loneliness is a sense and feeling of being deprived of the companionship and intimacy without which healthy and happy life is endangered. According to Brennan in Hamid and Lok (2000 : 46) adolescence seems to be the time of life when loneliness first emerges as an intensive recognizable phenomenon.

### **.6.9 Concealment**

Finkenauer and Hazam (2000 : 248 & 256) define concealment (also known as secrecy), which Kelly (1998 : 52) refers to as self-concealment, as an act by which an individual aims to actively and consciously withhold information from at least one other person. This is the kind of information that a secret-keeper does not want to or cannot talk about. Kelly (1999 : 105) says this information, which is perceived as being private by the owner, is inhibited from being disclosed because in most cases it contains traumatic or painful experiences. According to Pennebaker's theory as discussed by Finkenauer and Rime (1998 : 298), keeping a secret involves a continuous, active inhibition and suppression of thought and feelings related to the nonshared emotion. Children who conceal information engage in what Peterson and Mesiburger (1997 : 428) describe as avoidance, which they define as the effort an individual put forth to avoid revealing overwhelming or frightening experiences. There are behaviours which individuals manifest when they are in the avoidance mode. These behaviours are, among others, hyperactivity, distractability, aggression, dissociation, denial and refusal to answer questions.

### **.6.10 Intimacy**

Bernberg and Barnes (1988 : 336) define intimacy as "a relationship state in which inner or

innermost feelings, thoughts and dispositions can be revealed or explored.”Derlega and Berg’s (1987 : 10) definition seem to be in line with the revelation of the innermost states, but goes further to refer to a second person. Their definition states that intimacy is a relational process in which individuals come to know the innermost subjective aspects of another, and are known in a like manner. It is a process that leads to closeness where similarities and differences between two persons are explored. This closeness is described by Mazur in Rytting (1975 : 4) as “ the exquisite event of being in touch.” The closeness of a relationship is characterized by interdependence, integrated and mutually rewarding exchanges (Kelly et al. in Laursen, 1995 : 56). In cases where the exchange is disturbed, conflict arise as the parties make attempts at balancing the rewards and the costs. In this relationship state, individuals are able to commit themselves to concrete affiliations and partnerships and to commit themselves to the relationship even if they may have to offer significant sacrifices and compromises (Belkin, 1980 : 319).

#### **.6.11 Family**

Bouma, Dixon and Robarts (1990 : 153) define a family as a group of people that live together and share affection, resources and goals over time. This group of people which is usually made up of parents and children living together in a household (Charon, 1992 : 66), perform certain tasks for one another.

### **.7 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Any research needs to be planned in order to enable the researcher to achieve his or her objectives. Such a plan of work, which must be scientific in nature, is referred to as research design (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995 : 63). This kind of a plan, assists a researcher in the collection, analyzing and the interpretation of data collected.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992 : 154) there are two broad methods of research, namely, the qualitative and the quantitative methods, that a researcher may choose from when conducting research, and the choice of any of the two methods depends on the kind of information to be collected. In this regard Krueger (1994 : 27) maintains that in gathering information that lays emphasis on words and observations to explain reality, a researcher should make use of the qualitative method. On the other hand if data to be collected makes use of mainly numbers, use should be made of the quantitative method.

Since the objective of this study is to collect verbal information with regard to perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of the respondents, and the explanation of these perceptions, beliefs and attitudes with the help of words and observations, the methods most suitable for this research is qualitative research. What makes it even more suitable for this research is that it is a flexible method which makes room for discussions whose form and direction is not known to the researcher.

The main tools for the researcher in the collection of data will be focus group interviews and individual interviews as these techniques make use of unstructured questions over and above semi or structured questions found in face-to-face interviews (Palmer in Burgess, 1991 : 107). The reason why the researcher intends making use of both focus group and face to face interviews is that while the former type of an interview helps in the exploration of the meanings underlying behaviour, the latter method is useful in verifying information collected through focus group interviews.

## **1.8 CHAPTER DIVISION**

Over and above this chapter, this study is comprised of the following chapters:

## **HAPTER TWO**

This chapter deals with self-disclosure in general. Information given is based on literature study whose aim was to understand disclosure patterns in general, with a view to developing better understanding for adolescent disclosure patterns. Data gathered in this section formed the basis of empirical investigation.

## **HAPTER THREE**

In this chapter, attention is given to interpersonal relationships that prevail between the adolescent and his significant others. Knowledge gained from literature study, was of help in understanding interactional patterns that affect or influence self-disclosure among adolescence.

## **HAPTER FOUR**

In chapter four, the research method and design were examined. In this examination, attention was paid to the purpose of the research, assumptions, hypothesis, selection of the sample, and tools for data collection.

## **HAPTER FIVE**

Chapter five contains data collected through the various data gathering tools. This data reflect the research questions used and the different face-to-face and focus groups interviews. Interviews appear in a verbatim transcription.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

Chapter six contains the findings of the study. Data transcribed verbatim in the previous chapter were, after it was analyzed, given in the form of themes and categories.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

Chapter seven, the last chapter of this study, consists of the purpose of the study, guidelines, literature and empirical conclusions that underpin this study's guidelines, shortcomings of this study and recommendations for further study

## **9 . CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, attention was given to the background, statement of the problem, aim of the study and the clarification of concepts. An outline of the overview of the nature of self-disclosure and the problems it poses in interpersonal relationships were discussed. Attention was also given to the research design and the methods that were used in this study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SELF-DISCLOSURE

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Among the various human activities that clearly render an individual human, is self-disclosure. Morris and Burnard (1992 : 60) maintain that self-disclosure is the most basic form of human encounter in which man reveals himself to another. In this regard Harris, Dersch and Mittal (1999 : 405) argue that it is a spontaneous everyday life activity whose existence in a developing child starts to reveal itself from the time when a need to express one's inner subjective world in a meaningful way arises. This is the time when a need to share one's emotions with other individuals in order to establish meaningful relationships becomes an issue during adolescence (Cook, 2000 : 286).

Hurlock (1980 : 232) reasons that the value adolescents attach to self-disclosure in the establishment of relationships is indicated by the extent to which they engage in self-disclosure activities during adolescent years as compared to their earlier developmental period. He asserts that self-disclosure increases dramatically from grade eight, and it appears to reach a peak in grade twelve (see figure 1).

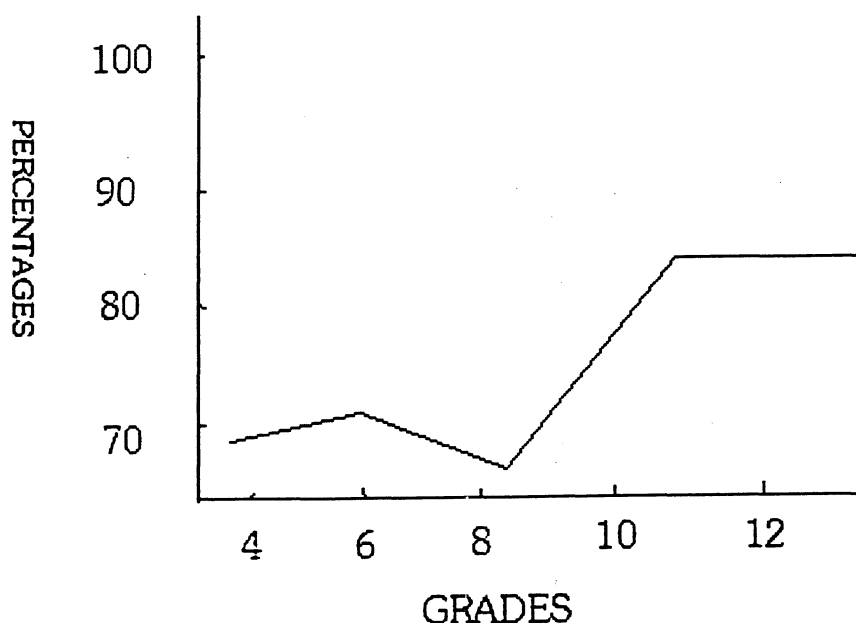


Figure 2.1 Rate of adolescents' self-disclosure according to grades

At this time, self-disclosure appears to favour the peer group than parents because of their belief that peers are more understanding of their self-disclosures than their parents, and the increase in the development of a need for autonomy (Rotenberg, 1995 : 210). Consequently, the establishment of relationships with peers starts to dominate their activities.

Unfortunately, many adolescents are unable to make good use of this social skill to build a network of relationships for themselves. Perhaps the best possible reason is that this inborn human activity is applied to their social life in a spontaneous manner with no regard for techniques to ensure that it provides the user with the desired results.

As an inborn spontaneous activity, most individuals know little about it and in some cases, others do not even know that it exists, or worse still, they are unable to label self-disclosure activities as self-disclosure. Under such circumstances, self-disclosure causes uncertainty. That is, different possible outcomes of self-disclosure can be imagined. This may happen even where considerable trust exists. When this does happen the development of an intimate relationship may be hampered (Sernberg & Barnes, 1988 : 336). Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that adolescents engage in self-disclosure even more intuitively with no consideration for appropriate ways of self-disclosure that should enable them to avoid risks involved in it.

In this chapter, the theoretical background of self-disclosure will be presented so as to shed light on how it impacts on the establishment of relationships. Its counterpart, which could also be regarded as its enemy, that is concealment, will also be presented briefly with a view to understanding the effects of putting a balance between the two activities as self-disclosure and liking are curvilinear, with too little or too much disclosure having a negative effect on liking (Tubb & Baird, 1976 : 10). Putting a balance between self-concealment and self-disclosure appears to ensure purposefulness of self-disclosure.

Derlega, Metts, Petronio and Margulis (1993 : 79-83) stress the importance of the purposefulness of the self-disclosure content by making reference to the 1960's opposing views concerning self-disclosure . These views were the “cult of compulsive honesty” and “cavalier deception” which referred to total self-disclosure of the disclosure content and concealment of certain information from the relationship partner, respectively. The concealment of information was regarded to be in the interest of the discloser target.

Self-disclosure that takes the two views into consideration appears to ensure that in deciding which self-disclosure content to reveal, one should be guided by whether such content contributes meaningfully towards relationship establishment and maintenance or not. That is, it should not negatively affect issues of trust, trustworthiness and caring for one's partner unnecessarily. For example, in disclosing information about having had an extra-marital affair, one should avoid information that does not have a direct bearing on the relationship in any way, like having had trauma in one's childhood experiences if the trauma has been resolved and has no direct bearing on the issue at hand.

Likewise, Derlega et al. (1993 : 79-83) assert that care should be taken to manage self-disclosure. That is, while self-disclosure should not be complete, concealment should also not be such that it compromises a relationship. Self-disclosure should, therefore, be made only when the self-disclosure content has the potential of fulfilling a particular purpose.

## **2.2 REASONS FOR SELF-DISCLOSURE**

Various authors advance different reasons that explain why people engage in self-disclosure in the establishment and maintenance of relationships. The common denominator of these reasons is that individuals engage in them because they are rewarding (Cozby in Kahn, 1976 : 1). The following reasons for self-disclosure are based mostly on Taylor et al. (1997



: 263) findings.

### **2.2.1 Expression**

Calhoun and Acocella (1990 : 370) argue that human beings have a need to talk about their feelings, thoughts and their experiences so as to sometimes blow off steam. While blowing off steam, they are also compelled to talk about their feelings and thought. It is through self-disclosure that individuals manage to come to a better understanding of their feelings and thoughts. The enhanced understanding of ones's feelings and thoughts promotes greater self-understanding and self-awareness without which relationship formation is difficult and sometimes impossible.

### **2.2.2 Social validation**

Self-disclosure helps people to compare their views with those of other people. In this way, individuals find themselves in a position to determine whether their views are appropriate or not. In cases where similarity exists (cf 3.4.1.2) relationship formation and maintenance thereof becomes a possibility.

### **2.2.3 Intensity of the self-disclosure material**

The degree of intensity of the self-disclosure material makes people to develop a need to talk about their experiences. There are, however, conditions under which the intensity of the self-disclosure material compels people to self-diclose. Finkenauer and Rime (1998 : 297) maintain that self-disclosure is made when the disclosure material is too painful for an individual to bear, although there are times when intense self-disclosure content promotes self-concealment (2.10.1.4 ). Self-disclosure material is difficult to bear when it is troubling.

162) view reciprocity paves a way for mutual transformativeness, with partners self-disclosure increasing as a result of the perceived growth of the relationship. In this regard Altman and Taylor in Hewstone et al. (1989 : 214) maintain that intimacy results from a relationship that is characterized by reciprocity of approximately equal valence.

There are various reasons why individuals reciprocate. Firstly, individuals reciprocate because of the urge to demonstrate and return feelings of trust and liking displayed by a discloser in intimate relationships. The explanation of reciprocity based on trust-liking approach holds that the recipient of a disclosure content reciprocates because of the feeling of trust and liking for the discloser. Secondly, according to the equity theory, there must be a flow of self-disclosure of equal intimacy if a relationship is to be maintained. Some individuals, therefore, disclose because they want to establish and maintain relationships (Derlega & Berg, 1987 : 4), especially relationships characterized by intimacy (Wierner et al., 1998 : 117).

#### **2.2.5 Concern for others**

Over and above the establishment of intimate relationships, Wiener et al. (1998 : 117) identified the following reasons for self-disclosure which originate from an individual's concern for others:

- A forewarning to significant others
- A desire to be honest with others
- The urge to offer tangible assistance, for example informational material.
- A desire to educate others
- A desire to protect the feelings of significant others so as avoid harming them psychologically

A desire to keep others from making sacrifices

### **2.3 FACTORS ENHANCING SELF-DISCLOSURE**

According to Berson and Meisburger (1997: 432) there are strategies that should be taken into consideration to assist adolescents to self-disclose.

#### **2.3.1 Locus of control**

Loss of locus of control is threatening and it may lead to self-concealment. People should, therefore, be assisted to not to lose it so as to promote self-disclosure. There are various ways of assisting self-disclosers not to lose it. According to Scorzelli and Gold (1999 : 115) the locus of control may be obtained through the use of multimedia technique. With regard to the use of this technique, De Rosa and Marks (1998 : 224) found that HIV victims' self-disclosure rate increased when exposed to multiple counselling situations, where repetition of a message took the form of multiple sources. These techniques seem to be effective if a discloser experiences a sense of safety (Palmer et al., 1999 : 263).

There are various forms of the multimedia technique that may be used. Firstly, according to De Rosa and Marks (1998 : 224) they may take the form of story telling. For example, there are different types of story techniques that may be used such as the metaphorical communication developed by Gardener. The client tells a story that has a beginning, middle and the ending and after having analyzed the story to identify thoughts, feelings and psychological meaning embodied in the story, the therapist narrates a similar story, but with a different meaning. There is also the mutual storytelling game, where the client and the therapist alternate in narrating a story with the beginning of the story raised by the therapist.

Secondly, self-disclosers may also be made to write about their experiences. They may, for instance, sit in a room and write with the interviewee's back turned and write these stories as one form of nonverbal communication (Paez, Velasco & Gonzalez, 1999 : 630). According to King and Holden (1998 : 358) writing about one's experiences (emotionally charged experiences), especially for people with high levels of inhibition, make them to experience the environment in which they are, as being safe.

Thirdly, Goldstein and MacGeorge (2000 : 235-237) considers the relationship between self-disclosure and advice in discussing the importance of the locus of control. They maintain that advice should be given with care to adolescents who disclose as it has both advantages and disadvantages at times. While some see it as providing information, enhance perceived control and convey caring, some adolescents regard advice as a controlling mechanism which is seen as a speaker's wish to solve problems and to move on to other topics. The self-discloser's ability to be in control of his life is perceived as being taken away. According to the politeness theory, advice seems to be effective when the giver is perceived as having more power and control over a problem than the receiver (for example, doctors giving advice on illnesses).

When these techniques are applied, Setsena's advice in Sunday Sun (18 November 2001 : 26) advice is that self-disclosure should be handled in the following manner so as to help an adolescent not to lose the locus of control:

- Acknowledge the adolescent's statement
- Do not show shock. That is, always speak to the adolescent calmly and in private
- Give matter of fact answers
- Stay reassuring and non-judgmental
- Believe what the adolescent tells you

- Do not ask questions that sound like accusations
- In the case of abuse, tell the adolescent that she or he is not responsible for the abuse, no matter what the circumstances are
- Do not encourage the adolescent to tell you everything at once
- Help the adolescent by saying that you realize how difficult it is for him or her to talk about a traumatic experience

Finkenauer and Hazam (2000 : 247) explain the secret-keepers' motivation to be in control by making reference to two positions ( that is, secret-keeper and secret-target ). The partner that is in the secret-keeper position derives happiness from the fact that she or he feels she or he is in control. Since partners usually do not disclose completely, it appears that in any relationship, partners revolve between the two types of positions, but it appears as if it is the withholding of taboo topics from which partners may enjoy most satisfaction.

### **2.3.2 The nature of a relationship**

According to Martin, Anderson and Mottet (1999 : 283) the type of a relationship between individuals determine the level of self-disclosure. People tend to disclose with greater breadth, depth and honesty with their friends and spouses than with their parents who feel that they disclose more than their children. Dunham and Senn (2000 : 258) say that self-disclosure within such parameters is influenced by the discloser's hope of getting help that would revitalize the relationship. That is, self-disclosure is influenced by the fact that an individual hopes to benefit from the disclosure (Kadushin, 2000 : 3).

Merighi and Grimes (2000 : 32 - 33) consider the belief system of the self-disclosure targets as determining whether a discloser would have hope in a discloser-target or not. This point is illustrated by making reference to the conservative or liberal nature of a family.

Conservative families are described as high traditional whereas the liberal ones are described as low traditional. High traditional families value and emphasize religion, heterosexual marriage and children whereas liberal families are flexible with regard to social issues. Adolescents from high traditional families find it more difficult to disclose as compared to those from low traditional as the former families' views differ drastically from those of the adolescents as compared to the low tradition families.

### **2.3.3 Feeling of being understood**

Merighi and Grime (2000 : 33) reported that for young adults, the amount of self-disclosure is related to the feeling of being understood. Martin et al. (1999 : 287) assert that there is a recursive relationship between self-disclosure and the feeling of being understood. When people feel understood, they probably self-disclose more frequently, with more depth and more honesty, and when people self-disclose more frequently, with more depth and more honesty, they probably also feel better understood.

The feeling of being understood comes into being when the self-disloser feels that the self-discloser target understands the emotion he or she experiences. Under such circumstances, the discloser's perception of costs and rewards play a role. Self-disclosure is made only when the rewards are perceived to be bigger than costs (Walder & Magruder, 1999 : 85). For instance, a depressed person discloses more if he or she discloses to someone who is depressed or has gone through depression.

### **2.3.4 Normative factors**

Shelume (1979 : 162-164) considers normative factors as being responsible for self-disclosure. He noted, for instance, that people belonging to a certain social group (for

example women, the poor and welfare recipients) may be expected or compelled to disclose more information than they receive. Men on the other hand are expected to avoid self-disclosure, particularly in areas that emphasize personal concerns, weakness and emotional difficulties. People who are expected to disclose (for example, women) are thought of as being maladjusted if they do not disclose, whereas men are thought to be well adjusted if they refrain from self-disclosure.

## **2.4 FORMS OF SELF-DISCLOSURE**

### **2.4.1 Broad forms of self-disclosure**

Wagner (1975 : 2) maintains that there are two broad ways of sharing one's inner self with others, namely, verbal or nonverbal self-disclosures. In verbal self-disclosure, the discloser makes use of words, whereas in nonverbal disclosure the inner self is made known to others through, inter alia, gestures and facial expressions (Jacobs, 1999 : 160).

There is, however, a huge difference in as far as the extent to which the self is made known to others when self-disclosure is made either verbally or nonverbally. It looks like the inner self is better made known to others when self-disclosure is done in a verbal way than in a nonverbal manner, although the nonverbal form promotes self-disclosure because of its ability to keep the locus of control in the hands of the discloser (cf 2.3.1 ). Language is, therefore, the best vehicle through which thoughts and feelings may be made known to others as compared to gestures and facial expression. It appears, therefore, as if the higher the development of one's language, the better the expression of the inner self will be.

#### **2.4.1.1 Forms of verbal self-disclosure and its characteristics**

Setsena in Sunday Sun (18 November 2001 : 26) identified three forms of verbal self-disclosures which vary on the direct-indirect continuum (Savin-Williams , 1998 : 56). These self-disclosures are indirect self-disclosure, purposeful self-disclosure and accidental self-disclosure. When self-disclosure is done indirectly, an individual may utter a statement that is not directly linked to the disclosure material. For instance, a child may say that he or she should not be taken to grandpa's home any more. In the case of purposeful self-disclosure, which may also be regarded as direct self-disclosure, an individual makes a conscious effort to disclose. In Palmer et al.'s (1999 : 260) view, self-disclosure is said to be direct when the victim personally reveals in explicit terms personal information, but indirect when someone else, like an adult makes inferences, which may be vague, partial or vacillating, based on observations. Accidental disclosures are like slips of the tongue where an individual makes an utterance or utterances which are not planned or through non-voluntary behaviour.

There are two forms of direct self-disclosures, namely, pseudo and authentic self-disclosures. Pseudo self-disclosure is made up of factual content where the discloser puts him or herself in the position of an object rather than a subject, with very little or no emotional involvement with the self-disclosure content. On the other hand, authentic self-disclosure involves revelation of information that has emotional content where the discloser assumes the position of a subject.

Direct self-disclosure serves special positive functions for the discloser. Merighi and Grimes (2000 : 32) assert that direct self-disclosure has the tendency to reduce negative impact on self-disclosure targets, especially parents. It reduces the amount of rejection that may follow self-disclosure because of its perceived positive characteristics. One such characteristic is that it is regarded as self-disclosure which is intimacy driven as opposed to other forms of



self-disclosure which are associated with mistrust and poor relationship quality.

## **2.5 THE NATURE OF SELF-DISCLOSURE CONTENT**

Self-disclosure content may be classified into various types which, however, have common characteristics. Moon (2000 : 323) classifies it into low risk and high risk information. Low risk content is associated with superficial issues whereas high risk information is associated with intimate, innermost emotional attitudes and feelings. This is the type of information that can make the discloser feel personal vulnerability in some ways as it is perceived to be emotional in nature (for example, If I tell her that I love her, she will laugh at me). Peplau et al. (1997 : 263) classify self-disclosure content into descriptive and evaluative self-disclosure. Descriptive ( low risk) disclosure refers to disclosure that describes things about ourselves, such as place of work, whereas evaluative (high risk) disclosure refers to our personal assessment of people, situations and ourselves (Harris et al., 1999 : 405).

These characteristics are embodied in social issues that people, especially adolescents, want to share with others. According to Lickona (1994 : 94-39), some of the issues of concern, that may contain either low or high risk information that adolescents wish to disclose are as follows:

- Worrying about pregnancy
- Regret and self-recrimination
- Guilt
- Loss of self-respect and self- esteem
- Corruption of character and the debasement of sex
- Shaken trust and fear of commitment
- Rage of betrayal

- Depression and suicide
- Ruined relationships
- Stunting personal development

In King and Holden's (1998 : 361) view self-disclosure content that is regarded as high risk information and evaluative in nature is emotionally charged, whereas the low risk which is regarded as descriptive is less or even non-emotionally charged. Tubbs and Baird (1976 : vii) consider non-emotionally and emotionally charged self-disclosure content as pseudo and authentic self-disclosure content, respectively.

Wagner (1975 : 2) considers emotionally charged information as having depth (intimate loaded information) whereas the non-emotionally charged as having breadth (quantity of information which lacks intimacy). Wagner (1975 : 2) further argues that the depth of the disclosure material may be further divided into levels of disclosure, also called intimacy levels which may either be low or high, depending on the perceived risk and/or privacy involved. Low intimacy self-disclosure is made up of information which is perceived as having a low risk and/or privacy for the individual. Disclosure content of this nature revolves around topics, opinions and feelings which are perceived as not threatening. This is disclosure content that is considered to be impersonal by an individual and it can be easily disclosed (Mills, 1985 : 70). High level intimacy disclosure, which centers around topics, opinions and feelings which are considered to be personal and cannot be easily shared, is made up of information perceived as high in risk and/or privacy of the self.

Burnard and Morrison (1992 : 77) argue that the depth of self-disclosure takes place when self-disclosure deepens, when it drifts away from impersonal topics to personal topics (Mills, 1985 : 70) and where topics discussed revolve around feelings and thoughts (Waring, Holden & Wesley, 1998 : 818).

Chelume (1979 : 152-153) refers to depth and breadth of self-disclosure as the informative aspect of self-disclosure content. Other aspects of self-disclosure that he identified are as follows:

- Reward value: This is the extent to which a discloser or target perceives the information to have either positive or negative results.
- Accessibility: This concept refers to the ease with which information may be obtained from the discloser.
- Truthfulness : The extent to which the information is true of the psychological states. It answers the questions with regard to self-presentation or the management of the self.
- Voluntariness: The extent to which the information is made available by the discloser.
- Social norms: The extent to which the message deviates or supports the existing cultural expectations about appropriate behaviour.
- Effectiveness: The extent to which the message accomplishes the discloser's goals.

Quinn (1990 : 391-392) explains low risk and high risk information in terms of the covert and overt information with the help of the Johari window, a concept derived from the first names of its inventors, namely Joe Luft and Harry Ingham. Johari window is a square with four quadrants with each quadrant representing the nature of the self-disclosure content. The self-disclosure content, according to the Johari window, ranges from completely overt (obvious or open ) to completely covert (hidden) information. As the self-disclosure content progresses from overt to covert, it also moves progressively from low risk to high risk content and therefore from emotionally to non-emotionally charged content.

Known to self		Not known to self	
Known to others	I OPEN	II BLIND	
	III HIDDEN	IV UNKNOWN	

Table 2.1: The Johari window

### 2.5.1 Quadrant 1: Open (Low risk, non-emotionally charged content)

This quadrant describes behaviour that is known to both an individual and others, and aspects of ourselves that are obvious to others and ourselves. It also contains any self-disclosure content one would like to disclose to others, like making known to one's teacher one's interest.

### 2.5.2 Quadrant 2: Blind (Low risk non-emotionally charged content)

This quadrant contains self-disclosure content that individuals are blind to. Individuals are said to be blind to this content because the content that they are unaware of, is completely or obvious to other people. This content and behaviours arising out of it, may include some annoying mannerisms such as tapping one's foot or pencil or even constantly using expressions such as "um" and "you know" or "okay" without realizing it. Sometimes an individual might even think that he or she is clever when actually others look at him or her in disbelief.

### **2.5.3 Quadrant 3: Hidden (High risk, emotionally charged content)**

Quadrant three describes self-disclosure content that is known to oneself but unknown to others. This content may include unimportant facts such as the amount of coffee one drank the previous day, including thoughts, feelings and self-disclosure content that one is afraid to share because of fear of embarrassment and ridicule. Such hidden content may complicate communication and endanger a relationship. For instance, supposing it is difficult to disclose to friends that one cannot be part of a soccer squad to play against another team on a particular day as one would like to accompany one's mother to a function. For fear of being regarded as a mother's baby, one may rather opt to argue against any moves to set a particular date than to reveal one's inner feelings and thoughts.

### **2.5.4 Quadrant 4: Unknown (High risk, emotionally charged content)**

This quadrant's self-disclosure content describes one's underlying motives that are not known to anyone, including oneself, as they (the motives) are comprised mainly of unconscious feelings. For example, one may find oneself constantly arguing with a younger brother because of the unknown jealousy brought about by the attention he (the younger brother) enjoys from parents. Both brothers may not realize that the behaviour is motivated by jealousy. For instance, the younger brother may think that the elder brother is just being funny.

## **2.6 THE PROCESS OF SELF-DISCLOSURE**

According to Kadushin (2000 : 2) self-disclosure is not randomly done. Instead, it is done selectively and in well calculated steps. Kimberly and his colleagues in Serovich, Kimberly and Greene (1998 : 15) highlight six self-disclosure steps in their theory of self-disclosure

which could be made use of in understanding the disclosure process. These steps are as follows:

- Adjusting to the traumatic event
- Evaluating personal disclosure skills
- Taking inventory of who to tell
- Evaluating potential recipient
- Anticipating reactions of the recipient
- Having a motivation for disclosing

With regard to selectivity (that is, taking inventory of who to tell), evaluating potential recipients and anticipating reactions of the recipient, Kelly (1999 : 107) notes that since disclosing involves risks (cf. 2.7.1), secret keepers choose their confidants carefully. Kelly (1999 : 107) notes that such a move is a genuine one because some confidants should never be trusted as they are intrinsically prone to leaking secrets.

Consequently, in disclosing HIV status, men are more likely to disclose to friends and lovers than to the family of origin because of various reasons (Green, 2000 : 260). Other studies support this contention. For instance, Mills (1985 : 68) states that self-disclosure within peers is easier because friends are the main source of support in cases of self-disclosure (Wolitski, Rietmeijer, Goldbaun & Wilson, 1998 : 601). Arata (1998 : 64) noted that reaction by friends after self-disclosure is more favourable than that from parents, because adolescents' and adults' interaction is characterized by the striving for power and the emancipation from parents.

In fact, adolescents find it difficult to disclose to all adults because they tend to associate all adults with their own parents. Kaczmarek and Backlund (1991 : 253) attribute this state

of affairs to the fact that most adults do not realize that adolescents' feelings resemble that of adults. For instance, in one of the studies conducted by Kaczmarek and Backlund (1991 : 253), it was found that adults do not view an adult's loss of a romantic partner in the same way as that of adolescents. As a result of this misconception adolescents' feelings are misunderstood and they are made to feel that disclosing to adults is not useful. In fact, adolescents are similar to adults in many ways (Davis & Benshoff, 1999 : 391-392), and their heterosexual relationships are plagued with problems areas like that of the adults.

An adolescent's grief is minimized and yet loss of a romantic relationship constitutes a major life change for them (ibid). Adults' minimization of the adolescents' loss is expressed in statements such as "you are too young to understand what love is; this wasn't the real thing; you'll feel better tomorrow." While this is being said, the victim would be undergoing depression to an extent where the alternative solution might even be suicide.

## **2.7 SELF-DISCLOSURE IN FAMILIES**

Research findings in families with regard to selectivity of the self-discloser targets is inconsistent but does, however, shed light on the dynamics of self-disclosure in these families. Jourad in Morrison and Burnard (1997 : 149) assert that in families, members of the family disclose selectively to different members of the family. Mothers and the siblings are the first to know, with the father being the last to be informed. Merighi and Grimes (2000 : 32) point out that adolescents tend to disclose to their mothers first, and later to other members of the family. Mothers are chosen probably because they tend to be accepting whereas fathers tend to reject children that disclose to them. Savin-Williams (1998 : 55) found in his research that half of the gay and bisexual males received support from their mothers after self-disclosing. Only twenty percent reported feeling supported by their fathers. Lesbian daughters felt that their fathers were as likely to reject them than to accept them.

Other studies, however, maintain that mothers are generally negative than other members of the family (Arata, 1998 : 63). Burnard and Morrison (1997 : 150) seem to concur with Arata. They assert that self-disclosure seem to be determined by the sex of both the self-discloser and the self-discloser-target. Disclosure to the same sex is higher than to the opposite sex. In same sex, self-disclosure, especially of self-disclosure content that has the potential of making an individual vulnerable, is higher because of the sharing of commonalities of experiences.

It seems, therefore, that the disclosure of areas in which both sexes feel vulnerable, is higher with the same sex parent than the opposite one. In this regard, Harris and Busby (1998 : 252) say that men find it easier to disclose information pertaining to their masculinity (that is aggressiveness and sexual prowess ) and avoid talking about deficits in these masculine areas, especially with women. Likewise, women are comfortable in disclosing feminine characteristics (For example, emotionality and sensitivity) to women than to men.

### **2.7.1 Risks associated with Self-disclosure to family members**

Williamson (1998 : 23) maintains that self-disclosure in families should be handled with care as it carries risks (Harris et al., 1999 : 407) which may translate into behaviours such as the manipulation, embarrassment, exploitation or rejection of the discloser (Schwab, Scalise, Ginter & Whipple, 1998 : 1264) as a result of its negative impact on them (Beeler & Di Prova, 1999 : 443).

In most cases, these behaviours cause family crisis as they create uncertainty, disruption and in more tempestuous cases, chaos which may, however, culminate in acceptance if well handled (Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998 : 7). It is as a result of these families' envisaged negative reaction that the would be disclosers sometimes find it difficult to disclose (Brown,



Russell & Thornton, 1999 : 180).

## **2.8 SEX DIFFERENCES IN SELF-DISCLOSURE**

There are a variety of sex differences (characteristics that can be used to classify human being into either male or female) which appear to be the basis for the difference in self-disclosure. Males and females differ with regard to primary (Papalia & Oaks, 1993 : 419 ; Money & Erhart in Shaffer, 1996 : 516), secondary (Siegel & Senna, 1999 : 222) and psychological characteristics (Butler & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1994 : 331) or personality characteristic such as mental, emotional and social patterns (Reber, 1985 : 715).

### **2.8.1 The origin of sex differences**

#### **2.8.1.1 Primary characteristic**

The characteristics that distinguish males from females start during conception when the female and male chromosomes are combined (Sroufe, Cooper & Dehart, 1992 : 489). The chromosome that determines male or female characteristics is the Y chromosome as its presence or absence paves the way for male and female characteristics, respectively. In this regard Rice (1992 : 35-352) asserts that the standard female chromosomes are XX, whereas that of males are XY.

The Y chromosome paves the way for male and female characteristics, by firstly activating the development of reproductive organs, the gonads, which are testes (singular testis) in males and ovaries in females (Vander, Sherman & Luciano, 1998 : 636). Once the reproductive organs have been developed, they in turn continue the work of differentiation with the secretion of primary sex hormones, which are testosterone and progesterone in males

and females, respectively. All male hormones are collectively called androgens whereas those of females are collectively called estrogens.

#### **2.8.1.2 Secondary characteristics**

According to Sroufe et al. (1992 : 489) the female and male characteristics which started at conception are further maintained and widened during puberty as a result of the influence of hormones. During this stage, females develop wider pelvises, whereas males become taller and also develop stronger skeletons than females (Ember & Ember, 1993 : 287). Females bodies get covered with fat whereas those of males are covered with largely muscles so as to make them strong (Steinberg et al., 1991 : 248). As a result of hormones males and females develop other characteristics peculiar to their sexes such as facial hair and a deep voice in the case of males, and breasts in the case of women (Sroufe, et al., 1992 : 489).

#### **2.8.1.3 Psychological characteristics**

Some authors attribute psychological differences to physical differences (Clarke-Stewart, Friedman & Koch, 1985 : 593) while others attribute them to socialization (Sroufe et al., 1992 : 16). These differences, according to Clarke-Stewart et al. (1985 : 593) exert an influence on how males and females think, feel and behave.

##### **• The influence of physical differences on psychological characteristics**

Various authors illustrate this influence by pointing out the role played by hormones in the development of the emotional being of an individual. For instance, Siegel and Senna (1991 : 222) say that hormones determine the level of aggression. Conklin (1995 : 133) argues that hormones may cause the disturbance of an individual's emotions. Huff in Shaffer (1996

:520 ) maintains that hormones determine the extend of an individual's vulnerability. Konner (1991 : 375) points out that the extend to which emotions can be expressed is determined by the level to which hormones influenced the structure of the brain that deals with emotions. Lastly, Butler and Nolen-Hoeksema (1994 : 331) noted that hormones (ovarian hormone) control mood swings and they may cause higher levels of depression in women than men.

Murdock, Parsons and Bowlby in Haralambos and Holborn, (1991 : 529) illustrate the influence of physical factors on the psychological being of males and females by making reference to what they call gender role theoretical assumptions, namely, biology and practicality, biology and the expressive female theory and the mother/childbond. They argue that physical factors play a role in shaping people's sex roles, which inturn have a bearing on their relationship with children. For instance, the biology and practicality theory holds that it was because of their weaker physical built that the place of women was associated with household chores which included the caring of children. The biology and expressive female theory maintains that mothers enjoy a better relationship with children as compared to fathers because they bear them and raise them, whereas the John Bowlby's mother/child bond theory stipulates that children require a close and intimate relationship with their mothers if they are to triumph in life. Consequently, mothers are in a better position than fathers to relate to their children in a way that makes their children to perceive them as people that they may confide in.

- **Socialization process**

Emotional expression may stem from the socialization process. Socialization, according to Sroufe et al. (1992 : 16) is a theory which maintains that behaviour acquired spontaneously and through modelling, has a tendency of being repeated if the performer is being rewarded for it. This theory, according to Derlega and Berg (1987 : 90) plays a big role in shaping

people's attitudes towards self-disclosure. For instance, men are socialized into concealing, whereas women are encouraged to disclose. Martin et al. 1999 : 287) reason that females learn to use self-disclosure as a way of building and maintaining relationships, whereas males learn that self-disclosure can make them vulnerable, especially in competitive situations. A man that conceals is regarded as being better adjusted than the one who discloses. Women on the other hand are regarded as being well adjusted if they disclose.

### **2.8.2 The effects of sex differences on behaviour**

According to Martin et al. (1999 : 287) the effects of differences regarding behaviour, including self-disclosure, appear to commence in childhood as boys and girls' self-disclosure levels differ, too. The development of these sex differences prepare both males and females for their adult roles and continue to influence their behaviour throughout their lives. These characteristics also put them in a situation where they invite particular kind of evaluation from their children with regard to these roles, which may either be positive or negative (Roediger, 1991 : 364-365).

#### **2.8.2.1 Expression of emotions**

Roediger (1991 : 481) maintains that men and women differ in the way in which they express their emotions, at both verbal and non-verbal levels (Papalia & Oaks, 1993 : 422). For example, women externalize (express emotions in overt ways) whereas men internalize (hide) them both at verbal and non-verbal levels. When men try to externalize their emotions, they express positive emotions to a lesser extent as compared to women. For instance, Papalia and Oaks (1993 : 423) found that women are able to maintain a smiling face and laugh more than men.

Further more, Spencer and Tan (1999 : 75) maintain that men generally are more negative than women in their reactions to the discloser. They tend to blame the occurrence of a disclosed event (such as abuse) on the survivor. Dolgin and Berndt (1997 : 431) assert that mothers disclose more emotionally charged information on a more variety of topics than fathers. Fathers' self-disclosure content, on the other hand, is lacking in emotional content and it is seen as being aimed at domination. Bograd and Spilka (1996 : 162) assert that women generally disclose more than men although both sexes disclose more to women (especially mothers) than to men (Burton & Dimpleby (1989 : 33). Lastly, men find it easy to disclose information of a certain nature better than all types of information. For example, they seem to disclose more than women, but only where it concerns anxiety reduction (Eisenhower, 1977 : 150 ).

In support of the externalization and internalization theory of emotions, Dysregrove, Kristoffersen, Matthiessen and Mitchell (1994 : 379) maintain that women share their emotional experiences with ease and they tend to talk about issues that are emotionally charged. Men on the other hand, avoid talking about issues that involve their emotional life (Lippa, 1994 : 346). Consequently, fathers are perceived to be less warm and affectionate to their children as compared to mothers even if their involvement in child rearing is of a satisfactory nature (Berndt, Cheung, Lau, Hau & Lew, 1993 : 161).

Likewise, Koner (1991 : 311) points out in his discussion of the five major interpersonal behaviours (which are nurturance, dependency, prosocial dominance, egoistic dominance and sociability) that females are nurturant whereas men tend to be dominating. These behaviours foster the development of particular kinds of relationships which call for different levels of self-disclosure. According to Jones, Bloys and Wood (1990 : 134) these types of relationships are face to face and side to side friendships which are peculiar to females and males, respectively. Men's types of friendship is repulsive whereas that of females attracts.

The women's act of revealing their emotions put them in a better position (as compared to men) to be evaluated positively by other people, including their children (Rathus, 1988 : 492).

#### **2.8.2.2 Male and female qualities**

The interplay between primary, secondary and psychological factors determine whether an individual acquires instrumental qualities, such as a need for power or expressive qualities, such as the tendency to be submissive (Doob, 1994 : 273) although other authors have different views. For instance, Money and Erhardt in Shaffer (1996 : 519) believe that these qualities have their origin in biological factors whereas Westen (1996 : 541), appears to be convinced that they originate from socialization. The former qualities are masculine in nature and therefore predominantly peculiar to men whereas the latter are feminine in nature and therefore peculiar to females (Smelser, 1991 : 214). Whatever the source of these qualities is, the fact of the matter is that they do exist and they influence people's behaviours. They translate into different behaviours which include behaviour towards self-disclosure which is perceived either positively or negatively.

### **2.9 USEFULNESS/ ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF SELF-DISCLOSURE**

Self-concealment has a detrimental effect on those who get involved with it. It negatively affects all aspects of being human such as the physical, psychological, cognitive aspects (Cepeda-Benito & Short, 1998 : 58 ) and interpersonal relationships (Williamson, 1998 : 24; Burton & Dimbleby, 1989 : 31 ). Interpersonal relationship are disturbed when people realize that someone deceives or conceals himself or herself. For example, Kelly (1998 : 52) found that keeping intimate information secret has been associated with more

interpersonal conflict.

Inhibiting the expression of emotional experience, may give rise to disturbing thought intrusions and images, and increased attention to emotion-relevant information may result in chronic states of negative mood and ultimately compromise an individual's ability to deal effectively with emotional upsetting experiences. It is perhaps as a function of mood related processes such as selective attention and thought intrusions that catastrophizers (defined as an exaggerated negative orientation to aversive stimuli that involves rumination about painful situations, magnification of the threat value of the painful stimuli, and perceived inability to control pain) experience more pain than non-catastrophizers (Sullivan & Nesish, 1999 : 155). It is, therefore, through anxiety reduction by means of self-disclosure that people gain healthy mental health (Tubb & Baird, 1976 : 10).

The negative effect of concealment may also be explained by means of a cancer-prone personality type theory (Derlega & Berg, 1987 : 231). This personality type has a tendency to conceal or suppress negative emotions such as anger. The suppression of these feelings may pave the way for the development of cancer. When people with this personality type suffer from cancer, chances of recovery are prompted if they are made to disclose.

Concealment, therefore, causes both physical and psychological problems because it does not promote active and effective coping with major negative life-events (Finkenauer & Rime, 1998 : 296). Self-disclosure, on the other hand, is a necessary pre-condition for both psychological and physical health.

### **2.9.1 Healing effect**

Various authors advance various reasons and supportive research as to why self-disclosure

is advantageous to one's well-being. Kelly et al. (2000 : 295) asserts that self-disclosure makes some people to feel better. Green (2000 : 257) argues that if children are to be psychologically healthy they should "come out to parents". Likewise, Anchin and Kiesler (1987 : 230) maintain that face-to-face self-disclosure to significant others can be therapeutic. Feldman (1990 : 539) cites a study where it was found that subjects who disclosed deep seated personal material intensively showed significantly lower levels of skin conductance of electrical charges, heart rate and blood pressure than subjects who did not disclose information of that nature.

Sullivan and Nesish (1999 : 155) discuss the healing power of self-disclosure with reference to an exposure to aversive situations. They point out that disclosing emotional content following an exposure to aversive situations may have beneficial effects on physical (for example, rheumatoid arthritis) and emotional well-being (personal trauma or loss). Paez, Velasco and Gonzalez (1999 : 630 ) maintain that revealing has healing powers because of its ability to offer new insights into the trauma which enables an individual to no longer use a lot of cognitive and emotional resources actively to hide trauma. The gaining of insight is made possible by the fact that in the process of making a disclosure, individuals are simultaneously compelled to place a cognitive structure on their experiences (Lutgendorf & Antoni, 1999 : 424).

The establishment of a structure is a prerequisite in the delivery of coherent messages. In order to be understood by the discloser-target the discloser is forced to formulate his or her thoughts in a coherent meaningful way, for individuals do not only have a need to talk, but they also have a need to be understood which is referred to as perceived understanding (Martin et al., 1999 : 281). These authors noted that this need is fulfilled when a communicator feels that his or her message, including self-disclosure messages, have been successfully communicated. Better understanding helps in the elimination of



misunderstandings by others as others tend to understand our motives and intentions better with the result that mistrust and misunderstandings are reduced (Tubb & Baird, 1976 : 10).

The use of less cognitive and emotional resources enhances an individual's immune-system functioning to enable the body to heal (Richards, Beal, Seagal & Pennebaker, 2000 : 156). The enhancement of the immune functioning is brought about by the fact that talking about a psychological issue that has a bearing on the physical symptom, tends to dissolve the link between the two (King & Holden, 1998 : 359). In their research, Beal et al. (2000 : 156) found that gay men who were more open about their sexual orientation were physically healthier than those who were secretive about this aspect of themselves.

In the process of this cognitive structuring, further reorganization or integration of cognitions and feelings related to an experience, takes place. King and Holden (1998 : 361) argue that the self-disclosure material that relieves stress and enhances good health, is the one that integrates emotional and cognitive content. Such self-disclosure further promotes the construction of coherent meaningful narrative.

The labeling of feelings, which is associated with the reduction of perceived intensity of the experience, affords individuals with increased sense of control over the affective experience. Further still, in addressing memories of traumatic or highly stressful events, the more complete the accessing of the relevant schema, the more amenable it may be to restructuring. If emotions are superficially processed they tend to leave some of the most relevant schemas inactivated and thus untouched. Consequently, the reorganization or integration of feelings with cognitions makes the labeling of feelings possible. Therefore success in drawing an individual to inner experiences is thought to be an important predictor of therapeutic change (Lutgendorf & Antoni, 1999 : 424).

It is therefore imperative that the total inner self of an individual be fully explored if healing is to take place. Lutgebldorf and Antoni (1999 : 425-426) explain this point by means of the stress response syndrome model and its resolution. According to this model, cognitive and emotional processing of traumatic experiences is characterized by alternating cycles of intrusion (for example, being reminded about the event intruding into one's awareness even when engaged in other thoughts or activities) and avoidance (avoiding thinking about the event). Information processing is difficult, if not impossible, during avoidance ( the objective is to protect the individual from being overwhelmed by emotions, thoughts and memories). If resolution is to take place, an individual should be made to face the avoided topics.

Inhibition of information makes it difficult or may even prevent an individual from fully processing the event, with the result that the inhibited information resurfaces in the form of mental ruminations or dreams (Finkenauer & Rime, 1998 : 298). Lane and Wegner's model of secrecy in Finkenauer and Rime (1998 : 298) sheds more light on the rumination and dream phenomenon. According to this model secrecy leads to the suppression of thoughts related to the event. Thought suppression, unfortunately, makes the thoughts hyper accessible to the consciousness, which in turn lead to intrusive unwanted thoughts (Kelly, 1998 : 52). A vicious circle is established when the unwanted thoughts lead to renewed efforts to suppression which in turn instigate more intrusive thoughts. This emotional secrecy also leads to failure to assimilate and understand the event.

### **2.9.2 Relationship establishment**

According to Festinger in Allman (1998 : 175) self-disclosure serves numerous positive relational as well as individual functions. According to Vittengl and Holt (2000 : 54) self-disclosure, reciprocal self-disclosure for that matter helps individuals satisfy the need to belong through the facilitation of relationships, and thereby reduce loneliness (Martin et

al.,1999 : 282). In Tubb and Baird's (1976 : 10) view, self-disclosure reduces loneliness because it brings man closer to God through intimate and deeper experience with others.

Taylor in Waring, Holden and Wesley (1998 : 808) considers self-disclosure to be the major process through which relationships between people develop. Matsushima, Shiomi and Kuhlman (2000 : 333) assert that the usefulness of self-disclosure lies in the fact that it makes friendship formation and the maintenance thereof possible.

In support of this argument, Greenberg, Ford, Alden and Johnson (1993 : 78) and Ladany and Melincoff (1999 : 162) maintain that self-disclosure leads to relationship establishment through the establishment of trust. That is, self-disclosure invites honesty (Hamachek, 1990 : 441) and trust (Burton & Dimpleby, 1989 : 33). Miller and Boon (2000 : 43) define trust in terms of an individual's beliefs about the nature of another's motives. Waring et al. (1998 : 25) point out that trust is established when through self-disclosure, individuals are able to coordinate necessary actions and reduce ambiguity about another's intentions and the meaning of their behaviour. Positive relationship breed further positivity in that reciprocity of exchange is of a positive nature.

It is through the verbalizations of one's emotions that trust is deepened. Relationship partners should therefore reciprocate trust to their partners through self-disclosure (Burton & Dimpleby, 1989 : 33) which may be conveyed through one of the positive reactions, namely, accepting and tolerance, as opposed to negative reactions, such as intolerance and rejection (Henderson, 1998 : 373).

The deepening of trust is enhanced because self-disclosure reduces barriers to intimate communication (Kadushin, 1990 : 224-227). Taylor et al. (1997 : 263) assert that once the barriers to intimate communication are reduced, the deepening of trust takes place through

a process called social penetration which refers to the penetration of another person beyond the surface to gain greater knowledge about the persons inner self. In support of the social penetration theory, Calhoun and Acocella (1990 : 370) point out that this theory maintains that individuals' knowledge of each other goes beyond physical familiarity such as getting to know each others' personality traits such as emotions and attitudes.

Calhoun and Acocella (1990 : 370) maintain that intimate communication should be about the inner self and not about non-intimate material (for instance, about how bad the weather is). In such conversations, an individual's defenses should be temporarily lowered so as to enable oneself to reveal one's vulnerable self. An individual should, therefore, present himself or herself not in the way in which he or she would like the world to perceive him or her. He or she should present himself or herself in the way in which he or she knows himself or herself (that is, this conversation is about conveying our subjective world as it is).

Self-disclosure of this nature makes other people to develop a favourable perception of the discloser, that is, liking (Gary & Kahn in Tubb & Baird, 1976 : 11), and satisfaction with the discloser (Martin et al., 1999 : 282), which in-turn makes them to be attracted to the discloser. The attractiveness of the self-discloser is made possible by the fact that favourable perceptions elicit positive ratings such as the self-discloser being regarded as being trustworthy and empathic (Simone, McCarthy & Skay, 1998 : 174), and reduces negative affect, such as anger and guilt (Vittengl & Holt, 2000 : 54).

### **2.9.3 Adaptation to new environment**

Self-disclosure has also been found to enhance adaptation in a new unfamiliar environment. Bell and Bromnick (1998 : 745-746) point out that where students experienced high levels of loneliness and depression, self-disclosure of personal thoughts and feelings assisted them

to adjust and to adapt to their new environment with ease. Bromnick and Bell (1998 : 747) found in the study of students' homesickness on entering university that homesickness reduced considerably among students who disclosed. Such students' participation level increased (Goldstein and Benassi in Warmbath & Brothen, 1997 : 262). On the other hand, those who did not, continued to suffer from homesickness despite the social support they received.

#### **2.9.4 Improvement of the self-concept**

Tubb and Baird (1976 : 10) argue that meaningful living is derived from, among others, self-acceptance, and one's own self-acceptance is based on acceptance by others. Others tend to like and accept individuals who reveal themselves to them. According to Burnard and Morrison (1992 : 70) one of the main causes of lack of self-esteem is the absence of someone to confide in. Failure to confide in someone tempers with the establishment of intimacy, and the absence of intimacy leads to isolation which may be accompanied by anxiety and depression. Anxious and depressed people lack self-esteem. Lack of personal disclosure, therefore, leads to rejection and consequently to a low self-esteem.

Keller (1975 : 2) notes that low self-disclosers are not only rejected by others, but they are also alienated from themselves. People who are rejected and alienated from themselves are not in a position to develop a stable self-image. They are also unable to experience personal growth, which is defined as growth in our knowledge of ourselves and others which is supposed to make an individual experience a sense of humanity. Consequently, they are unable to develop self-esteem (Burtons & Dimbleby, 1989 : 33).

### **2.9.5 Anxiety reduction**

Self-disclosure appears to reduce or eliminate negative emotional states that may hamper the development and maintenance of healthy relationships. Bottled up information may lead to pathology as a result of the guilt that accompanies concealment (Tubb & Baird, 1976 : 10 ). Kadushin (1990 : 227) points out that self-disclosure, through the sharing of similar negative experiences, reduces anxiety because it makes people feel that they are not alone in some difficult situations.

Eisenhower (1977 : 4) argues that the reduction of anxiety through self-disclosure during adolescent period contributes towards the achievement of a critical developmental task in the adolescent interpersonal relationships. The process of breaking away from parents to create his own identity in relation to his or her peer group is characterized by anxiety. These adolescents who manage to disclose to their parents tend to experience healthier adjustment as compared to those who do not disclose. Failure to disclose lead to heightened levels of anxiety which interferes with the establishment of interpersonal relationships.

### **2.10 SELF-CONCEALMENT**

Finkenauer and Hazam (2000 : 246) argue that if people do not disclose they conceal, a process known as self-concealment, because disclosure and secrecy are regarded as the opposite sides of the same coin. In this regard Cozby in Kahn (1976 : 1) argues that self-disclosure has two sides which work against each other.

Although people are supposed to disclose in order to enjoy physical and mental health, there are, however, times when they avoid self-disclosure (Freud, Fong & Cox in Kelly, 1998 : 50) because they are compelled to do so for various reasons (Scorzelli & Gold, 1999 : 113).

For instance, Feeney, Noller and Patty (1993 : 170) suggest that it could be because of attachment styles developed in childhood that adolescents conceal. While individuals with secure attachment style report high levels of disclosure, reflecting their emphasis on intimacy, those with the avoidant attachment style disclose less to intimate partners (that is, to lovers and same sex friends) than to opposite sex friends, reflecting their desire to maintain distance. Anxious/ambivalent subjects show high disclosure but a lack of disclosure flexibility, suggesting compulsive attachment aimed at alleviating fear of rejection.

Secondly, revealing one's authenticity, that is one's real self is, risky ( Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000 : 246). What makes it risky is that if someone knows you well enough to give assistance in need, she or he knows, too, how to hurt you (Dawis, Fruehling & Oldham, 1989 : 268). As a result of the risk involved in self-disclosure, people choose to conceal.

Concealment is, however, sometimes not indefinite. Kinzl and Biebl in Brown, Russell and Thornton (1999 : 180) maintain that people's duration of concealment differ from one individual to the other. For instance, Smith, Letourneur, Saunders, Kilpatrick, Resnick and Best (2000 : 274) found that among children who manage to disclose, disclosure is delayed. In support of this argument, Arata (1998 : 63) point out that "it has been found that some children do not disclose their victims (sexual abuser) until adulthood, or possibly not even then". It has also been found that even though there are those who disclose in childhood, it appears as if the average age of first self-disclosure is twenty five years.

There are two main categories of people who cannot disclose, namely, shy and lonely people. According to Baron and Byrne (1991 : 283) lonely people disclose very little about themselves because they are not inclined to provide intimate self-disclosures because of fear (Hamid & Lok, 2000 : 48). They fear that friends may react negatively to their self-disclosures by being critical and failing to maintain the confidentiality of self-disclosure

material. As a result of their failure to disclose they uphold their loneliness.

The other category of people who cannot disclose is that of shy people (Cheek & Buss in Matsushima, 2000 : 333). They cannot disclose because of the way in which they behave in the presence of strangers. In the presence of strangers (and acquaintances, too, sometimes), they become tense as a result of the aversion of gaze, feeling awkward and the inhibition of normally expected social behaviour. These authors suggest that shyness could be caused by a lack of daily social skills such as the ability to initiate a discussion. Rytting (1975 : 45) asserts that these people are unable to engage in social activities that promote healthy living such as the establishment of loving relationships with others.

### **2.10.1 Factors influencing self-concealment**

Although the after effects of self-concealment are said to be disastrous, Jourard in Kahn (1976 : 2) maintains that there are various factors that ensure its maintenance because of the rewards they afford a concealer. These factors protect an individual from pain, even though pleasure derives from such an exercise may be short-lived unless if a balance is struck between self-disclosure and self-concealment. There are several inhibitors of self-disclosure (Palmer et al., 1999 : 261-263).

#### **2.10.1.1 Self-presentation**

Sometimes self-concealment is used negatively and in an illusive manner through various means such as the management of privacy (refraining to talk about oneself), self-suppression (that is, disclosure avoidance) and selectivity of self-disclosure content, to enhance the image of the self (Goode, 1999 : 303). The purpose of engaging in self-concealment activities is to deliberately present ourselves incorrectly to others, a process known as self-



presentation or impression management. Through this technique, individuals hope to convey false aspirations, intentions, credentials, attributes and potential with an aim of manipulating others so as to make them accept the positive image of the self which is known to be admired by the society (Tubbs & Moss, 1974 : 215).

Hamid and Lok (2000 : 458) argue that in self-presentation, individuals either avoid, suppress or select beliefs, ideas, thoughts and feelings that would create a favourable impression about themselves. In such self-disclosure there is a tendency to disclose a little bit more when the subject of disclosure is perceived as a product of situational constraints than when it is perceived to be personal deficit.

Self-disclosure used in this fashion benefits the self (Kadushin, 2000 : 3) and it is used as a target-directed tactic (that is used to induce positive feelings in the target person) in a selfish manner. Such self-disclosure is associated with other selfish target-directed tactics such as flattery, expressing agreement with the target person's views, and self-deprecation, that is, providing negative information about oneself as a means of promoting the image of modesty (Baron & Byrne, 1991 : 329).

An example of self-disclosure used to create a favourable impression about the self is found in Lowenstein's (1999 : 587) research. In one incident it was found that a fireman confessed during police interviewing to having started a series of fires because he wanted the investigating officer to be pleased with him.

Sigurdsson and Dudjonsson in Lowenstein (1999 : 587) say that people who disclose by way of giving false confessions have personality problems. They say, for instance, that they are high on the approval scale and that they have an anti-social personality, low intelligence which makes them to experience learning problems. They are also being perceived as being

evasive, incompetent, not very likable and sometimes even mentally ill (Papsdorf & Alden, 1998 : 352). They may be considered to have a negative affect which is associated with ulterior motives such as the motivation for social control and dominance in conversations.

**(a) Self-suppression as a form of self-presentation**

According to Savin-Williams (1998 : 62) self-suppression may take different forms, which are, among others as follows:

- Maintaining an emotional or geographical distance from the discloser targets
- Becoming independent with little physical or verbal contact with discloser targets
- Avoidance of any discussion of personal issues by establishing a “demilitarized zone”
- Evasion of indirect questions

Hastings (2000 : 85-87) further notes that self-suppression appears to be culturally universal. There are, however, some cultural groups that engage in it more than others. In this regard Burton and Dimbleby (1989 : 33) maintain that the values of one’s cultural or sub-cultural group determine the extend to which one may disclose. Self-suppression used in this way is thought to be sensible within a specific group, and as such it becomes a sensible means through which a cultural group’s identity is expressed.

As a result of these values, which are instilled in people through the use of the socialization process which differs from one cultural group to the other (Wayne, 1995 : 123), people develop dishonest patterns of reporting which are either overreporting or underreporting. For instance, in one study it was found that low income Black parents socialized their daughters to be outspoken and strong because of the realization that if their daughters were passive and quiet, they would simply disappear in a society in which they and their daughters were

ready pushed to the margins. The material disclosed is therefore inauthentic.

**b) Selective self-disclosure**

In disclosing inauthentic disclosure material for manipulative purposes, the discloser discloses in a selective, dishonest manner, with the authentic material being censored. What makes selective disclosure possible, according to Allman (1998 : 178-179) is that self-disclosure is a voluntary act that is strictly guarded by the discloser. In his discussion of the general boundary management theory, he states that individuals create metaphoric protective boundaries that they can use to manage the flow of private information from self to others, and it is through self-disclosure that these boundaries are controlled.

The censorship is sometimes being guided by the nature of identities people have (McKenna & Bargh, 1998 : 682). According to this phenomenon, some people possess mainstream and culturally valued identities, whereas others possess culturally devalued identities which are potentially embarrassing to reveal (Ryan & Boxer, 1998 : 135). Some cultural identities are devalued because they have been stigmatized or marginalized (Gerbert, Bronstone, Pantilat, McPhee, Allerton & More, 1999 : 105).

The marginalization (which then becomes the devalued identities) of some information is caused by the attitudinal barriers and negative beliefs towards certain possible subjects for self-disclosure (D'Augelli, Hersberger & Pilkington, 1999 : 361). For instance, Leask, Sabin, Miller, Jarret and Johnson (1998 : 165) maintain that there is a belief that people who are infected with HIV engaged in highly stigmatized behaviours such as homosexuality and intravenous drug use. People with epilepsy, former prison inmates, those with nonstream sexual interests or political views are said to be possessing culturally devalued identities which are extremely difficult to disclose (Chin & Kroesen, 1999 : 222).

The culturally devalued identities may further be divided into two, namely, concealable and conspicuous identities. Those with concealable identities find it difficult to disclose because disclosing is embarrassing to themselves and the listeners. What makes the information even more difficult to disclose is that sometimes individuals are exposed to negative comments and opinions of other people. Hearing such opinions is likely to reinforce the negative effect of the marginalized identity on the individual's self-esteem and thereby further enhance selectivity. According to Hewstone et al. (1989 : 134) selective self-disclosure may be due to an individual's quest for approval from others.

### **(c) Managing privacy**

In the process of presenting oneself favourably or managing the self, individuals are also compelled to manage their privacy. That is, access to private information is controlled with the objective of avoiding talking about oneself (Petronio in Allman, 1998 : 179). In the same breath, Harris et al. (1999 : 405-406) maintain that self-disclosure is not a random activity, but a controlled one. In support of the general boundary management theory (2.10.1.1) Hewstone et al. (1989 : 230) maintain that self-disclosure is done with care and strategically. And as such, individuals are regarded as gate-keepers who through this act minimize vulnerability and thereby maintain their individuality, autonomy and personal identity which gives them a sense of locus of control.

Although people try hard to control access to their self-disclosure content, it appears as if this exercise is sometimes futile as they only have control on direct self-disclosure. People may gain access to someone else's self-disclosure content through the self-discloser's indirect and accidental self-disclosures, although it should be accepted that indirect and accidental self-disclosures can not be rich in content like direct self-disclosure (Setsena in Sunday Sun, 18 November 2001 : 26).

John Luft and Harry Ingram in Quin (1990 : 392) seem to support Setsena. In their discussion of the self-disclosure content with the use of the Johari window (cf 2.5) these authors point out that people do not have control over certain self-disclosure content as they are either unaware of this content whereas others are aware of it or it is inherently obvious to himself or herself and other people. Consequently, the former type of self-disclosure content may be leaked to others whereas the latter is always on display.

#### **2.10.1.2 Maintenance of healthy interpersonal relationships**

In the process of privacy management, people also find it possible to establish and maintain relationships. Under such circumstances self-concealment is used as an interpersonal skill to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships (McKendrick & Hoffman, 1990 : 360). Self-concealment may, for instance, be used in the following ways to establish and maintain relationships:

- To protect a listener against embarrassment a discloser may shower a listener with praises for putting on a beautiful dress, when in fact she or he may not be admiring the dress.
- For relational stability when the speaker aims at avoiding conflict (agreeing with the listener's valued beliefs even though you may regard them to be irrational).
- For psychological compensation in order to present a favourable social image for example, one may say sorry, I cannot join you tonight. I have so many other colleagues I have arranged to see already, when you are actually lonely and bored).

Although the rate of success with regard to the use of self-concealment to maintain relationships appear to be low, Wiener et al. (1998 : 116-117) maintain that disclosers try to maintain relations by avoiding hurting their disclosure targets through this irresponsible

social technique.

### **2.10.1.3 Emotional reasons**

Sometimes after having disclosed, individuals experience behaviours and emotional problems at the hands of their discloser-targets (Shalhoub-Kervorkian et al., 1999 : 1289). Palmer et al. (1999 : 261-263) identified fear and self-blame as the main reasons why people find it difficult to self-disclose. The would be disclosers belief that a tool for the avoidance of fear and self-blame is self-concealment.

#### **(a) Avoidance of fear through self-concealment**

The would be disclosers usually have fears that follow self-disclosure. They are threatened by the discloser-targets' negative reactions, and their own imagined reactions. Reaction to self-disclosure appears to be influenced by the socio-economic development of people. In societies which are bound by patriarchal views, self-disclosure content has a high chance of being nullified as opposed to contemporary societies where acknowledgment stands a better chance (Shalhoub-Kervorkian et al., 1999 : 1287).

Reactions to traumatic self-disclosure are of two kinds, namely, emotional and behavioural reactions. Both these types of reactions may affect the self-discloser and the self-discloser-target. According to LaSala (2000 : 67) the negative emotional reactions, which are externalized by the discloser targets are, among others, shock, guilt, anger, embarrassment and avoidance (also referred to as distancing or disengagement). D' Augelli, Hershberger and Pilkington (1998 : 361) point out that initial responses to self-disclosure are shock and surprise, followed by psychological distress.

Williamson (1998 : 23) asserts that these reactions or responses run in stages which are ranked differently by various authors. For instance, some authors' sequence is denial, anger, bargaining and depression whereas others ranking is as follows: Shock/disbelief/embarrassment, anger/rejection, fear/worry/anxiety, sadness/sorrow and hopefulness/love/acceptance. In avoidance, the disclosure content is discounted and an assumption is made that the opposite of the disclosure content exists. For example, if a son discloses that he is gay, an observing person may assume that his son is actually heterosexual. Since depression is an unpleasant feeling, observing people try to protect themselves from such unpleasant feelings by keeping the disclosers at arms length.

These self-discloser targets' emotional reactions may translate into behavioural reactions which self-disclosers fear. They fear being discriminated against, disruption of relationships, not wanting to worry others, loss of financial support, emotional self-protection, stigmatization, loss of intimacy, physical violence, sexual abuse and extrusion from home and fear of being isolated and lonely (Keller, von Sadowszky, Pankratz & Hermsen, 2000 : 287) which may culminate in reactions such as, among others, maltreatment. Maltreatment may take different forms such as being disowned (rejected) by parents, thereby losing one's ties to biological kin (Green, 2000 : 258).

There are several reasons why individuals that disclose may be rejected. According to King and Holden (1998 : 358) it appears as if one of the reasons why disclosers may be rejected is that disclosure material has a tendency of depressing the observing persons. Depression emanates from the way in which the observing persons react to self-disclosure. Some react negatively whereas others react positively. Negative feelings are felt because such feelings threaten social order and homeostasis (Shalhoub-Kervorkian et al., 1999 : 1277 ).

The self-discloser-targets' emotional reactions may induce the same kind of behaviours in

the self-discloser which may culminate in behavioural reactions. Consequently, self-disclosers fear that they may turn to substance abuse and criminal activities following the disclosure (Salvin-Williams, 1998 : 59). Brown et al. (1999 : 180) noticed responses to self-discloser-targets' negative reactions such as regression and acting out behaviours such as running away, self-mutilation, hiding away and angry outbursts and sometimes even suicide.

Men and women's perception of these negative emotions differ. For instance, men and women seem to fear rejection for different reasons. Spencer and Tan (1999 : 74-75) advance several reasons that explain why men fear rejection. Firstly, men fear social rejection for violating the male sex role. Traditionally, men are expected to be strong both physically and emotionally. Any man that is overpowered and sexually abused is regarded as either unmanly or homosexual. It is also thought that he could have allowed the sexual abuse to take place if the abuser is a woman.

Men's fear of rejection appears to be justified when one considers the myth complicity. In terms of the myth complicity, which states that men desire and are willing participants in any heterosexual activity, Mendel in Spencer and Tan (1999 :75) sum up the men's traditional sex role as follows: "If he was abused he mustn't be a man and if he's a man he mustn't have been abused". Male sexual abuse is ruled out because it is also believed, although erroneously (Spencer & Tan, 1999 : 75) that there are other inherent male characteristics that make sexual abuse impossible in men. For instance, it is believed that a male cannot achieve or maintain an erection when threatened or attacked (Finkenor & Russell in Spencer & Tan, 1999 : 75 ).

#### **(b) Avoidance of self-blame through self-concealment**

Some women tend to accept abuse once they have self-disclosed because they blame



themselves for it (Dunham & Senn, 2000 : 258). Those who suffer from self-blame, feel that they are the cause of the problem and as such it would be in their interest to avoid self-disclosure. In Hill, Gelso and Mohr's (2000 : 496) opinion, keeping a secret under such circumstances makes some people feel comfortable as the relationship does not lose its balance due to self-disclosure. It is through the maintenance of the balance in the relationship that an individual hopes to maintain the existing emotional closeness which is accompanied by support from significant others (Wiener et al., 1998 : 116-117).

#### **2.10.1.4 Characteristics of the self-disclosure material**

Whereas some people find themselves being pressurized to talk about traumatizing self-disclosure content (cf 2.2.3), others on the contrary, seek to avoid it (traumatizing self-disclosure content). Finkenauer and Rime (1998 : 297) mention two characteristics of self-disclosure material that makes people to conceal information, namely, intensity and the quality of the information which is supposed to be disclosed. An extremely distressing emotional experience (high level intensity event) tends to elicit two different kinds of reactions. In the first instance, victims may avoid conversations associated with this event as well as activities, places or people that arouse its recollection.

The study conducted by Palmer et al. (1999 : 262) support this contention. In their study, this authors found teenagers reported that they tried to tell their parents about their traumatic experiences but were unable to find words to do so. Dunham and Senn (2000 : 258) illustrate this point by referring to the severity of women's abuse. Their contention is that the more severe the abuse, the more likely an abused woman would omit relevant abusive information because while they need help, they also keep away information that might prompt the aggressor to negate their self-disclosure.

With regard to the qualitative aspect, there is a tendency among victims of major life events to exaggerate the extent to which they are responsible for what happened and to blame themselves for the event. Like in the first instance with the intensity of the emotional experience, victims may actively avoid public confrontation and interpersonal situations as a result of guilt and shame emanating from perceptions of the event. For instance, in a research conducted by Dahl in Finkenauer and Rime (1998 : 297) it was found that out of the eighty five percent of the victims of rape who experienced guilt and ninety one percent who experienced shame, only eighteen percent reported their cases to the police.

## **2.11 CONCLUSION**

Self-disclosure is utilized in interpersonal relationships as a means to an end. It is a communication skill whose dynamics should be understood so as to enhance interpersonal relationships.

People self-disclose with a purpose and various reasons for self-disclosing were discussed. The purpose for self-disclosure and relationship type appears to determine the nature of information to be disclosed .

People who understand this dynamics are in a position to engage in meaningful relationships and by so doing avoid loneliness. The establishment of relationships and successful maintenance thereof has many physical and psychological advantages whereas loneliness has many negative effects on both the psychological, physical aspect of people and one's social life.

The extend of self-disclosure is also dependent on some factors, which if well known may be used by disclosure-targets to enhance self-disclosure. There are, however, times when

people engage in self-concealment. Some aspects of self-concealment were discussed in this chapter with a view to making a comparison between the two phenomena. From this discussion it seems as if self-disclosure has many advantages in interpersonal relationships as compared to self-concealment.

In the next chapter, attention will be paid to interpersonal relationships.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SELF-DISCLOSURE

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Among the various human activities that clearly render an individual human, is self-disclosure. Morris and Burnard (1992 : 60) maintain that self-disclosure is the most basic form of human encounter in which man reveals himself to another. In this regard Harris, Dersch and Mittal (1999 : 405) argue that it is a spontaneous everyday life activity whose existence in a developing child starts to reveal itself from the time when a need to express one's inner subjective world in a meaningful way arises. This is the time when a need to share one's emotions with other individuals in order to establish meaningful relationships becomes an issue during adolescence (Cook, 2000 : 286).

Hurlock (1980 : 232) reasons that the value adolescents attach to self-disclosure in the establishment of relationships is indicated by the extent to which they engage in self-disclosure activities during adolescent years as compared to their earlier developmental period. He asserts that self-disclosure increases dramatically from grade eight, and it appears to reach a peak in grade twelve (see figure 1).

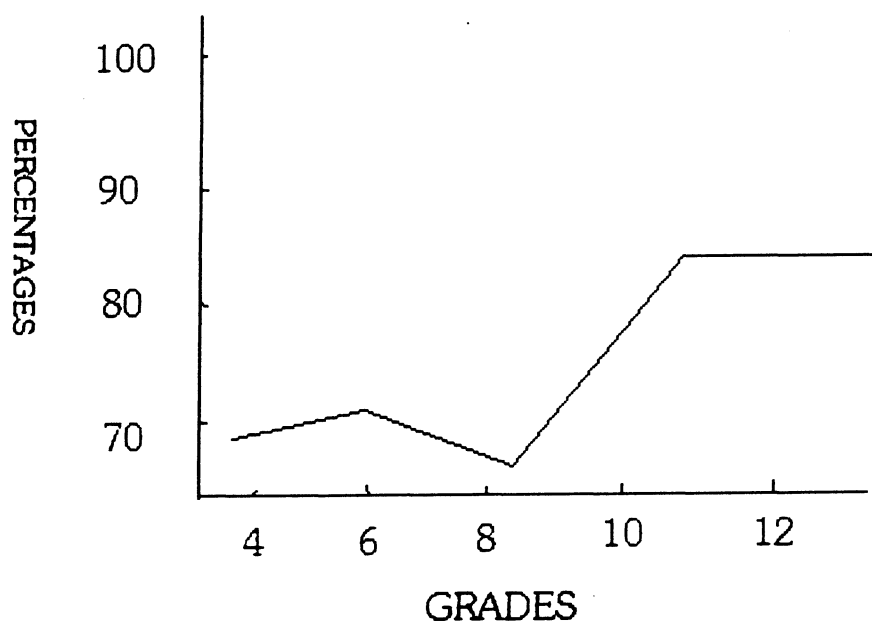


Figure 2.1 Rate of adolescents' self-disclosure according to grades

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

#### **.1 INTRODUCTION**

Green and Sanford (1983 : 10) maintain that man is forced to share his life with other people (that is, his parents, friends, lovers, co-workers, teachers and employers) whether he likes it or not because he has a basic need to belong (McKenna & Bargh, 1998 : 681). In this regard, Furman and Buhrmester (1992 : 103) maintain that individuals have personal relationships with a number of people in their social networks. As such, an individual cannot be seen and described “as a lone subject” in an impersonal environment, but should be seen as part of a total environment (Heider in Shaw & Costanzo, 1982 : 137) where relationships, according to Arditti and Kelly (1994 : 61) are interdependent.

Leis, Lin, Bennett and Nezlek (1993 : 633) noted that in this enforced encounter, social interaction is so important that adolescents’ much waking time is spent in thinking about interpersonal relationships. Social interaction is regarded as important because of its rewarding value. Its value lies in the fact that it is a source of happiness, whereas the lack thereof leads to loneliness.

Satisfying relationships, especially for lonely individuals, may be obtained through the use of effective social skills (Schwab et al., 1998 : 1265). Wick-Nelson and Israel (1997 : 158) define an interpersonal skill as a technique to assist one to get along with others, and the ability to function in the social environment. Interpersonal skills are indispensable in our lives because virtually all human activities involve other people (Bassis, Gelles & Levine, 1999 : 138 : 139).

likewise, Flora and Segrin (1999 : 803-804) maintain that the establishment and

maintenance of relationships is dependent on effective social skills. These social skills such as the identification of interpersonal problems, generation of possible solutions, prediction of the consequences of different actions and the description of other people's feelings involved in a situation so as to recognize emotional responses that keep people apart, (Green & Sanford, 1983 : 10) need to be taught and learned (Bornstein & Lamb, 1988 : 572). Rice (1992 : 225) considers the ability to engage in these social activities as a function of interpersonal intelligence which is a product of social skills learned. He defines interpersonal intelligence as the ability to understand others, how they feel, what motivates them, and how they interact.

Gardener in Gage and Berliner (1998 : 76-77) who defines interpersonal intelligence as the ability to make use of cues in our complex social environment, our families, friends, schools and clubs, maintains that interpersonal intelligence (also called social intelligence) should be taught like all other forms of intelligence such as linguistic and intrapersonal intelligence. In a research conducted by Shure and Spivak in Rice (1992 : 92), it was found that children who were subjected to an interpersonal skills program improved their social adjustment. It was also found that the adjustment was not due to intellectual functioning.

Flora and Segrin (1999 : 803-804) maintain that people who possess these social skills experience many positive social and psychological circumstances such as high self-esteem, social support which in turn make them to make others feel good about themselves. Webster-Stratton and Herbert's (1994 : 183-184) view is that the adolescent's ability to deal with interpersonal difficulties through the use of interpersonal problem-solving skills is made possible if these skills are learned from positive experiences in the family. Such skills make it possible for adolescents to achieve the highest form of relatedness and intimacy which appears to be the most ideal friendship among adolescence.

### **3.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTIMACY**

Intimacy in adolescents' relationships is made possible by the fact that adolescents' interpersonal relationships are sometimes characterized by emotional bonds (Kersten, 1990 : 257). Sometimes the bond becomes so strong that it leads to intimate friendships which according to Paul and White (1990 : 386), has not been given adequate attention and yet it is one of the major life tasks facing young adults (Reis et al., 1993 : 633). Intimacy enables them to share issues that they may not be able to share with adults (Vrey, 1979 : 168-169).

Various authors conceptualize intimacy as the product of different factors. Some conceptualize it as reciprocal behaviours, self-disclosure, or the partners's level of responsiveness. All these conceptualizations are integrated in Reis and Shaver's interpersonal process model of intimacy as discussed by Laurenceau, Banet, Pietromonaco (1998 : 1238). This model states that intimacy is a product of a transactional, interpersonal process in which self-disclosure and partners responsiveness are the key components. That is, intimacy develops through a dynamic process where an individual self-discloses, receives a response from a partner, and interprets the response which is related to a feeling of being understood, validated, cared for and accepted.

This dynamic process starts to unfold in childhood and continues into adolescence. During this period different types of friendship emerge with true relatedness, that is, intimacy emerging, during late adolescence. The early years of development appears to be a preparation period for the intimate relationships. During this preparatory period, it is the emotional and the cognitive aspects that need to interact to produce the readiness for intimate relationships. In other words, intimacy versus isolation cannot be resolved without the interaction of the emotional and the cognitive aspects.

In pointing out the importance of the cognitive aspect in the development of intimacy Selman in Biehler and Snowman (1993 : 115) discuss four reasoning stages that pave the way for the cognitive aspect of a child to render the establishment of intimacy possible. These authors assert that during the first three reasoning stages a child's cognitive activity is predominantly egocentric in nature and as such the consideration of other's viewpoint is out of question although there is progression towards reasoning that makes the establishment of intimacy possible. For instance, during the egocentric stage, which includes children who are approximately four to six years old, children do not realize that the same stimuli or social event or course of action can be interpreted differently by different people, and their interpretation, therefore, is not the same as that of other people. Although they can label others' overtly expressed feelings, they do not comprehend cause-and-effect. When they are about six to eight years old, at a stage called social information role taking, children are now able to differentiate between their own interpretations of social interactions and the interaction of others in a limited way. They cannot simultaneously think of their view and those of others. At the age of eight to ten, (that is, self-reflective role taking stage) specific situations are taken into consideration when interpreting interpersonal relations, where each person understands the expectations of the other in that particular context. The ability to view the two perspectives at once has, however, not yet developed. The interpretation of relations develops to a level where a child can take a third person's view during the multiple role taking for the ten to twelve year old children. This permits them to understand their expectations and that of others in a variety of situations as if they were spectators.,

During the conventional systems role taking, the fourth stage of reasoning about their social world, adolescents find it possible to share their inner selves with others, a process that sets the establishment of intimacy in motion (Selman in Biehler & Snowman, 1993 : 115). During this stage, to which the twelve to the fifteen year olds belong, the ability of each individual involved in a relationship with another reaches a point where it enables an



individual to understand many of the subjects of interactions involved. Moreover, a social perspective develops. That is, henceforth, actions are judged by how they might influence all individuals, not just those who are immediately concerned.

Intimacy is said to have developed if this dynamic process produces a healthy resolution of the intimacy versus isolation crisis (Gage & Berlinger, 1988 : 145). Adolescents that manage to resolve this crisis in a healthy manner are able to establish close relationships with others where the ability to confidently give and to receive love is found to exist. Unfortunately, those who fail to develop intimate relationships suffer from a feeling of isolation (Woolfolk, 1995 : 67) which leads to self-absorption (Belkins, 1980 : 319). Such a feeling put them at a risk of psychological disorders (Hall & Braken, 1996 : 253) such as (in order of frequency) depression, anger, emptiness, loneliness, frustration, disbelief, shock, helplessness, loss of self-esteem and guilt.

Adolescents should be assisted to resolve the intimacy versus isolation crisis because the zenith of any interpersonal relationship is intimacy which is greater in adolescence than at any other time in the life span (Papalia & Oaks, 1993 : 555-556). Montgomery and Sorell (1998 : 677) argue that it is the highest form of relatedness because it is the most emotionally charged kind of a relationship. This is the only level of friendship where breadth and depth of self-disclosure have developed in the highest form possible (Myers, 1998 : 1067). As such, it is the most rewarding level of a relational process because it gives partners the privilege to know the innermost, subjective aspects of another individual. Knowledge of the other person's inner world is made possible by the fact that individuals are in a position to share, among others, thoughts, fantasies, interests, goals, background and sometimes sex, although sex is not always part of such a relationship. The main characteristic of an intimate relationship is mutuality (engaging in joint ventures), interdependence, trust, commitment and caring (Tubb & Moss, 1974 : 216).

Reis and Shuver (1998 : 1238) maintain that adolescents should be assisted to resolve the intimacy versus isolation crisis because when this emotional attachment deteriorates, disaffection sets in, and a relationship suffers. By “disaffection” is meant the replacement of positive affect with neutral affect. The unfortunate part of disaffection is that it is not usually mutually experienced. In most cases it strikes only one partner, or the other partner is not affected as much as the other one.

Although adolescents have several domains of becoming which include, among others, physical, cognitive, affective, conative, normative and social development (Kruger & Gouws, 1994 : 8-10), only their social development will be given attention in this study. In the following sections, attention will be given to the establishment, maintenance and deterioration of relationships in general, although the emphasis will be on adolescents' relationships.

### **3.3 USEFULNESS OF RELATIONSHIPS**

Friendship formation during adolescence becomes crucial because it serves particular purposes. There are several reasons given by different researchers that makes it a crucial activity.

- (1) Rice (1992 : 428) maintains that during this period adolescents associate with peers to reduce a sense of anxiety that accompanies the break away from parents. In other words, adolescents need their peers to ensure successful break away from parents.
- (2) According to Barlow and Durand (1995 : 71) interpersonal relationships enable people to overcome some physical deficiencies and even delay death. De Anda and Smith (1993 : 422) maintain that loneliness has been identified as contributing to

potential suicidal behaviour. In support of this assertion, Appleby, Cooper, Amos and Faragher (1999 : 171) found that disturbed relationships is one of the causes of suicide among adolescents. This happens because relationships afford people with a sense of living for something (that is, relationship provide a sense of purpose).

- (3) Woolfolk (1995 : 97) maintains that friendship formation during childhood provides individuals with higher esteem, which in turn makes it possible for them to maintain intimate relationships as opposed to people who never had friends during childhood.
- (4) According to Ebersole and Hess (1998 : 614) friendships provide the most basic critical elements of satisfactory living that families may not provide. For instance, Friendships provide partners with commitment and affection without judgement.
- (5) According to Hirschi's social control theory as discussed by Houtzager and Baevelde (1999 : 179) adolescents who fail to develop strong bonds with their peers commit criminal offences.
- (6) Interpersonal relationships (or social relationships) facilitate health-prompting behaviour, such as restraint in the use of alcohol and drugs, getting proper sleep or seeking appropriate health care (Faragher, 1999 : 171)
- (7) In Jensen-Campbell and Graziano's (2000 : 924) view partners provide each other with resources and benefits that each need.

### **3.4 ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONSHIPS**

#### **3.4.1 Prerequisites for the establishment of relationships**

There are three major factors that set a stage for the establishment and maintenance of friendship, both in childhood and adulthood which are proximity, similarity and physical appearance.

##### **3.4.1.1 Proximity**

Proximity paves the way for other factors in the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Various authors illustrate this point in different ways. Lippa, (1994 : 381) maintains that it proximity (distance) opens a way for mere exposure effect. That is, people tend to like stimuli more if they have been exposed to them frequently. For instance, people seeing each other and having to evaluate each other's attributes such as attitudes and physical attraction frequently, have a tendency of developing attraction for each other.

The stimulus-response model as expounded by Brigham (1991 : 365) confirms this view. According to this model, individuals who are through per chance, near each other (proximity), may be attracted to each other where the source of attraction (that is, the stimulus) is physical appearance in most cases, followed by similarities of a few traits (Morgan et al., 1986 : 366 : 370).

Hurlock (1980 : 232) points out that the selection of friends during adolescence is no longer determined by the availability at school or in the neighbourhood. Adolescents are attracted to each other on the basis of various factors, such as similarity of attitudes, physical

attractiveness, interests and values because nearness makes it possible for them to be aware of these characteristics (Morgan et al.,366-370).

Feldman (1985 : 96-97) warns, however , that the spacing between individuals (called proxemics) should be taken into consideration during friendship establishment if success is to be realized, as the nature of friendship tallies with proxemics. The proxemics for intimate relationship, casual interaction with friends, for interpersonal, and for interaction at public level are from oneself to the individual one is interacting with, eighteen inches and less, eighteen inches to four feet, four to twelve inches and twelve inches and above, respectively. If these proxemics are ignored, a potential relationship may fail to take root. For instance, if strangers come too close to each other in the initial stages of contact, friendship may not be established because of nervousness that may prevail between them.

#### **3.4.1.2 Similarity**

People who hold similar or share common characteristics or qualities tend to be more attracted to each other than those who do not. According to Lindgren and Suter (1985 : 117-118) people associate with one another if they have certain qualities or characteristics in common, such as interests, attitudes and values. Lindgren and Suter (1985 : 117-118) assert that by the time children are in the middle of their primary school years, they shall have developed a fair idea of how to judge the interests, values and attitudes of their peers and that the formation of cliques, play groups and gangs, is based on this judgement. Usually, common characteristics appear to exist between adolescents of the same age, sex and ethnicity during this period. Adolescents get to know another person's attributes through the evaluation of outward and inner characteristics. The evaluation of outward characteristics is done without the other partner being aware of it.

Determining a person's inner nature, for example, attitude and interest, is facilitated by social cognition. Feldman (1989 : 58) defines social cognition as the "process that underlie our understanding of the social world; what others are like, what reasons lie behind people's behaviour and the way the social world operates". It helps us to categorize and interpret information relating to other people. If the evaluation is positive, a friendship may be established.

Howitt (1989 : 61) explains attraction that is based on similarities by means of the reinforcement-affect-model. According this model, people like others who share their views because they confirm their positions and do not undermine their perspectives. Bootzin et al. (1991 : 653) refer to such needs as compatible needs and because such needs elicit positive emotions in those close to them, reinforce them, and consequently, they act as reinforcers that consolidate the behaviour of seeking the company of those that please them..

#### **3.4.1.3 Physical attractiveness**

With regard to physical attractiveness, Morgan et al. (1986 : 369) found that "of a number of attributes measured by researchers, including personality factors and intelligence", physical attractiveness was found to be the only attitude which affected liking. Physically attractive people have many advantages over unattractive individuals. For instance, physically attractive persons are considered to possess positive, desirable attributes that make them to be attractive.

Physical attractiveness is enhanced by many other factors other than physical features only. These characteristics, according to Lussier (1990 : 88) are as follows:

- Optimism - Successful people are optimistic

- Avoid complaining or criticizing
- Being genuinely interested in other people
- Smile and laughter
- Calling people by names
- Being good listeners
- Being helpful to others
- Avoidance of impulsivity

#### **3.4.2 The establishment of relationships during childhood**

Preparation for adolescent relationships starts in childhood and according to Louw (1991 : 166) a child goes through three stages that prepares him or her for adolescent relationships.

##### **3.4.2.1 Memontary play**

This stage, which is found mainly among pre-school children and school beginners (that is children aged between three and six) is characterized by friends being valued for living close by and for their material possessions (Selman in Clarke-Stewart et al., 1985 : 517-519). At this first level of a relationship, Woolfolk (1995 : 96) maintains that friendship is based on who the child plays with often and kindness, and it can come to an end quite abruptly. That is, moment to moment interaction defines friendship. According to Shulman and Knafo (1997 : 687) at this level friends are considered partners or playmates that one spends time with and enjoy common interesting activities together. Relationships are therefore not yet emotionally charged and true friendship requires a shift from self-centeredness to other centeredness (Lindren and Suter, 1985 : 117-118).

### **3.4.2.2 One way support and two way fair cooperation (second stage)**

This stage may further be divided into two phases, namely, one way support and two way fair cooperation (Louw, 1991 : 366). In the first phase, called one way support, to which children aged six to the seven year olds belong, each child pushes his own agenda without consideration of the feelings of other children although a start is made in the realization that friendship is based on feelings and intentions, and not just things (Selman in Clarke-Stewart et al., 1985 : 518). That is, personality traits determine the choice of friends probably because of its links with the concrete operational cognitive abilities (Woolfolk, 1995 : 96). It is only later during a stage called two way fair cooperation, to which the seven to ten year olds belong that friendship becomes reciprocal and intimate, an attempt is made at mutual cooperation.

### **3.4.2.3 Intimate mutually shared relationships**

In Louw's (1991 : 366) view, at this stage, which includes the nine to ten year olds, the potential for developing an intimate relationship is activated as a result of the adolescents' ability to respect others' dependence and independence. According to Selman in Clarke-Stewart (1985 : 520) friendship at this level is no longer fluid and as such little disputes do not disrupt a close relationship. Lippa (1994 : 416-417) considers this stage, which he refers to as the continuation and consolidation stage, as a point where relationships reach stability. In support of this argument, Woolfolk (1995 : 97) maintains that friendship is now a long term proposition and usually cannot be destroyed by one or even several incidents. The attachment bond in friendships at this stage is made of dyads and new members are not allowed in it. Such relationships, which are said to have reached "middle age" are characterized by maturity, although sometimes if a violation of expectations is experienced, negative emotions such as fright and anger may occur, and the livelihood of a relationship



may be threatened.

#### **.4.3 The establishment of relationships among adolescents**

Levinger in Morgan et al. (1986 : 372) and Feldman (1989 : 341-342) explain how friendship is established at the level of intimate mutually shared relationships by describing three levels of involvement or relatedness towards intimacy. During these stages Rathus (1988 : 461-462) asserts that friendship develops from being superficial to being intimate where interaction is emotionally charged. It develops in breadth ( such as the amount of interaction ) and depth (for example, the level of intimacy) over time (Rosenblum, 1997 : 225-226).

##### **.4.3.1 Unilateral awareness**

At this level, which according to Lippa (1994 : 412) may mark the beginning of a close friendship, individuals whose relatedness and contact was zero, become aware of each other. After having become aware of each other, adolescents are either attracted to each other or not. According to Lippa, (1994 : 412) attraction is made possible by proximity (physical closeness) or geographical closeness (Rathus, 1988 : 462). The shorter the distance between individuals, the higher the chances of friendship formation and maintenance thereof. The possible reasons for this state of affairs appears to be that decreased distance reduces the costs of maintaining a relationship and increases the opportunities to experience the rewards that the relationship can provide (Lippa, 1994 : 412).

At this level individuals start to interact with people that they frequently come into contact with. The nature of exchange that takes place at this stage referred to by Lippa (1994 : 13) as building a relationship, determines the growth or failure of a relationship. This

exchange is controlled by cultural norms specifying appropriate behaviour such as self-disclosure. Greater self-disclosure enhances the establishment of a relationship.

#### **3.4.3.2 Bilateral surface contact (Emergence of intimacy)**

This stage marks the beginning of intimacy. Once some kind of friendship has been established partners start to engage in activities that foster the growth of their relationship and avoid behaviours that are detrimental to it. According to Bassis et al. (1992 : 139-141) partners start to engage in more cooperative and exchange or reciprocal behaviours (that is, behaviours that satisfy each other's needs and avoid competitive conflicting behaviours). They may exchange a variety of items such as assistance, favours, including love where they are being guided by principles such as if you scratch my back I'll scratch yours, too. Competition and conflict are inherently destructive to a relationship whereas cooperation and reciprocity may enhance it and the degree of assisting each other determines the degree of closeness (Shulman & Knafo, 1997 : 687).

#### **3.4.3.3 Mutuality stage (Development of intimacy)**

True friendship begins at this stage when two individuals cease to be only interested in roles and the sharing of peripheral issues, but start to be interested in the inner selves. The inner self shared include common interests and values and faithful keeping of secrets (Woolfolk, 1995 : 97) as a result of trust that develops between partners (Schindler and Thomas in Omodei & McLennan (2000 : 279). These authors assert that trust is a prosocial behavior which brings people together whereas mistrust (the inability to relate positively to others) is associated with sub-optimal interpersonal behaviour. Sub-optimal interpersonal behaviour is associated with interpersonal maladjustment and any relationship based on it may not last.

Woolfolk (1995 : 97) maintains that at this stage (mutuality stage) the sharing of knowledge moves from the sharing of trivial information about each other during the early stage of mutuality called minor intersection to the sharing of intimate feelings and thoughts. Later on, during the moderate intersection and the major intersection levels, the intensity of self-disclosure increases both in depth and breath as partners reveal intimate and meaningful attitudes and feelings. This kind of behaviour provides partners increasingly with rewards. As a result of the emotionally charged self-disclosure adolescents' interaction is no longer controlled by cultural norms, but by norms more relevant and specific to the particular relationship. For example, James should not be teased about his height.

### **3.5 CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS TAKE PLACE**

#### **3.5.1 Identity formation**

A point of departure in the formation of whatever kind of a relationship, including intimacy, is the achievement of an identity (Montgomery & Sorell, 1998 : 677) whose search starts during adolescents (Davis & Benshoff, 1999 : 391-392). In support of this argument Erickson in Montgomery and Sorell (1998 : 677) argue in his discussion of the sequence of psychosocial stages that the resolution of intimacy versus isolation follows after the identity versus role confusion crisis has been resolved. Adolescents who fail to develop a sense of identity battle in their interpersonal relationships, for they make use of some form of attachment which they regard as intimacy to arrive at a personal identity. Adolescents with a sense of identity are in a better position to develop a secure sense of self, both individually and relationally.

After the attainment of identity, intimacy is made possible by unreciprocated and secretive

(labelled as love) passionate feelings which all children, including the nine to eleven years, (who according to Freud are in the latency years) have. The unreciprocated and secretive (labelled as love) passionate feelings are early attachment feelings which appear to be the first step in a sequence of events leading to a full-fledged romantic relationship in later adolescence (Broderick in Montgomery & Sorell, 1998 : 678).

It is, however, during late adolescence and young adulthood that the formation of a consistent and coherent identity takes place. The establishment of a consistent and coherent identity paves the way for the pre-occupation with the establishment of intimate relationships (Paul et al., 1998 : 77). This is made possible by the fact that upon establishing a consistent and coherent identity, adolescents proceed to fuse their identity with those of others in an effort to create committed and emotionally close relationships (Ibid). In this regard Belkins (1980 : 319) maintains that fusing one's identity with that of others is made possible by the willingness to do so only after one's identity shall have been crystalized.

The development of this identity is dependent on many factors. Firstly, the development of a meaningful self-concept in which the past, the present and future are integrated to form a unified whole. Concerning the past, Newman, Caspi, Moffat and Silva (1997 : 206-207) argue that individual differences identified in early (as early as three years) childhood temperament may be meaningfully linked to the functional style of adult interpersonal behaviour. There are several reasons why this is possible. The temperament has been found to be stable over time, and is also related to later behavioural problems and adolescent psychopathology, and shows meaningful continuity with adolescent personality. Secondly, one's weaknesses and strengths need to be assessed and a plan to deal with them has to be developed. Lastly, in the assessment of these strengths and weaknesses, an adolescent constantly requires feedback from his social network (Erickson in Davis and Benshoff (1999 : 39).

### **3.5.2 The social penetration theory**

According to Paul, Poole and Jakubowycz (1998 : 84) relationships are not hapazardly formed. They follow some kind of a sequential process of social penetration during which interactions broaden the breadth of topics and increase the depth of the discussion content through self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor in Goodwin et al., 1999 : 73). Breadth refers to the number of different areas about oneself that a person is willing to make accessible to others. Depth refers to the level of personality that is revealed. These authors liken the process of broadening the discussion content through self-disclosure to the peeling of an onion: The initial superficial interaction is followed by the central intimate level provided that previous exchange has been rewarding. The movement towards the central level is made possible by the desire for uncertainty reduction. During the act of alleviating the tension associated with uncertainty through questioning each other, interactants gain the confidence to tell others their own thoughts and feelings.

In support of the gradual progression towards intimacy, Feldman (1985 : 96-97) assert that individuals should avoid closeness in the early phases of their interaction. A rush towards closeness does not facilitate the development of trust which is a necessary or prerequisite for sharing intimacy (Hoeman, 1996 : 604). They should rather take note of the four levels of the social penetration process as expounded by Rytting (1975 : 29-30) and Altman and Taylor in Brigham (1991 : 366). These levels are the orientation stage (disclosure is limited to largely small, surface and nonpersonadiscussion), exploratory affective exchange (willingness to start to reveal oneself although in a small way such as in an encounter between casual acquaintance and neighbourly conversation), affective exchange (discussion about private areas of personality) and lastly, stable exchange (partners can now readily predict and interpret the feelings and behaviour of others because of knowing each other well).

This sequential process of social penetration is sometimes, however, rendered unnecessary as a result of cultural and sex differences. With regard to cultural differences, Gudykunst and Kim (1984 : 128) indicate for instance that in the United states, relationships are developed and maintained primarily according to activities, whereas in the non-western cultures, where people are relatively homogenous and in a less technological environment, relationships are often given to them according to their birth, schooling, work and/or residence. As far as sex differences are concerned, Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan (1996 : 70) point out that to be in a relationship for adolescent girls means to “shape themselves in accordance with the dominant cultural ideals of feminists and womanhood”.

### **.5.3 The principle of reciprocity**

Adolescents make use of the reciprocity principle in establishing and maintaining relationships in various ways. Firstly, White and Mullen (1989 : 49) maintain that relationship partners make use of the principle of reciprocity to ensure a successful competition with their rivals (their partners' alternatives). Rivals are dealt with in two ways, firstly by manipulating circumstances affecting the partner, and secondly by manipulating circumstances affecting the rival. In dealing with their partners, they make their primary relationships to be more attractive than secondary relationships by, among others, increasing the partner's rewards or lowering the partner's costs through behaviours such as making oneself more physically attractive, doing more of the household chores, going more often than usual to entertainments the beloved one likes, inquiring more often about the beloved's state of satisfaction. In dealing with their rivals, they increase the costs or lower the rewards of their rivals by, inter alia, inducing guilt in the beloved partner for seeing the rival, verbally or physically assaulting the rival or the beloved and withholding affection.

Secondly, relationship partners make use of reciprocity as a cheater-detector mechanism.

hackelford and Buss (1996 : 1153) argue that relationship partners make use of this mechanism to determine the quality of their relationship so as to strengthen it if it is found to be weak. This mechanism is based on the understanding that one of the most important characteristics of close relationships is reciprocity of time, resources and effort expended by one relationship member for the benefit of the other. This exchange involves costs and benefits and it is called reciprocal altruism and tit for tat. The time frame of expected reciprocity is called shadow of the future. When the shadow of the future is short; that is, when the relationship parties have little reason to assume that they will interact in the near future, an emphasis on immediate reciprocity develops. A relationship partner who avoids immediate reciprocity will be regarded as a potential cheater. On the other hand, when future interaction is uncertain, the potential for cheating arises. On the other hand, when the probability of future interaction is high, a concern with reciprocity will remain, but adjustments will be made in the decision rules of the cheater-detector mechanism to allow for an extension in the acceptable delay of reciprocation.

#### **.5.4 The social exchange theory**

According to Bouma et al. (1990 : 171) the development of a relationship and its maintenance may be explained by means of an economic theory called exchange, a principle which flows from the reciprocity principle. The exchange theorists maintain that a relationship is developed and maintained if a bargain is implicitly or explicitly struck. That is, there must be an exchange. Other authors, such as Morgan et al. (1986 : 370) explain this exchange in terms of outcomes with the help of a modified form of the concept exchange, called the social exchange theory. According to this theory, the main determinant of the establishment or failure to establish a relationship is an outcome. These authors define an outcome as the consequence of specific acts. These consequences are described as the rewards experienced from a particular set of behaviours as weighed against the costs required

to carry out those behaviours. A reward is explained as anything a person gains in a relationship, such as a feeling of being loved or receiving financial assistance. Costs on the other hand, are defined as negative consequences that occur in an interaction or relationship. According to Taylor et al. (1997 : 258) an interaction is considered to be costly because it requires a great deal of time and energy and because of limitations such a relationship places in the way of other rewarding activities, such as going to a party. The establishment of relationship stands a better chance if rewards are more than the costs because individuals operate according to a minimax strategy where attempts are made to minimize costs and maximize rewards (Taylor et al., 1997 : 258).

Brigham (1991 : 368) explains satisfaction resulting from rewards and costs in terms of comparison level and comparison level alternatives. Comparison level refers to expectations about the kind of outcome an individual is likely to receive from a particular relationship whereas the comparison level alternatives refers to the value of the next best alternative interaction a person could enter. If the outcome is equal or exceeds the comparison level, satisfaction results, but if it is below, dissatisfaction is the result.

In support of this perspective Papalia and Oaks (1993 : 644-645) argue that costs should be equal to rewards. That is, people are more comfortable in relationships in which there is a fair distribution of rewards and costs. According to Calhoun and Acocella (1990 : 221) satisfaction is experienced when the comparison level is reached ( that is, when the minimum benefits a person expects from a relationship are reached ) whereas dissatisfaction results when it is not reached. In the case where this balance is not maintained, a partner may either feel underbenefitted or overbenefitted if the costs exceed the rewards or if the rewards exceed the costs, respectively. Overbenefitted subjects feel guilty whereas underbenefitted subjects feel angry. Meyers (1990 : 441) says that those who feel equity in a relationship are content, whereas those who experience inequity feel discomfort, distressed and depressed.



All these negative feelings lead to the disruption of a relationship. It is probably these feelings that prompt individuals to try to restore equity (balance) in relationships perceived as unbalanced.

The basic reward that tends to determine the effect of other rewards, are feelings. Schultz and Schultz (1998 : 155) refer to a person's feelings or emotions towards another person as interpersonal affect. An interpersonal affect results from one's evaluation of another person. It appears, therefore, that if an individual's interpersonal affect is positive, chances of the two partners satisfying each other's needs will be higher than if the opposite is the case because of the rewards it affords.

Positive interpersonal affects may be classified into two types, namely, particularism and nonparticularism affects. A particularistic reward is a reward whose value depends on who rewards it such as love, hugs and tender words. On the other hand, the value of a nonparticularistic reward, such as money, is useful regardless from whom it comes. According to Taylor, Peplau and Sears (1997 : 258) a reward that seem to foster healthy relationships is the particularism reward as opposed to nonparticularistic or universal reward.

#### **3.5.4.1 Balancing the equation**

In cases where satisfaction is not felt as a result of the rewards being below the comparison level, attempts at establishing equity may be made. There are two ways, according to Papalia and Oaks (1993 : 645) to restore equity, namely, through behavioural and psychological means. Through behavioural means, one may change or consider either seeking new company or sticking to the existing relationship, which is behaviour explained by means of the comparison level for alternatives. This theory suggests that one would opt for action, or stick to the existing one, if there is no better alternative relationship. White and Mullen

(1989 : 54) say that adolescents seek alternatives as a way of securing alternative sources of self-esteem, desired interpersonal experiences or valued resources. Through the acquisition of alternatives such as turning to other friends, getting more involved in rewarding tasks, getting a pet and joining a hobby club, an adolescent's self-esteem is enhanced.

The psychological means that may be used have to do with defense mechanisms. There are three kinds of defense mechanisms, namely, to increase one's rewards, derogating the partner and a task oriented approach (Papalia & Oaks, 1993 : 645). Increasing rewards may take the form of irrational conclusions. For instance, a partner that feels exploited may convince himself or herself that the inequitable relationship is in fact fair. He may minimize inputs (For example, I am not good enough for him), exaggerate his outcomes (even if I am unappreciated, this friend of mine makes it possible for me to meet a lot of people), and exaggerate the partners inputs (my friend spends more money than I do in this relationship).

White and Mullen (1989 : 50) assert that derogating the partner may take the form of enhancing one's self-esteem through devaluing the primary relationship and discrediting the beloved as a source of reliable information about the self. In devaluing a relationship, one may convince oneself that the relationship is demanding as the partner cannot be trusted or is too manipulative.

When the task oriented approach is adopted, adolescents avoid the use of defense mechanisms and face a problem in a way in which it presents itself. According to White and Mullen (1989 : 54) where this approach is used, adolescents engage in self-assessment or inward-directed coping techniques. Self-assessment aims at the changing of one's inner world so as to better manage the environment that is perceived as threatening. Examples of self-assessment behaviours, are among others, undergoing psychotherapy in order to develop the

kills to make the partner more satisfied with the relationship, reading books on how to make oneself better and allowing for a calmer approach to the partner.

### **.5.5 Commitment**

According to Beach and Broderick in Sternberg and Barnes (1988 : 333) relationship survival and continuity depends on the commitment of the partners to the relationship. They define commitment “as a set of cognitions, affect, and behaviours that comprise or serve as markers of an individual’s disposition to continue a particular relationship”. When partners become committed to a relationship, they activate existing cognitive structure presumably acquired in childhood and earlier relationship experiences to a particular relationship with a particular person. This cognitive structure does not, however, remain constant or static. It is dynamic over the life of a relationship because new information may be incorporated into the schema as a result of the subsequent relationship experiences.

According to White and Mullen (1989 : 50) commitment is also used to maintain a relationship by protecting the primary relationship against rivals or alternatives. There are various ways of demanding commitment in a primary relationship. Firstly, a partner may engage in behaviours aimed at forcing the other partner into a choice that would bring about emotional barriers (for example guilt) to leaving the primary relationship. Secondly, one may engage in intimate self-disclosure about one’s feelings while signaling that one can no longer tolerate the emotions induced by the rival relationship. Lastly, Youniss and Damon in Seifert and Hoffnug (1994 : 560) assert that an adolescent may be a partner that complements the other partner. In complementary relationships partners with different strengths and abilities cooperate for mutual benefits. Brigham (1991 : 365) and Bootzin et al. (1991 : 652-653) say that this theory suggests that “individuals select as a partner the one who will best complement their personal needs”. In a study conducted by Feldman (1990 : 661) which led

o the formulation of the need complementary hypothesis, it was found that partners appeared o have complementary needs. For instance, it was found that people with submissive personality traits were attracted to those with dominant personality traits.

Huffman, Vernoy and Williams (1987 : 414-415) sum up the establishment and maintenance of relationships by pointing out that all the principles of liking or attraction work jointly to produce an effect, and their common denominator is the reinforcement theory, equity theory and the social exchange theory. For instance, we tend to obtain the greatest reward from those who are near us (principle of proximity) and who share similar background and values with us (principle of similarity). Repeated exposure through proximity makes some people o be physically attractive; those who are judged to be attractive, are those who are similar n some ways. Individuals are also attracted to others when the output in a relationship is proportional to the input (equity theory). Even if there is liking as a result of the above, a relationship has got to conform to the social exchange theory. According to this theory friendship must not only be fair and equitable, but partners should feel that benefits outweigh losses as a relationship is perceived as an interpersonal market place where the traders ( that s partners ) exchange certain commodities (which include love).

#### **5.6 Use of negative tactics to establish and maintain a relationship**

Sometimes adolescents make use of negative tactics to establish and maintain a relationship even though the life-span of relationships establish in this fashion may be short-lived (Felson & Messner, 2000 : 86-87 ). Some, for instance, make use of threats. Through these threats, compliance, which comes in the form of submissive behaviour from the victim is elicited. In most cases the victim and the aggressor are the weaker and the stronger partners, respectively.

## **.6 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALES AND FEMALES RELATIONSHIPS**

According to Louw (1991 : 366) the nature of relationships between boys and girls differ and their relationship patterns may be explained by means of various theories. Firstly, Pleck, Monenstein and Ku (1993 : 12) make reference to these differences by discussing two broad theoretical approaches, namely, the trait and the normative perspectives in the study of sex roles. The trait perspective holds that by virtue of being a male, an adolescent possesses personality traits that are predetermined to enable a male figure to execute tasks that are culturally regarded to be for men. The normative perspective, on the other hand, holds that the different sexes should possess characteristics pre-determined in accordance with the different sexes. These characteristics may be classified into two broad qualities, namely, instrumental and expressive qualities which are mainly peculiar to boys and girls, respectively (Leichtentritt & Shechtman, 1998 : 37).

As a result of these qualities boys and girls differ in many respects which include, among others, emotional and behavioural differences. Sefert and Hoffnug (1994 : 560) note that girls seem to be better able to express feelings and are more comfortable with giving emotional support than boys. Louw (1991 : 366) points out that at the level of intimate mutually shared relationships, girls have a tendency of developing close friendships with only one or two other girls, whereas adolescent boys often have many friends with whom they are less intimate. It appears, therefore, that the amount of energy girls put in a relationship make it difficult for them to keep many friends, whereas boys because of little energy used in friendship establishment and maintenance, are able to use it on many friends.

At a behavioural level males are more concerned with instrumental issues such as independence, assertiveness, logic and duty which is a stumbling block for closeness (Jones, Bloys & Wood, 1990 : 135). On the other hand, females' expressive qualities such as caring,

responsibility and interrelationships pave the way for closeness. In support of this argument, Laursen (1995 : 56) asserts that females place greater emphasis on mutual help and support, while males are more concerned with the sharing of activities and interests with their friends. There appears to be no differences, however, among androgynous adolescents. For instance, both male and female adolescents who are androgynous tend to communicate with ease and self-disclose a little bit more as compared to sex typed male or female adolescents. Androgyny is also associated with social competence. That is, androgynous individuals are sociable, communicate with ease in dyadic relationships.

The differences in the way in which females and male adolescents express emotions and behave, make them to differ in as far as the degree to which intimate relationships are achieved (Bakken & Romig, 1992 : 301). It is as a result of these differences that different patterns of friendship formation develop (Jones et al., 1990 : 134). For instance, female friendship patterns are described as “face to face”, whereas those of males are said to be “side to side” friendships. Face to face relationships are characterized by more self-disclosure of intimate information about feelings. Female adolescents are, therefore, in a better position to establish intimate relationships as compared to male adolescents.

Maccoby in Reis et al. (1993 : 633) illustrate this point by means of the intimacy level theory. According to this theory friendship among girls tends to be more intimate than friendship among boys. Both sexes, however, value intimacy as a basis for friendship during early adolescence which first emerges within same sex friendships.

### **3.7 THE ROLE OF A FAMILY IN ADOLESCENTS' RELATIONSHIP ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE**

#### **3.7.1 A family**

According to Coleman and Cressley (1990 : 131) although a family has many problems, many people still rate a good family as their single most important goal, more important than good health, self-respect or personal happiness. A family is given such rating because there are still healthy families that tend to demonstrate openness, direct expression of humour, tenderness, warmth and hopefulness to a striking degree (Wass & Corr, 1984 : 296).

#### **3.7.2 The nature of a family**

According to Nye and Berado (1973 : 30), Kruger (1994 : 190) and Ebersole and Hess (1998 : 60 ) a family is a universal, primary, fundamental or basic institution of any society without which human society as we know it, could not exist. A family is, therefore, regarded as a backdrop where children learn to deal with various aspects of their being such as their emotions and drives and to handle problems in a socially acceptable manner. If children are to develop positive attitudes they, therefore, need a warm, close, supportive relationship with their parents (Siegel & Senna, 1985 : 233). In this regard Roopnarine and Johnson (2000 : 244) argue that parents are primary teachers. They are in a position to motivate children, reinforce newly acquired skills at home and can provide valuable information for others working with children.

#### **3.7.3 Types of families**

There are different types of families, the first and the oldest being the nuclear family which,

according to Bornstein and Lamb (1988 : 598) include the husband as the breadwinner, the mother as a housewife and two or more children living together. This type of a family is, however, giving way and continues to give way to many other forms of family structures such as single-parent families, both parents as wage earners, unrelated persons living together, and blended families (also known as reconstructed or new extended families created by divorce and subsequent remarriages of one or both parents). The basic characteristic of these families is that they loose the emotional bond between members which makes self-disclosure among their children difficult if not impossible.

According to Stone in Anthony and Giddens (1994 : 395-396) the historic background of a nuclear family is as follows:

#### **3.7.3.1 Open lineage family**

For many years before 1500, a family took the form of a nuclear family which was called open lineage family. This kind of a family lived in a fairly small household and led a communal life which included the next of kin. A family during this time did not offer its members emotional support and it therefore lacked the emotional attachment between members. Individuality also suffered at the expense of communality.

#### **3.7.3.2 Restricted patriarchal family**

This type of a family, which existed approximately from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, had remarkable differences with the open lineage family. For example, it was characterized by emotional attachment between members and as such a family became a separate entity, distinct from ties to the broader community and the next of kin. In this type of a family, fathers' authoritarian powers grew substantially.



### **3.7.3.3 Closed domesticated nuclear family**

Current families are an offspring of this kind of a family. This type of a family differs from the above ones in that the rearing of children with love, is their main feature. It is possible to give children love because parents are guided by love when entering into marital contracts. Consequently, families are presumed to be a loving milieu which provide its members with physical and emotional support, create a link between the present and the past and provide a springboard from which the world may be conquered. In this kind of an environment, members anticipate that they will be accepted and nurtured in their growth and development (Savin-Williams, 1998 : 49). Although conflict exists, the general, fundamental message sent is that of love. Children growing up in such families learn that it is acceptable and safe to talk about feelings, security and self-giving acceptance, trust and esteem (Vrey, 1979 : 73-74).

### **3.7.4 Function of a family**

Baker (1986 : 23) and Belkin (1980 : 337) point out that a family has many functions, the most important one being the emotional support of its members. Lauer (1986 : 415) asserts that emotional support is of crucial importance in enabling children to experience happiness in their lives. The emotional support given, according to Neubeck (1979 : 36 ) should make children to experience a family as an oasis, that is a safe place that provides its members with a sense of satisfaction where they may hide away from the stressful demands of the outside world.

A sense of satisfaction is experienced when the emotional support satisfies their needs. The most important need to be satisfied, according to Noller (1996 : 97) is that of love which he regards as the most important of all human needs since it is an emotion upon which

relationships rest. The satisfaction of needs, therefore, helps adolescents in the various aspects of their lives, including relationship establishment and maintenance thereof, especially in the development and maintenance of romantic partners (Van Horn & Marques, 2000 : 199).

Papalia and Oaks (1993 : 546-547) maintain that if a family does not offer emotional support, or is perceived not to be offering emotional support, adolescence turn to their friends. The consequences of such a behaviour is poor parent-child relationship which paves the way for behaviours which are detrimental to their well-being such as identification with a deviant group, with the possibility of developing delinquent behaviour (Biehler and Snowman, 1993 : 117-118).

Perception of the support is determined by various factors. Firstly, the mood of the recipient just before interaction (that is, recipients who are in a negative mood prior to an interaction might be more likely to experience less support), long term and stable attitude regarding the amount and type of support towards the relationship and more global sentiment about the relationship. If less support is perceived (no matter how much it is) satisfaction may not be experienced (Carels & Baucon, 1999 : 133).

Fenwick and Smith (1993 : 99) point out that this support should be continued even during the adolescent stage when conflict between parents and children seem to reach a peak as a result of the children's drifting towards peers. That is, they should be encouraged to continue to use a home as a base for their social life. The reason these authors provide is that although children at this stage appear to be fighting their parents, they still regard them as their main source of affection, and the main source of social support. Carels and Baucon (1999 : 13) define social support as available support (that is, perception of support in their families as believed to be available if needed) and actual support received (that is, the actual amount

f support that is received).

### **7.5 Family factors setting a stage for a need for adolescents' peer relationships**

No matter how much emotional support families provide their adolescent children with, it seems as if adolescents' separation from parents in favour of their peers, is inevitable. There are several reasons that bring about this inevitability. Biehler and Snow (1993 : 114) argue that as children grow older, they reach a point where they wish to be accepted by their peers. This wish makes them to behave in ways that force them to please their peers at the expense of their authority figures, including their parents.

There are various factors that compel them to please peers at the expense of their parents. Besides the inherent conflict between parents and their children, conflict is an inevitable event in all interpersonal relationships (Shatz & Hartup in Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998 : 736). Reese-Weber and Bartle-Haring (1998 : 736) argue that although a family is supposed to be a centre of love, that is, an oasis, it is intrinsically like all interpersonal relationships, violent. Ritzer (1986 : 186-187) describes it as the most violent institution, whereas Murray Straus and his co-authors and Suzanne Steinmetz and Straus in Ritzer ( 1986 : 187 ) describe a family as a cradle of violence institution. Laursen (1995 : 56) points out that conflict appears to be higher among family members than among close peers.

Conflict in families between parents and their adolescent children appears to be fuelled by the adolescents' sexual development. In the discussion of Sullivan's interpersonal theory, by Snow (1991 : 382) it appears as if parents' negative reactions to the adolescents' sexually related behaviours forces them (the adolescents) to experience conflict about their sexual needs. The adolescents' peers are the only individuals with whom the discomfort resulting from this storm and stress situation may be discussed, since the behaviours criticized by

parents are accepted and admired by peers. Acceptance and admiration that adolescents are afforded by peers gives them a sense of security which makes it possible for them to talk freely about almost everything, including their sexuality (Louw, 1991 : 422).

It seems as if this violence in the family is enhanced by the power struggle caused by a considerable shift from the patriarchal life style. This shift has been caused by industrialization (Reedy & Woodhead, 1988 : 10-11). As a result of industrialization, members of a family, especially the mother and the father, are equal partners whose leadership role is confusing. While the battle for the leadership role rages, a leadership vacuum is created. Consequently, every member of the family makes attempts, either consciously or unconsciously to fill up the vacuum as even children demand not just to be seen, but to be heard, too. While fighting for power, members are also compelled to engage in competitive activities (Hurlock, 1980 : 319). Among their peers, they therefore, seem to find the intimacy which makes up for the lost one in their families (Paul & White, 1990 : 387).

In the process of fighting for power, relationships are disturbed. Horney in White and Mullen (1989 : 83) maintain that disturbed interpersonal relationships in childhood (and in later life) result in basic anxiety. People who experience basic anxiety tend to crave for unconditional affection (regarded as a neurotic need) which is impossible to satisfy. Failure to satisfy needs in a relationships causes the deterioration and collapse of these relationships (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981 : 368-374) which they hope to find in peer relationships.

Secondly, according to Anthony and Giddens (1993 : 7) relationships in peers (peer means equal) are founded on mutual consent because of the equality that exists among them rather than dependence inherent in the family situation. Bornholt and Goodnow (1999 : 431) say that the nature of communication, among others, that is taking place among youth bears

testimony to the equality and inequality that exists between youth and parents, respectively. They point out that adolescents describe conversations with peers as a reciprocal exchange, whereas that of adolescents and parents as irreciprocal as parents dominate conversations by expressing their own opinions. This description could be just a perception as Gudykunst and Kim, 1984 : 34 & 75) maintain that the nature of an interpersonal relationship determines the nature of interaction, including communication. That is, the category in which a particular person is placed (for example, close friend) has an influence on how we encode our messages to that person and how we decode messages coming from him or her.

Hurlock (1980 : 250-251) asserts that parents dominate conversations because of the generation gap (which could also be regarded as a cultural gap). As a result of this generation gap, parents and children pursue different values. The cultural values of the peer group differs from those of adults and the end product is violence and conflict. Parents enforce codes of conduct upon their children whereas in the peer group rules of conduct can be tested out and explored and those that are not held in high esteem, are chunked out (Biehler & Snowman, 1993 : 114). Parents and children, therefore, live in different worlds with different values and norms. As such, among adolescents, even though a forceful or physically strong child may try to dominate others, because of the mutuality that exists, there has got to be a certain amount of give and take if the survival of the group is to be ensured.

#### **.7.6 Parental effect on their adolescents**

Despite the inherent conflict between parents and their adolescence which is sometimes accompanied by adolescents's breakaway from parents to establish friendships with their peers, parents are still faced with a task of influencing their adolescents to acquire personality traits that ought to enable them to establish rewarding relationships with their peers. Conger (1991 : 208) argue that the extent to which adolescents are able to establish mature peer

relationships is determined by the nature and quality of personality traits acquired during both preadolescent and adolescent years. These personality traits inculcated in them through interactions that take various forms, make it possible or impossible to establish and maintain fulfilling relationships. Trojanowics and Morash (1992 : 105) assert that parents influence their children either positively or negatively long before they are influenced by opportunity structures and negative community conditions. In emphasizing the influence of a family in child development, Shoemaker (1996 : 170) refers to a research conducted by Martin Haskell and Lewis Yablonsky. In this research it was found that delinquents from broken homes was 23,6 percent to 61,5 percent while the range of nondelinquents was from 12,9 percent to 36,1 percent.

In this regard Brill (1990 : 198) says that a family has the greatest and most lasting influence on personality development. For instance, children whose early life is characterized by parental hostility, rejection and inconsistency as a result of early relationship difficulties with parents, may develop delinquent behaviour. Early life experiences of the child in the family shape his or her future attitude, values and lifestyle. There are various ways in which parents influence their children

#### **3.7.6.1 Attachment styles**

Feeney et al. (1993 : 169) support this view point by maintaining that the attachment styles acquired in infancy, whose roots lie in the parent-child interaction styles, play a role in the determination of the quality of a relationship because of their basis in love. Herzberg, Hammen, Burge, Daley, Davila and Lindberg (1999 : 38) define attachment as the emotional and physical bond between an infant and a primary care-giver whereas Cook (2000 : 286) describes it as the affectional bond between infants and their care-givers.

In illustrating this point, Feeney et al. (1993 : 169) make reference to three attachment styles which are disorganized-disoriented pattern, anxious avoidant attachment and secure attachment (also called anxious resistant attachment). Disorganized-disoriented pattern attachment refers to mother-child relationship characterized by confusion. The anxious avoidant attachment describes a relationship in which a child would cry when the mother leaves, and rejects her on her return (Steinberg et al., 1991 : 201). This type of attachment (which develops when a need to be loved is not satisfied) is associated with passion and preoccupation with relationships, but low relationship satisfaction as a result of low levels of intimacy and commitment. The desirable attachment, the secure attachment, which is born of the satisfaction of the need to be loved, is associated with positive relations and characteristics such as intimacy and satisfaction. Children that develop this attachment style stand a better chance of establishing and maintaining their relationships during adolescence.

Herzberg et al. (1999 : 387) maintain that the nature of attachment that is established during infancy, is carried to adolescent life. The carrying over to adolescence is made possible by the fact that individuals have a drive to maintain consistency within themselves. As a result, individuals are motivated to establish relationships that resemble the past, a phenomenon known as the continuity principle (Sroufe and Fleeson in Herzberg et al., 1999 : 389). Hazan and Shaver in Herzberg et al. (1999 : 38 ) identified three adult attachment cognitions, namely, secure, avoidant and anxious/ambivalent, which correspond to infant attachment, namely, disorganized- disoriented, anxious avoidant and anxious resistant, respectively

Cook (2000 : 286) adds that a sense of security, which is derived from a secure attachment, is reciprocally determined within relationships. That is, secure people may foster a sense of security in others, resulting in positive outcomes. This sense of security referred to as felt security by Schneider and Young (1996 : 96-97), results in positive outcomes probably

because it enables adolescents to be more ego-resilient, less anxious, less hostile and to experience lower levels of emotional distress as compared to other undesirable attachments, which lead to a sense of insecurity.

Iacovetta in Scheider and Younger (1996 : 97) explains how a felt security may be established during adolescents by means of the theory of exchange and reciprocity. In their interaction with their children, parents should display love and acceptance. If the interaction is rewarding, felt security may be experienced which will in turn enable adolescents to reciprocate this love and if not, the child seeks to establish relationships with compensatory sources of gratification, especially with peers in search of felt security. .

#### **3.7.6.2 Relational patterns**

Ruben (1984 : 262-264) maintains that with the passing of time, partners in a relationship develop joint rules or relational patterns which become their habitual way of relating to each other. These relational patterns which may either be detrimental or fruitful to a relationship, guide and shape a relationship over a period of time. The most important relational patterns are dependencies and counter-dependencies, progressive and regressive spirals, and self-fulfilling and self-defeating prophecies.

- **The dependencies and counter-dependencies**

A dependency relationship exists when one individual in a relationship who is highly dependent on another for support, money, a job, leadership, guidance or whatever, generalizes this dependency to other facets of the relationship. In a dependency relationship, the dependent individual agrees with the other partner on all topics or subjects discussed. In the case of counter-dependence, one individual relates to the other, this time not as a



dependent, but instead, as counter-dependent. In counter-dependence, the one individual always disagrees with the other person, instead of conforming to every idea or behaviour of the other individual. In this kind of a relationship, partners' needs are not satisfied.

- **Progressive and regressive spiral**

This relational pattern has to do with the achievement of goals and the satisfaction of needs. The relational pattern is termed progressive spiral when partners experience pleasure and harmony as a result of their actions which harmonize each other. That is, in pursuit of a goal and satisfaction of needs, individuals' actions elicit positive reciprocal message from the other individual. Whereas progressive spirals lead to harmony and satisfaction, regressive spirals are characterized by discomfort, distance, frustrations and dissatisfaction because interaction is characterized by failure to satisfy needs. All relationships have both types of spirals. If a relationship is to grow, the progressive spirals should outweigh the regressive periods.

- **Self-fulfilling and self-defeating prophecies**

Our efforts, commitment and attitude which are dependent on our expectations, play a role in the achievement of goals. It often happens that what we expect to happen will happen or at least what we expect to happen influences what actually happens. It appears, therefore, that our expectations have either a positive or negative influence on our commitment, attitudes and efforts in the achievement of goals. If our expectations are negative, negative influence will result, whereas if we have positive expectations, positive influence will dominate our actions.

### **3.7.6.3 Parenting styles**

The atmosphere prevailing in families and the nature of perceived support and love, seem to be influenced by different parenting styles (Hall & Bracken, 1996 : 253) that are influenced by the types of parents (Cate & Loots, 2000 : 399). Hall and Bracken (1996 : 253) identified five categories of parents.

- **Authoritarian and authoritative parents**

Authoritarian parents believe that rules given to children should be accepted without questioning, whereas authoritative parents expect rules to be followed but do explain reasons behind their rules. They also respectfully and lovingly listen to their children's points of view while still maintaining a final word. Hall and Bracken (1996 : 253) highlight the following characteristics of authoritarian parenting:

- Make high demands for mature behaviour
- Are often harsh, uncompromising and power-assertive
- Tend to be low in nurturance
- High in parental control
- They shape, control and evaluate their children's behaviour according to an absolute set of standards.
- Emphasize unquestionable obedience, respect for authority, work and tradition
- Verbal give-and-take between the parent and child is discouraged.
- Less likely than others to use more gentle methods of persuasion such as affection, praise and rewards with their children

- **Permissive and nonconformist parents**

Both types of parents make few attempts to control their children. The difference, however, between the two types of parents is that permissive parents show a lack of control due to being uninvolved, whereas the nonconformists, through their lack of control, give their children the freedom to develop. Communication between permissive parents and children is poor as parents give in to their children's demands. On the other hand, the nonconformist parents communicate well with their children in supporting them to develop their own view points. Characteristics of permissive parents, according to Hall and Bracken ( 1996 : 253 ) are as follows:

- Minimize control over their children's behaviour
- Make few demands for mature behaviour on their children
- Allow their children to explore and express opinions and emotions freely
- Neglect children's needs
- Inconsistent disciplinarians
- Warm but non-controlling and allow their children to make their own decisions and learn from natural consequences
- Do not monitor children's behaviour.

- **Harmonious type parents**

These parents are neither restrictive nor permissive. There is no need to be restrictive or permissive because their children live up to their expectations. These parents, like the authoritative types, willingly listen to their children's opinions. Self-disclosure is high among children whose parents encourage them to speak by listening to their views, but very poor where they are not being given support in expressing their opinions (Rotenberg, 1995 :

211-212). Other characteristics of harmonious parents, as identified by Hall and Bracken (1996 : 253) are as follows:

- Fall between the other extreme styles
- Tend to be highly nurturing and moderately controlling
- Proactively set clear standards for children's behaviour
- Respond to children in a consistent fashion
- Exercise the verbal give-and-take technique
- Acknowledge children's opinions

#### **3.7.6.4 The intergenerational transmission theory**

According to Guttman, Ben-Asher and Lazar (1999 : 182) the ability or inability to sustain a relationship is transmitted from parents to children (in various ways), who in turn transmit it to their own children, too. For instance, parents who fail to maintain their heterosexual relationship or marriage, transmit to their children an attitude of failure to survive in the midst of conflicts, and the attitude transmitted to them is that of withdrawal in the face of conflicts. Schamess (1993 : 427) points out that depending on the level at which parents exit a relationship, children develop a lower level of withdrawal threshold in interpersonal conflict situations (that is, a greater likelihood of distancing or breaking up a relationship where a threshold of withdrawal is defined as the point at which an individual gives up the struggle and disengages from further involvement).

Cantrell, McIntyre, Sharkey and Thompson (1995 : 35-36 & 258) also noted that the technique of violence used by parents to solve their marital problems has a tendency of teaching their children through modelling to solve their interpersonal relationships through violence. Patterson in Bornstein and Lamb (1988 : 482) illustrate this teaching by means of

familial interaction. Patterson identified a pattern of coercive interactions that serve to elicit, maintain and promote aggression among family members. For instance, an adolescent who becomes aggressive as a result of undisclosed painful material may prompt another (second member) to respond with the same type of stimuli if the latter believes through parental modelling that coercion may be effective. As a result of this aversive interchange, other members may be engulfed as the aversive interchanges escalate. This process socializes children into aggressive patterns of behaviour which causes parents, too, to apply highly punitive child-rearing tactics in an attempt to control their children's aggression.

Conflict resolution techniques, therefore, either equip or deprive an adolescent of interpersonal competence. In their three subsystems model (model for predicting young adults interpersonal competence), Armstead et al. (1995 : 447) explain the influence of the significant others in the development of interpersonal competence.

Conflict and divorce between parents impact negatively on the acquisition of interpersonal competence during adolescents and subsequent years. Adolescents who are products of conflict and divorce also have lower self-esteem and poorer relationships with parents. Theriault (1997 : 566) maintains that competent adolescents are in a position to successfully separate from their parents while still maintaining some attachment bonds with them. Gerson, Hoffman, Sauls and Ulrici (1993 : 341-343) maintain that adolescents develop lower self-esteem because of the impact of negative messages embodied in violence on their subjective world.

The message send to them is in the form of a linear and simplistic sequence of cause (conflict) and effect (divorce). Such message of failure, both verbal or nonverbal, are send long before divorce or separation takes place. To illustrate this point, Schamess (1993 : 427) point out that some adolescents reach a point where they are wary of commitment and

fearful of betrayal because of their negative home backgrounds. For instance, their home backgrounds might make girls to perceive men as either objects of fear or sources of narcissistic gratification.

According to Armstead et al. (1995 : 448) these messages translate into coping mechanisms (also called frames) which are, among others, as follows:

- **A coping frame:** This frame describes how an individual has learned a particular way of reducing anxiety in childhood. Special attention is given to specific experiences that may have led to this way of coping. For instance, negative experiences may lead an individual into believing that to reduce anxiety one should take action.
- **Modelling frame:** The modelling frame is a frame that describes how someone learned to model his or her behaviour by observing important figures, usually parents during childhood. Special attention is on general patterns of behaviour observed and followed such as the acquisition and internalization of the use of arguments to solve problems.
- **A role frame:** This frame describes how someone learned to play a particular role in his or her family while growing up, for example, having learned to be a problem solver.
- **A definition frame:** This is a frame that describes how a family creates certain unquestioned beliefs or myths about how things are or should be. For example, that a place of a woman is in the kitchen.
- **A reversal frame:** This frame describes how someone developed a particular set of values whose aim is to negate unfavourable situations, like being determined not to be abused by a husband after seeing one's mother or father being abused by his spouse.
- **Loyalty frame:** This frame refers to identification with one's parents to an extent where one's life may not be different from theirs. For example, an individual may stay

in a relationship no matter how negative it might be.

These frames are negative in nature as they arise out of the negative conflict resolution techniques used by parents (Shatz & Hartup in Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998 : 736). In their interpersonal relationships adolescents apply techniques that were used in their families (Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998 : 736). The negative problem solving techniques are those that may be labelled as attack, and they include behaviours such as hostility, and authoritarian behaviour, avoidance, which include behaviours such as ignoring the problem, withdrawal from the conflict (one parent express hostility whereas the other distances himself or herself from the resolution process), and compromising style, which includes behaviours such as apologizing, understanding the others' point of view and working together to solve a problem without being assertive.

The way in which this behaviour is acquired by children may be explained by means of the social learning theory (Bandura & Mischell in Shaffer, 1996 : 525). According to this theory, the modelled behaviour is acquired and maintained and strengthened if they are rewarded. A reward in the case of the acquisition of marital violence come by way of witnessing a parent gaining power or possessions through the use of violence, and violence is perceived as being legitimized. Violence in one area of life engenders violence in other contexts.

#### **3.7.6.5 Need satisfaction behaviours**

Shaw and Constanzo (1982 : 362) describe three broad categories of behaviours related to need satisfaction in the family that may either contribute to the establishment of relationships or failure to do so. These behaviours are types of inclusion behaviours, types of control behaviours and types of affection.

- **Type of inclusion behaviours**

The extend to which parents involve their children in their home affairs determine the type of personality traits that will later affect their interpersonal relationships. Broadly speaking, there are three kinds of parents' behaviour in this regard which may result in failure to experience adequate amount of inclusion satisfaction (that is, either insufficient integration into the family or too much inclusion in family affairs). These behaviours are undersocial behaviour, oversocial behaviour and the ideal type. The undersocial behaviours have the tendency towards introversion and withdrawal. On the other hand, the oversocial behaviour tend to be extroverted and constantly in search of others and expecting them to reciprocate. The ideal type, has the combination of the two types of behaviours. Adolescents exposed to the ideal type behaviour enjoy being in both a group and being alone. They also tend to develop personality traits suitable for friendship development and maintenance.

- **Types of control behaviours**

The extend to which an individual interacts with other family members, guided by his decision-making style, determines the quality of the relationship. Schutz in Shaw and Constanzo (1982 : 363) identified three kinds of control behaviours in interpersonal relationships, namely, the abdicrat, the autocrat and the democrat. The abdicrat tends to be submissive and abdicates power and responsibility in dealing with others. This type of an individual prefers subordinate roles. The autocrat tends to dominate others and prefers the top position in a power hierarchy. The democrat, which is the ideal type, interacts with others as determined by the situation in which he or she finds himself or herself.



- **Types of affection behaviour**

Schutz in Shaw and Constanzo (1982 : 363) defines affection as close emotional feeling between two people. The quality of affection experienced in early childhood determines the nature and quality of interpersonal relationships. Inadequate affection in parent-child relations can cause either underpersonal and overpersonal behaviour, whereas the ideal parent-child relationship produces personal behaviour. The behaviours resulting from the underpersonal type are a tendency to avoid close personal relations and maintains emotional distance. The overpersonal types have a desire for very close emotional relations and makes attempts to create them. The personal types functions satisfactorily in both close and distant emotional relations.

### **3.8 ADOLESCENTS' GROUPINGS**

While breaking away from parents adolescents find themselves in different types of peer group networks or groupings which differ with regard to the extend to which they offer emotional support (Hurlock, 1980 : 232). These groupings are, according to the gender segregation theory (Maccoby in Reis et al., 1993 : 633) made up of the same sex adolescents in the initial stages of friendship establishment. Furman and Simon (1998 : 726) and Hurlock (1980 : 232) identified five adolescent social groupings, namely, close friends, cliques, crowds, organized groups and gangs. Children may be well accepted in one group but not in the other.

#### **3.8.1 Close friends**

The search for friends usually culminates in two to three friends or confidants whose sex, interests and abilities are similar. Although this social grouping is marked by occasional

quarrels, it however, appears to be a social grouping which appears to afford adolescents with the highest form of emotional support as self-disclosure seem to be at a high level in this social grouping. In Papalia and Oaks' (1993 : 646) view, friendship may start and be fixated at the lowest level, that is, social acquaintances. These are friends that adolescents play tennis with, go to the movie with, or study with, or gradually move to the last stage, that is, best friends. Best friends are friends that are able to confide in one another, especially during times when emotional support is needed. Baron and Byrne (1991 : 229) refers to the former type of friends as good friends and close friends and to the latter as true friends. The emergence of true friendship formation is marked by greater self-disclosure.

### **3.8.2 Cliques**

This is a social grouping which is made up of groups of close friends and it is initially composed of members of the same sex. At a later stage membership, however, includes members of the opposite sex, too.

### **3.8.3 Crowds**

As adolescents grow older and interests in parties and dating grows, the result is the development of another social grouping called crowds. Crowds are made up of cliques. Because of the large size of this social grouping, this grouping is characterized by less congeniality of interests among the members and as such a greater social distance exists between them which undoubtedly negatively affects emotional ties as a result of the low level of self-disclosure.

#### **3.8.4 Organized groups**

Youths who do not find home in any of the social groupings, are organized by schools and community organizations into youth groups. The purpose of these organized groups is also to meet the social needs of adolescents. These social groupings are unfortunately short-lived as adolescents lose interest in them and leave them by the time they turn sixteen or seventeen because of a feeling of being regimented.

#### **3.8.5 Gangs**

Adolescents who are rejected by their peers and therefore do not belong to any social grouping, may join gangs. Gangs are usually made up of members of the same sex.

### **3.9 TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS**

There are different types of relationships (Pirhacova, 1996 : 27) which may be divided into two broad categories, namely, primary and secondary relationships (Reber, 1985 : 384 & 557). A primary relationship is characterized by emotional ties between partners, whereas a secondary relationship is free of emotional attachment. The emotional attachment in primary interpersonal relationships renders the replacement of partners difficult whereas relationship ties in secondary relationships are fluid and quite flexible.

There are various ways that may be used to identify primary relationships from secondary ones. For example, Quinn (1990 : 380) maintains that the distance that people keep between themselves when interacting with each other is an indicator of the quality of a relationship that exists between them. Likewise in discussing the relationship between the level of friendship and distance, Feldman (1989 : 496-497) refers to what he calls personal space

which is a zone around a person's body which others are not allowed to invade. Those who enter this zone are allowed to do so. Forced entry into this zone causes nervousness and other negative emotions such as anxiety. There are four general standards for spacing that depend upon the intimacy of the interaction, namely:

- The public interaction zone between persons such as politicians, or a lecturer.
- The social interaction zone - used for impersonal and businesslike contacts.
- The personal interaction zone - used for contacts with close friends as well as acquaintances.
- The intimate interaction zone - which is used in intimate relationships such as lovers, parents and their children. According to Anthony and Giddens (1993 : 105) this the shortest distance to body contact, where bodily touching is permitted.

Shulman and Knafo (1997 : 691) describe three types of friendships that have the characteristics of primary and secondary relationships. The interdependent friendship type and the consensus-sensitive friendship type are primary relationships, whereas the disengaged friendship type reflects the characteristics of a secondary relationship. These authors describe these relationships as follows:

- Interdependent friendship type: In discussing relational issues, partners belonging to this type make use of one another to come to consensus. They look at matters objectively and feel free to either accept or reject a proposition. They reach the final solution of an issue after having agreed or disagreed and after having evaluated all available information. As such, all parties involved in this type of a relationship respect one another's needs.
- Disengaged friendship type: Friends belonging to this type of a relationship tend to

work independently of each other. Each partner imposes his views on others who in turn rejects them as accepting a partner's opinion is seen as evidence of weakness.

- **Consensus-sensitive friendship type:** This type of friendship is characterized by friends trying to stick together at all costs. Friends strive for cohesion and complex agreements. In an attempt to avoid conflict, friends reach quick solutions to problems without disagreements. Individual inclinations are suppressed in favour of closeness.

### **3.9.1 Different ways of describing primary and secondary relationships**

The different types of relationships discussed by various authors fall in one of the two categories. Taylor et al. (1997 : 262) identified two kinds of relationships which are exchange and communal relationships. Exchange relationships are those relationships that take place between (mostly) strangers or casual acquaintances and business people, whereas communal relationships take place between family members, romantic partners and friends. In communal relationships partners feel a personal responsibility for the needs of the other partner, and exchange relationships are characterized by people giving comparable benefits in return soon afterwards in the absence of emotional ties. The main characteristic of communal relationships is that people provide benefits (including love) to the other partner with no expectation of receiving similar benefits in the near future.

Tajfel in Foster and Louw-Potgieter (1991 : 29-30) distinguishes between two types of relationships, namely, interpersonal or inter-individual relationships and intergroup relationship. A relationship is said to be interpersonal when the social interaction between people, two or more, is determined solely by their unique individual characteristics. The intergroup relationship exists when the interaction is wholly determined by the participants' membership in various groups. For instance, in a conversation where one says jazz music is

a personal favourite, the relationship is said to be interpersonal, whereas where the same individual says as a black person I experience a special connection with jazz music, the relationship is said to be intergroup.

Likewise, Jensen-Campbell and Graziano (2000 : 924) describe two types of relationships in their discussion of the social exchange theory, namely, the closed and the open (also called voluntary relationships) relationships, which seem to be similar to the communal and exchange relationships, respectively. The closeness of a relationship refers to the degree of interdependence between two individuals when they are motivated to achieve their personal goals. On the other hand, the openness of a relationship refers to the perceived availability of alternative relationships, and how easily the relationship is disturbed, changed or ended.

According to Jensen-Campbell and Graziano (2000 : 924) a closed relationship, like a communal relationship, is more desirable to individuals than the open relationship (or exchange relationship) because it appears to give them a greater sense of security. These kinds of relationships, as compared to the open ones, cannot be easily dissolved despite the high level of conflict inherent in them. The main reason why they do not dissolve easily, is because of the partners commitment to achieving common goals and receiving rewards, mainly in the form of love that is inherent in these kinds of a relationship (Taylor, et al., 1997 : 258). The open relationships are less characterized by friction, but when friction does occur, the survival of these relationships is threatened.

### **3.10 CAUSES OF RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN**

According to Kurdek's (1994 : 923) observation of interpersonal relationships, it appears as if relationship breakdown is inevitable because conflict is inevitable. He maintains that "interpersonal conflict is an ubiquitous phenomenon" and it occurs prominently in one form

or another in all major accounts of social relationships and developments. There are various factors responsible for the collapse of relationships.

### **3.10.1 Expectation violation**

According to Afifi and Metts (1998 : 367) expectation violation is a behaviour that a receiver notices as being different from the behavioural display expected. Such a behaviour which is regarded as falling outside a range of expected behaviours is theorized to produce cognitive arousal and trigger an interpretation-evaluation sequence that helps individuals cope with unexpected outcomes.

In discussing Mandler's scrip-disruption hypotheses Sternberg and Barnes (1988 : 336) refer to the expectation violation and expected behaviour as scrip-disruption and neutrality. Positive emotions result from script disruption (a script refers to an expected sequence of actions and interactions) whereas neutral or even negative ones result when there is no novelty in the actions that were intimate at one time (especially at the beginning of a relationship). If these actions are maintained (no script-disruption) throughout the relationship as they were from the beginning, they may turn out to be boring with the passing of time. For instance, early in a relationship a kiss could have caused a heart thumping and therefore positive emotions, but later neutrality or negative feelings towards the relationship may develop as it (the kiss) may not have any effect at all.

In Barber, Weinyd, Morse and Chittams' (1999 : 205 & 219) view, expectations are not formulated to evaluate others' behaviour only. Own behaviour is also being evaluated. These authors assert that individuals construct beliefs about the self as worthy of love and care (or unworthy and unlovable) and expectations about others as available and comforting (versus unresponsive and rejecting). These set of beliefs and expectations which can be

conceived as part of a person's character, are carried into meaningful relationships. These violation behaviours influence the quality of a relationship because they lead to relational uncertainty as a result of the anxiety producing effect they intrinsically possess. Consequently, such behaviours tend to be perceived negatively with interpretations such as betrayal, disrespect for the integrity of the relationship and untrustworthiness attached to them.

Expectations (also called relationship rules) develop in various ways (Afifi & Metts, 1998 : 367). Firstly, they are the product of relationships. That is, friends and partners carve or create them through interacting with one another. Secondly, they are based on scripts generated from one's own experience. Thirdly, they are formulated on the basis of observations of other relationships (for example, that of parents and peers). Fourthly, they are also the product of accumulated knowledge about one's own and partner's typical behaviour in a variety of circumstances.

### **3.10.2 Self-presentation**

The downfall of a relationship is sometimes caused by self-presentation (Myers, 1990 : 52 - 53). This author defines self-presentation as making impressions about oneself to others so as to gain social and material rewards, to feel better about ourselves, even to become secure in our social identities. In order to succeed with this act of hypocrisy, one has to monitor one's behaviour in order to determine its effects on others, an act known as self-monitoring.

According to Lippa (1994 : 235) there are two levels of self-monitoring, namely, low and high self-monitoring. Individuals who are low on self-monitoring tend to behave in accordance with their attitudes (that is, their inner states) as compared to those who are high on it as they act in accordance with the demands of their environments. Consequently, low



self-monitoring individuals are reliable in all respects including self-disclosure, whereas the high self-monitoring individuals are selfish and unreliable as they engage in self-presentation most of the time.

As a result, partners high on the self-monitoring scale adjust their behaviour to make it plausible to others ( that is, the external audience ) and in the process also make it, according to Myers (1990 : 88) plausible to themselves, that is the internal audience. It appears, therefore, that individuals high on self-monitoring are hypocrites and as such they portray deceptive behaviour, whereas those who are low on self-monitoring, act in accordance with the inner real self and, therefore, portray the true self. When this hypocrisy is discovered partner by the other partner, it may produce feelings of mistrust and betrayal which may lead to the collapse of a relationship. Bagley and King (1990 : 115) define betrayal as a dynamic in which an individual discovers that someone on whom they were vitally dependent has caused them harm. For instance, in cases where incompatible individuals are attracted to each other as a result of self-monitoring, the relationships may be terminated as self-disclosure reciprocity starts to unfold to an extent where the true dishonest motive of the other partner is realized.

Howitt (1989 : 70) argues that self-monitoring has a high probability of arousing cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance occurs when an individual subscribes to two or more attitudes, beliefs and perceptions (Hewstone et al., 1989 : 157). Cognitive dissonance causes stress because an individual who may be behaving in hypocritical ways is compelled to find a balance between his thoughts, beliefs and attitudes and his behaviour. Stress in a relationship gives rise to many negative behaviours, such as irritability, which has a tendency of putting a strain on relationships. According to the interpersonal balance theory, maintaining sound relationships with individuals high on the self-monitoring trait is difficult because of the stress that torments them at all times.

### **3.10.3 Dissimilarity**

Baron and Byrne (1991 : 295) maintain that relationships break down when two people discover that they are dissimilar in as far as attitudes, values and preferences are concerned. These differences arouse negative feelings. There are several ways in which partners who were attracted to each other on the basis of similarity become suddenly dissimilar. First, dissimilarity shall have existed before the development of a relationship, but faked through tactics such as self-presentation and flattery that include selfish self-disclosure. Secondly, some dissimilarities arise once the relationship has developed. For instance, a partner that never loved soccer, may suddenly develop the love for this activity.

In summary, Hewstone et al. (1989 : 230) highlight the following causes of relationship decline and breakdown:

- Increase in conflict (all relationships have some degree of conflict)
- Availability of attractive alternatives
- Geographical separation
- Being jealous of other relationships

### **3.11 INDICATORS OF A COLLAPSING RELATIONSHIP**

There are various signals of a relationship that is declining which may be divided into two broad categories, namely, direct and indirect indicators (Baxter in Hewstone et al., 1989 : 230). Direct indicators, which seem to be manifested by young people, include signs such as withdrawal of self-disclosure and deception to avoid embarrassing or hurting the other partner. Indirect indicators include behaviours such as gradual withdrawal which may be characterized by reduced frequency of contact and they are mainly displayed by older people.

### **3.11.1 Stages in a declining relationship**

There are various steps through which a declining relationship goes through before it is dissolved (Kersten, 1990 : 258). Lippa (1994 : 419) highlights four such stages which are, voice (actively talking and discussing problems in either a sober or agitated manner), loyalty (passively waiting for things to improve), neglect ( distancing oneself from the relationship and allowing it to decline) and exit (leaving the relationship, either emotionally or physically).

With regard to loyalty and neglect, Myers (1990 : 441) maintain that some people exhibit loyalty passively but optimistically waiting for conditions to improve. When problems are difficult to deal with, and the risks of separation too great, partners may prefer to be silent and suffer from pain with the hope that the good old days will return. In the case of neglect (practiced mostly by men), partners grow apart, with each partner redefining his or her life without the other. Further still, it appears as if prior satisfaction and greater investment in a relationship promotes constructive (voice and loyalty) rather than exit and neglect responses. Exit and voice are promoted by available alternatives which have a tendency of down playing loyalty and neglect responses.

According to Feldman (1990 : 667) it appears as if Lippa's last three stages in the decline of a relationship, are characterized by communication breakdown. He maintains that communication breakdown may be caused by, among others, the change with regard to the evaluation and the meaning attached to a partner's behaviour. For instance, behaviour that was perceived as charming forgetfulness, might suddenly be perceived as boorish indifference. When this happens, the partner is viewed as less valued and attractive and the partner who feels bored may engage in avoidance behaviour which may include communication breakdown. Communication that has broken down is characterized by,

among others, justifying oneself, rather than listening to what the other person says.

According to Brigham (1991 : 400) and Baron and Byrne (1991 : 300) these stages vary on two dimensions, namely, constructive/destructive and active/passive. Voice and loyalty are considered to be constructive, with the tendency to maintain the relationship, whereas exit and neglect are destructive, as they tend to break the relationship. As far as activeness/passiveness is concerned, exit and voice are considered to be active, whereas loyalty and neglect are considered to be passive.

The choice of any of the above dimensions is determined by three variables identified by Rusbult and Zembrodt in Brigham (1991 : 400). These variables are as follows:

- The degree of satisfaction before the onset of dissatisfaction with a relationship
- The extend to which an individual invested in a relationship
- The quality of an individual's best alternatives to the current relationship.

### **3.12 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, it was indicated that man cannot live in isolation. He has to establish and maintain healthy relationships, as relationships are being helpful to his being in various ways. The establishment of relationships follows a particular pattern which starts to unfold in childhood. There are prerequisites and conditions that should prevail to enable friendship establishment to take place. Although male and female adolescents are exposed to the same prerequisites and conditions, friendship formation between them differ due to various factors. These differences are further enhanced by their family of origin which exert an influence on them in various ways. The ideal relationship is intimacy which is may only be established during late adolescents as a result of the emotional status and the cognitive development that

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Any research should be preceded by a research strategy that guides it. Botes (1994 : 12) defines a research strategy, which includes the research method and the research design, as an overall plan and approach that guides the research proceedings. A research strategy helps a researcher in ensuring that he or she remains on track by avoiding unnecessary and irrelevant data. In this chapter, this research strategy, which was briefly discussed in chapter one, will now be discussed in detail.

#### **4.2 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH**

The aims of this study are, as indicated in chapter one (cf 1.5) two fold, namely, primary and secondary aims.

##### **4.2.1 Primary aim**

The primary aim of this study was as follows:

*To identify perceptions, beliefs and attitudes held by adolescents that make it difficult for them to handle self-disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships so as to enable themselves to self-actualize.*

## **2.2 Secondary aims**

his study's secondary aims, which were also stated in chapter one (cf 1.5.2 ) are as follows:

To investigate the nature of self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships

To explore and to understand the extent to which adolescents disclose in interpersonal relationships.

to explore the nature of in interpersonal relationships

to develop guidelines to assist adolescents to handle self-disclosure in ways that ought

to enhance their establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships so as

to enable themselves to self-actualize.

## **3 ASSUMPTIONS**

he purpose of this study is based on the following assumptions:

Adolescents are unable to establish and maintain intimate interpersonal relationships as a result of inappropriate self-disclosure techniques

Most adolescents' significant others seem to handle adolescents' self-disclosure in ways that render the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships difficult

Adolescents have secrets of one kind or another and their secrets differ in intensity depending on how they rationalize about them

## **4 HYPOTHESES**

he nature of the primary and the secondary nature of this study coupled with the

assumptions, prompted the researcher to formulate the hypothesis of this study as follows:

*Adolescents have negative perceptions, beliefs and attitudes that make it difficult for them to handle self-disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships so as to enable themselves to self-actualize.*

#### **4.5 RESEARCH METHOD**

The purpose of research has an influence on the type of research method to be used to investigate a phenomena. There are two research methods which the researcher had to choose from to investigate the phenomenon under study, namely the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of adolescents towards self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships, which are qualitative and quantitative research methods. These research methods serve different purposes which a researcher should keep in mind when deciding on the appropriate method for any research.

##### **4.5.1 Qualitative research**

According to Brink (1991 : 15) qualitative research has two characteristics that differentiate it from quantitative research. Firstly, qualitative research, which is ex post facto in nature, lays emphasis on words and observations as opposed to quantitative research method which tends to mainly make use of numbers to represent phenomena. Consequently, in this research adolescents were given an opportunity to fully express their views on how they deal with self-disclosure through in-depth interviews which were guided by open ended questions in focus group and face-to-face interviews (Best & Kahn, 1993 : 184).

Secondly, qualitative research is more suitable for describing or generating a hypothesis or

hypotheses in a field of study where researchers have inadequate information. On the other hand, Leedy (1993 : 142) maintains that quantitative research is most useful in cases where researchers would like to confirm or dispute or negate existing hypotheses in areas of knowledge with adequate information at the disposal of researchers. Although there may be adequate information on self-disclosure, it appears as if not much is known about the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of adolescents towards self-disclosure.

Qualitative research has three aspects, namely, the exploratory, descriptive and contextual aspects, that make it even more suitable for this research than quantitative research method. Bless and Higgsson-Smith (1995 : 42) argue that the exploratory aspect enables a researcher to familiarize himself or herself with an unfamiliar topic (in this case, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of adolescents towards self-disclosure) by developing and clarifying ideas.

In the process of developing and clarifying ideas Herbert (1990 : 19) asserts that a researcher would also be describing certain characteristics of a population (that is, in this research, adolescents) in detail. These characteristics should be reported as they are (Gay (1992 : 10). The development, clarification and the description of ideas should be contextual in nature. For instance, in the investigation of adolescents' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes, a researcher should consider the conditions and circumstances in which adolescents find themselves. Weinbach in Grinnell (jr) (1988 : 25) observed that any research that ignores contextual factors cannot be regarded as being informative. .

The nature of qualitative research has prompted Leedy (1993 : 142-143) to conclude that the qualitative research method is a friendly approach because it describes human phenomenon from human beings' perspective. It is as such a natural method of investigation because it describes and understands reality from the respondents' subjective world. In this regard Grinnell (jr) (1988 : 186) maintains that in this type of research, a researcher does not



put words and ideas in the minds of respondents.

## **4.6 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Every scientific research should be preceded by a well formulated research design (Luthans, 1995 : 13). According to Bless and Higgsson-Smith (1995 : 63) a research design is a plan of any scientific research which must guide a researcher in collecting, analysing and interpreting data collected with the aim of generating answers (Herbert, 1990 : 18). This plan should help the researcher in collecting data which in this study is the gaining of insight into the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of adolescents towards self-disclosure. This data was used to draw up guidelines to assist adolescents to handle self-disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their interpersonal relationships so as to enable themselves to self-actualize.

### **4.6.1 Selection of the sample**

Since working with the entire population of interest is not always possible, that is, all the adolescents in this study, a researcher should rather work with a sample. Wimmer and Dominick (1990 : 69) define a population as “a group or class of subjects, variables, concepts or phenomena under investigation” whereas a sample, according to Neale and Liebert (1986 : 31) is a subset of a population of interest.

A sample should be scientifically chosen and there are various sampling techniques to choose from. In order to make a scientific choice of a sample, a researcher should take his or her research design into consideration so as to choose the most relevant technique. Since in this research the qualitative research was used, it was therefore imperative to identify the most suitable sampling technique for this type of research. According to Bradley (1993 : 440) the most suitable sampling technique in qualitative research is purposeful sampling because it

is not controlled by any set of rules like it is the case in quantitative research. For instance, samples in qualitative research may be of any size, and they may be changed from time to time if the researcher deems it fit to do so. In this study, the researcher made use of a sample of adolescents and parents. The adolescent samples were composed of six groups of adolescents which were made up of three boys and three girls each and an adolescent boy and girl. The parents' samples were made up of one group of six parents composed of three mothers and three fathers.

Qualitative research samples should be made up of respondents that the researcher considers to be average persons of the population under investigation. Trembling in Burgess (1991 : 100) maintains that these should be individuals who satisfy two criteria. Firstly, they should be in a position to provide the researcher with the required information. Secondly, where necessary, they should be available to make this information available to the researcher on a continuous basis. In this research, the researcher made use of the following criteria to select such individuals.

- Only adolescents in late adolescence were chosen because this is a developmental level where self-disclosure and intimacy reach their peak
- These adolescents were from two parent families
- Only parents of adolescents in late adolescence were chosen

#### **4.6.2 Pilot study**

Before a full scale study is conducted, a researcher should conduct a pilot study. A pilot study has many advantages. Tuckman (1994 : 237) points out that it is useful in the identification of sensitive topics which respondents may find difficult to respond to. Gay (1992 : 233) asserts that the pilot study is helpful in pre-testing an interviewing schedule.

McNeil (1990 : 34) argues that the pre-testing of an interviewing schedule provides an opportunity of rectifying wording problems that may cause ambiguity. Lastly, Herbert (1990 : 65) refers to a pilot study as a dress rehearsal because of its helpfulness in identifying unforeseen difficulties.

Before a full scale investigation was undertaken, the researcher conducted a pilot study with a focus group of six adolescents made up of three boys and three girls and a group of six parents made up of three mothers and three fathers. Adolescents and parents responded to two different questions which were “How do you deal with your secrets” and “How do you deal with your adolescents’ secrets”, respectively.

#### **4.6.3 Data collection**

Data was collected by means of the following techniques:

- Focus group interviews
- Individual interviews
- Observations

##### **4.6.3.1 Focus group interviews**

Krueger (1994 : 6) defines a focus group interview as a “carefully planned discussion on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment”. Usually, focus groups are made up of six to ten members. This author further maintains that focus groups manage to engage in a planned discussion provided they are guided by an interviewer who has made a study of the area(s) of interest to be discussed. The areas of interest in this study were the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of adolescents towards self-disclosure in interpersonal

relationships. This interviewer is referred to as a moderator. In this study the focus groups were each made up of six respondents each which were composed as follows:

- Three groups of adolescent girls
- Three groups of adolescent boys
- One group of three fathers and three mothers with adolescent children

Focus groups were used in this study because of the advantages which the researcher found to be highly valuable for the study of this nature (Renzetti & Lee, 1993 : 106). The self-disclosure of whatever kind of information, be it from adolescents or from their parents, is difficult because it involves the invasion of privacy. Focus groups give respondents who might feel threatened, support that enable them to talk freely. More support in the form of focus group discussion is even of greater importance in situations where the researcher deals with shy people. As a result of the support given to respondents, the exploration of the meanings that underpin behaviour becomes possible and easier because of active group participation.

Burgess (1991 : 15) asserts that active participation in focus groups is rendered possible because discussions take place in situations that resemble real-life situations. Such situations have features of real-life situations because interviews are unstructured. According to Singleton (jr), Strait, Strait and McAllister (1988 : 236) interviews are unstructured because they are characterized by the formulation of general objectives which are referred to as the thematic areas under exploration. In this study, the areas investigated were explored through the use of suitable questions for adolescents and parents which were slightly different from those of the pilot study. These questions for adolescents and parents were “How do children of your age deal with their secrets” and “How do parents deal with their adolescents’ children’s secrets,” respectively.

#### **4.6.3.2 Face-to-face interviews**

According to Baker (1986 : 182) a face-to-face interview is a data collecting method where an interviewer directs questions to a respondent. These questions may either be closed (requiring specific responses) or open-ended questions (that is, questions that require productive responses). In this study, Face-to-face interviews were used to verify information collected by means of focus group interviews and both types of questions were used.

Face-to-face interviews were used in this study because of the advantages such interviews have for this study. Palmer in Burgess (1991 : 107) makes mention of several advantages of this technique which are among others, the securing of vivid, accurate and inclusive accounts from informants because of its inherent ability to provide a researcher with the opportunity to probe deeply. Bailey (1994 : 174-175) maintains that probing is made possible by the fact that questions may either be modified, changed and repeated as the need arises, something which cannot be done in the case of focus group interviews. In this study, two adolescents, one female and one male, were interviewed.

#### **4.6.3.3 Observations**

When focus groups and face-to-face interviews are used, data that cannot be collected by means of these techniques, should be collected through observations. These observations should be recorded as field notes. Miles (1994 : 89) points out that field notes, an activity which should be regarded as an integral part of research interviews, should be written either during or after the interview sessions. In this study, field notes were made both during and after the interviewing sessions.

Field notes (reflected between brackets in the transcribed data) are made up of two kinds,

namely, the descriptive and the reflective parts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992 : 107). Descriptive notes are made up of a description of settings, people, actions, experiences and conversations made. Reflective notes, on the other hand are concerned with the researcher's own subjective impressions and thoughts about the phenomena under study.

#### **4.6.4 Data interpretation**

While quantitative researchers make use of statistical methods to analyze data, qualitative researchers make use of content analysis. Rosenthal and Rosnow (1984 : 124) define content analysis as a "multipurpose research method of analyzing data which goes through certain stages." A researcher formulates categories after having explored the phenomenon under study. In the exploration of the phenomenon, a researcher engages in a process that moves from description to the analytical and later to the synthetic aspect of the exploration.

In this study, the phenomenon to be described are the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of adolescents towards self-disclosure that make it difficult for them to handle self-disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships so as to enable themselves to self-actualize. After having described this phenomenon, the next step was to break it into meaningful parts which were given in the form of themes, sub-themes and categories. Lastly, the relationship between these themes, sub-themes and categories was reflected.

The actual process of working with data collected to arrive at the themes, sub-themes and categories is called a coding procedure. Baker (1988 : 265) asserts that coding procedures are as many as researchers. In this study, the researcher made use of a three step coding procedure as suggested by Bogden and Biklen (1992 : 176-177):

- Firstly, the researcher read through the collected data carefully, and while he did so, a list of preliminary coding categories was developed. These categories were changed or modified during the interpretation process.
- After the preliminary coding categories were developed, they were assigned with abbreviations that were used to label units of data being interpreted which were sentences and paragraphs in the interview scripts and field notes in the study).
- Further reading and interpretation were done with a purpose of breaking the categories into additional categories and sub-categories which were presented as themes and categories in this study.

#### **4.7 CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRUSTWORTHY RESEARCH STRATEGY**

A research strategy needs to be trustworthy. Bradley (1993 : 436-437) maintains that a trustworthy research strategy has characteristics that a researcher should be conversant with.

##### **4.7.1 Truth value or credibility**

Research strategy should ensure that the phenomenon under study is accurately identified and described (Marshall & Rossman, 1989 : 145). Accurate identification and description of the phenomenon under investigation ensures that the researcher's findings are credible. According to Bradley (1993 : 436) there are various ways of promoting credibility. In this study the researcher made use of triangulation ( that is, using more than one technique to collect data and making use of multiple research subjects ), debriefing and member checking, that is, verification of the research results with research subjects (Silver, 1993 : 156).

#### **4.7.2 Applicability/transferability**

A well planned research tends to ensure that research findings can be generalized to the population under study. That is, a research strategy that ensures that research findings are repeatedly obtained in various situations and conditions where research was systematically done in accordance with the research strategy, yields a certain measure of transferability (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994 : 381). Such research findings can be transferable because they show evidence of reliability and validity (Campbell & Stanley, 1994 : 719).

#### **4.7.3 Dependability/replicability**

Although the replication of qualitative research is more difficult as compared to the quantitative research, a well thought out research strategy should make provision for the replication of a qualitative research. According to Merriam (1995 : 56) replication of a study can be ensured through the strategy of an audit trail which refers to the full exposition of procedures, protocols and data collected. This author compares the auditing of such information, procedures and protocols to the auditing of financial records by auditors where full information is made available to auditors. In this study, the research design made provision for replicability by making all necessary information available, including verbatim transcripts of audio tape cassettes, except for the use of the subjects used by the researcher due to ethical issues.

#### **4.7.4 Neutrality/confirmability**

Research findings should be objective if they are to be convincing. As such a research strategy should enhance an investigation that is free of whatever form of bias from a



researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 1989 : 148). Research that is free from bias promotes the objectivity of research findings. In this study the researcher ensured objectivity by recording all interviews on audio cassette tapes, verbatim transcription of these tapes, and by making a detailed description of procedures and protocols of this investigation.

#### **4.8 ETHICAL ISSUES**

Wilson (1989 : 66-69) defines ethics as a “branch of philosophy concerned with what is right or bad.” Ethical issues, therefore, guide a researcher with regard to the do’s and don’ts of an investigation. Shaughnessy and Zechmesister (1994 : 47-57) make mention of the following ethical issues that should be taken into consideration in a research with a view to either avoiding or making use of them:

##### **4.8.1 Anonymity and confidentiality**

Babbie (1992 : 450) asserts that there are ways in which anonymity and confidentiality may be embodied in a research. This may be done through, among others, avoiding to identify a given response with a particular research subject and through withholding a research subject’s name from public scrutiny. In this study, pseudo names were given in the transcripts to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

##### **4.8.2 Obtaining informed consent**

According to Babbie (1992 : 470) respondents should not be compelled to take part in a study if they are not willing to do so. Participation should, therefore, be voluntary and be based on informed consent. That is, respondents should be made aware of the merits and the demerits of a research. In this study all respondents were formally verbally requested to take part in

this study. In the case of adolescents, permission to make use of them was obtained from their parents after they were given the merits and the demerits of the research. Concerning the merits, parents were told that through the research findings, they may be in a position to enhance their relationships with their children. As far as the demerits were concerned, participants were told that the discussion of the research question may revive painful information that both the parents and their children may not wish to talk about.

#### **4.8.3 Deception**

Deception may take various forms such as either withholding information, misinforming the research subjects or omitting certain information that respondents are supposed to know (Bailey, 1994 : 463). Weiten (1992 : 54) considers deception as a form of lying. It should, therefore, be used with great care. A researcher may, depending on the objectives of a research, either avoid deception or make use of one or more forms of deception. In this study, one form of deception, namely, that of withholding certain information, was used with the purpose of avoiding giving research subjects clues with regard to information that was sought after. That is, respondents were not told that the focus of the research was on their perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards self-disclosure.

#### **4.8.4 Debriefing**

Debriefing concerns making known to participants the results of the investigation (Herbert, 1990 : 67). Aronson, Ellsworth, Carlsmith and Gonzales (1990 : 104) maintain that debriefing has many advantages which, are among others, as follows:

- The validity of the research may be established through the comparison of the subjects' views and the research findings.

- It makes participants to feel as worthwhile beings and not just mere subjects
- It enables participants to acquaint themselves with both the research findings and to gain a deeper understanding of what research is all about.

In this study, all participants were revisited and informed about the results of the research and the conclusions drawn from research findings.

#### **4.9 CONCLUSION**

In this study, the research methods and the research design were discussed with a view to explaining how data was collected. Attention was also paid to the value of qualitative research and its aspects, namely, the exploratory, descriptive and the contextual aspects. Reference was also made to quantitative research on a small scale with an aim of comparing it with qualitative research so as to point out the relevancy and irrelevancy of qualitative and quantitative research, respectively, to this study.

In the next chapter, the transcribed interviews will be presented.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will be devoted to the presentation of the transcribed data collected through interviews. Data collected is composed of the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of adolescents towards self-disclosure and the parents' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards their adolescent children's self-disclosure to them. Two main categories of interviews, namely, the focus group and the face-to-face interviews, were used to collect this data.

#### **5.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Both types of categories of interviews were guided by one main open ended question and a few other minor questions made up of open ended and closed questions. The adolescents' and the parents' questions, however, differ. The main question for the adolescents, for both focus group and face-to-face interviews was as follows: "How do children of your age deal with their secrets" whereas that of the parents was as follows: "How do parents deal with their adolescent children's secrets?".

#### **5.3 INTERVIEWS**

In this section, seven focus groups and two face-to-face transcribed interviews are presented. The two face-to-face interviews are for a girl and a boy whereas the focus groups are composed as follows:

- Three groups of six adolescent girls each
- Three groups of six adolescent boys each
- One group of three couples

### **5.3.1 Focus group interviews**

#### **5.3.1.1 First adolescent girls' focus group interview**

**Key:**

<b>R</b>	: Researcher
<b>SH</b>	: First girl
<b>CH</b>	: Second girl
<b>TS</b>	: Third girl
<b>TH</b>	: Fourth girl
<b>MA</b>	: Fifth girl
<b>BR</b>	: Sixth girl

**R:** Good afternoon girls. Thank you very much for having accepted my invitation to this eh... discussion. The question that I would like us to discuss is: "How do children of your age deal with their secrets". Right, there you are. Who wants to make a start?

**SH:** I think it is not necessary for children of our age to have secrets because everything in the coming time eh... everything will just go out.

**CH:** I disagree with you because some of us here have secrets.

**S:** Speak louder so that everyone can hear you.

**CH:** I disagree with you because eh... some of us have secrets from home. You just deal with them by telling a friend or somebody .

**TS:** I agree with SH. All of us have secrets, but we cannot tell anyone, especially our friends or somebody because some of our friends pass our secrets to other people and these people laugh at us.

**TH:** People, I think the main reason of calling this a secret is because you should be the only one to know it. Your secret does not mean that you should share it with everybody or maybe with your friend. Maybe you can deal with it alone. If you can, or with your friend if you trust her, but then if you can't, you can go to somebody older who can give you advice. That's how I feel.

**MA:** Okay, I agree with TH, but most people at our age buy these books called diaries and keep their secrets in there. So we all have secrets.

**SH:** But MA, a diary can get lost. There is only one person that can keep a secret and it is you because you may leave a diary somewhere unattended and your friends or someone may take it.

**TS:** I agree with CH because sometimes you find that you have a diary. You put it in your school bag and thereafter your friend comes and take it. All your secrets... she reads all your secrets. Thereafter she throws it away. Other people are going to pick it up and read it. How will you feel about that?

**MA:** No TS, I disagree with you because I said you can use anything as a diary, a book, a page eh... anything. How is that person going to know that what you are putting in there is a diary?

**TS:** Let me tell you. I don't think it is necessary to write in a diary. If you do write in a diary, you don't have to bring it to school or anywhere else. It should stay in your room because it has secrets.

**MA:** That's what I am saying. Most people keep secrets in their diaries and that is the only place to keep them. You can keep a diary at home and when you come back from school you can then write whatever you want to write.

**SH:** Guys, I think there is a big problem here. The minute you say keeping many secrets... that may affect your health. They may also affect your school work when you are at school, especially when you are in class when you try to remember. I think it is supposed to be out (that is, the secret) so that everybody can know about it and if it is a problem, everyone should help you.

**TH:** Wait a minute. There are some secrets that you cannot tell to people. Some secrets you may share with other people because they may affect your health.

**SH:** I agree with SH. Some secrets can affect your studies. Let me say somebody raped you and you don't want to tell anyone. In class you always think about that rape and you don't forget about it.

**BR:** Some people go with their diaries wherever they go, because the minute they see something, they write in them but others don't go around with their diaries.

**TH:** (Emphasizing) That BR is never ever possible. It's never ever possible. You can't go with a diary wherever you go. For instance, if we go to Cape Town for a trip, are you going to take your diary everywhere we go, even if we go to Table Mountain? Will you take it along because you don't know where you will have a secret?

**BR:** Yes, you may take your diary. Maybe when you are taught something, you write and if you think they will steal your diary, you should keep a small diary in your pocket.

**SH:** But BR, you can still recall what you were taught. Many people say your brain is like a computer to store something which you may erase if you want to.

**BR:** What if you forget?

**SH:** If you don't want to forget, you will not forget. If you want to forget you will forget. If you don't want to forget you'll never.

**BR:** If it is something serious you will never forget it, but if it is not serious you will forget it.

**SH:** But BR, when you say you move around with a diary... we are talking about secrets and not about something that is taught.

**TS:** How can you write something you are taught in your diary when almost all your secrets are in your dairy?

**TH:** Let me tell you TS, it doesn't matter if you keep secrets in your diary. You won't keep things that you are taught.

**BR:** You can write them (that is, secrets). On one side you may write your secrets, and on another side you don't write your secrets.

**SH:** Guys let me ask you a question. What is the use of a diary because it seems we are getting confused?

**CH:** Some people use diaries to write secrets, others use hm... diaries to write notes and that they are being taught. So you see, there is a difference because...

**TH:** (Interrupts) And some people can also use it for... maybe writing something that will be a remembrance when they grow up.



**CH:** I don't think so. Some do, some don't.

**SH:** I think it is a matter of eh... of no secrets. Everyone has to know (that is, the secret). I don't care what they say. I don't mind what they do. If someone says something, it doesn't get into my brain. It gets in this side and gets away on the other side.

**SH:** Oh! We have different beliefs. Some maybe think that eh... when they look at themselves in the mirror they are their own best friends and they write everything in their diaries. Some think that if they tell everybody it won't haunt them for the rest of their lives. They will really feel proud to walk in the street with that kind of a topic told to others. There is nothing wrong if everybody knows who they are. If you feel that if you are gay you don't have to be ashamed. Yes, some people are not ashamed if everybody knows their secrets.

**TH:** But then there are those who want to keep it a secret because most people discriminate gay people because they don't really understand how they feel. That's why they would keep such issues as secrets.

**SH:** So okay, I agree with TH that most people that are gay have been treated somehow. Therefore if you are gay you have to keep it a secret.

**CH:** Okay, people we are girls. Why not talk about lesbians...

**TH:** (Interrupts) They are all gays ( that is, lesbians and gays are all gays).

**MA:** I disagree with SH: You don't have to let everything out SH, because sometimes you take out something... I mean like you know that there are people that like to get to you if you say (pause) something concerning secrets.

**SH:** If you have any problem with TH, I think you should go and tell her and not tell me because I am not TH.

**CH:** But then SH, what maybe if you hate TH? Let me just say BR is your friend but then you hate TH and BR is TH's friend. Are you going to tell TH that you hate her?

**TH:** This is what I say to SH. The things that you think you can't tell your friend, you should keep them to yourself as your secrets because there are people that you tell secret and they go around telling everybody.

**CH:** No, it doesn't mean that if she says that she saw me doing something bad she doesn't like me. In fact, I think if she saw me doing something she doesn't like, she should come to me instead of telling somebody else.

**TH:** But what if she heard rumours that you did not hear? Let me say somebody spreads rumours about you that you have been talking badly about her such as talking about hating her...

**TH:** (Interrupts) Let me just say she is your friend and she goes to someone else and tells her that I don't like TH. So, is that a secret?

**TH:** It is not a secret. It wouldn't be a secret because she told it to somebody and she didn't tell that person to keep it as a secret.

**SH:** I like a person who hates me openly and hate or dislike someone who hates me secretly. I think if you dislike someone's manners, you just have to tell that person.

**BR:** SH, it won't be easy telling someone such an issue.

**TS:** Sometimes you may feel that you are going to hurt someone. In that person's heart she may say that SH hates her or she knows that you hate her because always when you come to her you say something badly to her.

**CH:** So SH, in other ways you mean that everyone should be open with her secrets. She should tell if she likes her or what? Do you mean that way?

**TH:** I think it is the best way to tell a person that you don't like her because if you are open to another person she is going to get even more hurt when she hears it from another person.

**TS:** TH, I disagree with you. How can you... let me say you hate somebody. Can you just go to a person... let me just say you hate CHR. Can you just go to CHR and tell her that you hate her?

**TH:** With me I do it. Ask CH. I do...

**CH:** (Interrupts) Yes, she does it. She tells you...

**TH:** (Interrupts) Because I know that, that is what I want a person to do to me. If you don't like me, you should come straight to me. I don't want you to tell somebody else.

**SH:** I think you should be more polite in this situation. You should at least be polite. You should go to CHR and tell her that you hate her. Just talk to her. Sit down with her. Tell her that you have a problem. "I don't like your manners. I dislike your attitude and I don't see you in the coming future having you as a friend." It

will be the best thing because at least she will know where your loyalty stands and where your friendship with her stands.

**SH:** At least you will tell her about eh... maybe that you don't feel right talking good about her. "Don't be surprised when people say that. Maybe I am bad mouthing you. Don't be surprised. That's how I feel about you, Okay."

**TS:** SH, I think it is going to be hard to sit with that person and tell her how you feel about her. Let me just say you and BRI are friends and you hate her guts. You come and tell me about her. The moment I know I go to her (that is, BRI). BRI is going to dump you. How would you feel?

**TH:** You don't understand what SH is saying. She says that if you hate somebody you should tell her. That's what I disagree with. How can you say you hate somebody's guts and you sit down with her and discuss something?

**CH:** SH, what you are trying to say is that you must just tell that person when you are two only. Is that what you mean?

**MA:** I don't think it is ever possible to talk to someone you hate being two only because you won't be able to talk to that person.

**TH:** Yes, you won't feel comfortable telling a person that you hate her.

**TS:** I agree with MA because the minute you start calling her she might think that you are going to tell her something that is good whereas you are going to tell her something bad. I think she is going to...

**SH:** (Interrupts) No, it is not a question of being bad or good news. It is just a question

of making time for her because you don't know how she feels about you. Maybe when someone tells her, she might have a heart attack.

**SH:** So SH, in other words, what you mean is that we must always be open with ourselves. Tell people how we feel about ourselves?

**SH:** "Ja," I think so. Be honest with yourself first and go to others and be honest with them, too.

**BR:** But SH, do you think we should be honest with everybody?

(Silence)

**SH:** Yes, I think so because in that way you will avoid having stress and other complicated stuff.

**MA:** Kids at our age SH, don't have stress.

**SH:** That's because they don't make themselves stressful. You have stress when you sometimes create stress for yourself. If you don't make time for yourself then you will get stress.

(Silence)

**R:** Girls, thank you very much. We have come to the end of this discussion. Thank you very much

**All:** Thank you sir.

### 5.3.1.2 Second adolescent girls focus group interview

**Key:**

<b>R</b>	: Researcher
<b>SA</b>	: First girl
<b>KA</b>	: Second girl
<b>OR</b>	: Third girl
<b>BY</b>	: Fourth girl
<b>RS</b>	: Fifth girl
<b>BA</b>	: Sixth girl

**R:** Thank you very much girls for having accepted my invitation. Okay.

**All:** Yes sir.

**R:** The question I would like us to discuss is as follows: "How do children of your age deal with their secrets." There you are. You may start.

(Silence)

**R:** Who would like to be the first?

**SA:** Children of our age keep secrets to themselves because they say they don't want other people to know about their personal lives and I don't blame them. Imagine telling your secrets to your mother and thereafter she tells other mothers your secrets at their block meetings or something like that. Then next everybody in your street knows about your deepest, darkest secrets. So most people of our age prefer to keep their secrets to themselves only or to their very best friends, that is, their closest friends. Otherwise eh... they keep them to themselves.

**KA:** No, they don't tell their best friends because eh... they don't trust anyone. I think... I prefer keeping my secrets to myself because if you tell someone maybe

one day he or she will blackmail you. That's my point.

**OR:** I think most of them like to keep secrets to themselves because when they tell people, like their friends, they will manipulate them and say if you don't do this, I will do this to you. I will tell everybody your secrets. If they tell their mothers they first check what kind of a secret it is. Their secrets are very private. They won't tell them, but if it is something little they may tell their parents or their friends.

**R:** Thank you.

**BY:** I also prefer keeping my secrets to myself because you might not be sure whether the person you disclose your secrets to also thinks of you as her best friend. What if that person also has another best friend and passes your secrets to her best friend and her best friend passes them to her best friend, too. So your secret will be known by everyone.

**R:** Good, wonderful. Thank you.

**RS:** And it is difficult to tell someone a secret because you don't know what that person is going to do with your secret.

**SA:** I think you should love them all but trust none. You just keep your secrets to yourself. It should rather haunt and kill you and take it to the grave than to tell it to other people because you never know who to trust. There are some goats in sheep's clothing.

**R:** Hm! Any other contribution. There you are.

**KA:** If you tell your parents sometimes they will laugh at you (laughter by all). Yes, that is what I dislike about telling someone my secrets.

**BY:** I also don't prefer telling my parents because if you tell your mother, she passes it to your father. If you tell your father, he passes it to your mother. Yes, you see sometimes mothers sir, they enjoy telling your secrets to their friends. You find that mothers tell one another their children's secrets.

**KG:** The next thing everyone in your school knows your deepest secret.

(Silence).

**OR:** I think it is also not right to tell somebody because right now we are talking here as a group. Maybe I only trust KG, then KG one day starts to hate me and she tells people my secrets. If you tell your father that's another story. If you find him reading a newspaper or something, he is just going to say, hm... all the time and afterwards when you ask him for an advice he may say "what were you talking about?" Then you have to repeat what you said again and again. They don't listen.

**SA:** It is nice telling secrets to some dads but some of them, after having told them secrets, they tell them to the first person they come in contact with. For example, if they are going to fix their car or something like that, the person who is fixing their car is going to know everything. Thereafter the next person who comes to fix his car at that guy's place will get the secret through the mechanic. Ultimately everybody will know your secrets. So, keep your secrets to yourself.

**KA:** Telling fathers a secret is a nightmare because if they see you in the mirror at the back of the car while driving, they will just laugh at you. The father might just say: "Hey, that secret." Then your mother is also going to say: "Hey, which secret?"



You see sir, telling the father your secret is... perhaps to boys, yes it is good sometimes but to girls, no. Yes, it depends on what kind of a secret it is.

**SA:** It also depends on what kind of a father it is. If it is a father that likes reading a newspaper his eyes will be looking at the newspaper while you tell him your deepest secret and he ignores completely what you will be telling him. It happened to me. I know what I am talking about. It happened.

**KA:** My father likes to laugh at me when I tell him my secrets. Let me give you an example. I once told him that we were making noise in class and we were punished. It was a secret not to tell my mother. He went on laughing every time at that secret. Even my mother happened to know the secret. That is why I say fathers should not be told.

**OR:** I think it is also good to tell secrets because in that way you won't always have something to think about. At least it will be off your chest and you will not be haunted. It is good (that is, telling secrets) because sometimes people like me have secrets. I ended up going to a psychiatrist because of my secrets (which I did not disclose).

**R:** Hm... come in. Would you like to say something?

**BA:** I trust my dad because I tell him secrets which he can pass to my mother if he wants to. I trust my father because he gives me all the attention I need.

**SA:** Sometimes it is not only a matter of fathers. Like your brothers and sisters or your friends or something because it once happened that I told my brother a secret. I think a month later... a month is a very long time. She was like... I don't forget... ah... I didn't forget. Then everybody knew my secret. So, it is useless telling your

secrets to others. Just keep them to yourself.

**KA:** Telling your brothers and sisters? No, because sometimes they may manipulate you by trying to black mail you to your parents. No, just keep them to yourself.

**KG:** Rather than telling it to my parents I prefer telling it to a close friend. If you know your friends secrets and she knows your secrets, both won't tell. But you will never know your parents' secrets.

**OR:** If somebody wants advice from me on whether they should tell people their secrets, I'll say go ahead because it is not nice going to see a psychiatrist. It is not an everyday thing. It is not like going to Dr M. Just to go and get checked up because you wouldn't mind because you will just open your mouth and be checked but telling a psychiatrist is like telling a total stranger everything you feel and when she gives you an advice, she sometimes tells you to try to apply the advice and sometimes it doesn't work. I went to her and I told her about my brother and what he does and how I feel about him. She told me to ignore him. Trying to ignore a person is very hard. Imagining going back to her for another advice is problematic because I don't know what I will have to do if she gives me another advice. I don't know whether I will have to try it again or just ignore it.

**KA:** I don't prefer going to a psychiatrist or whatever because if you go there you waste money. Just keep it to yourself. Maybe write it somewhere. Yes.

**KG:** I think it honestly helps going to a psychiatrist because there are secrets that you just can't keep to yourself. You just can't keep quiet about them and you just can't tell them to someone. If you tell them to a psychiatrist you get to trust him although he is a total stranger. He or she can't say anything about you because he doesn't know you. So telling a psychiatrist something I think is something good.

**BA:** And sometimes when you keep your secrets sometimes they eat you inside because eh... they are hurting. It is best to tell somebody close to you and if you trust that person.

**RO:** There are other people that you can trust, that you can just see that you can tell them secrets. If it is your friend you can just tell secrets to, but if it is somebody that you don't trust, you don't have to tell her your secrets because she may pass them to others. I can tell my closest friend my secrets.

**KA:** I disagree with KG when she says that eh... what did you say?

**SA:** Going to a psychiatrist.

**KA:** No sir, I disagree because you waste money. If you can just keep them maybe you'll learn to be honest. Before you get married you learn to trust yourself and "ja"... sir and believe in yourself.

**KA:** I told myself that I will never ever tell my secrets to anyone. I once disclosed them to someone and that person is a teacher. You know sir, teachers are friends. Is not it sir? They tell each other things and when you do something like a mistake in class they remind you of your mistake. You see and it is not nice telling teachers your secrets.

**OR:** The best part about going to a psychiatrist is that when she started her practice she had to sign papers that she is not allowed to say anything to anyone and if she or he does that, you are allowed to sue her. They treat secrets in a confidential manner. She is not even allowed to tell her husband or even her grandmother who lives in Cape Town.

**SA:** I think telling teachers is not very good sometimes but it depends on which teacher it is. Here at school there are only two teachers that I trust. Two among, I think, twenty two teachers or twenty six teachers. What about the other twenty? It once happened to me that they just took out my deepest secret in public and now I think all teachers discuss about us in their staff meetings. They take out our deepest, darkest secrets in the staff meetings, sir. They then tell their children and their children tell their friends. Everybody ends up knowing your secrets. I trust only two teachers eh... eh... two teachers! Staffrooms are dangerous (all laugh).

**KA:** That's why I say even if you can get married, sir, I will tell my secrets to my husband only. He, too, may however also tell his friends my secrets. Sometimes you should keep your secret to yourself. Maybe it will help you. Even this psychiatrist, sir. Even though they sign papers, it is happening that they tell people's secrets. If something is eating you up, let it do so. Let it eat you and finish you up. You won't die, sir. Maybe it will help you. Yes sir.

**SA:** I usually tell one person my secrets, that is, my best friend and that is God. If He knows something I am hundred percent sure that nobody else is going to know it, unless you ... drop on me when I was praying but otherwise eh... no one else will find out. I always get them off my back by telling them to God.

**OR:** I also have a best friend but this time it is not God. She lives two houses away from me. We tell each other secrets and thereafter we just forget about them because we trust each other. We just tell each other and we advice each other. We tell each other hundreds and sometimes thousands of secrets and none of them has been told to someone else, including the ones we have been lying to each other about. We know that no secret has gone anywhere.

(Silence )

**KA:** You see, this thing for having a best friend... somewhere somehow you talk to each other and in the process of talking to each other you may somehow hurt her feelings. Then you break up. She then goes and have another best friend. She tells those secrets, all of them to her new best friend. That is why I say trust no one but love them all. Yes.

**OR:** KA, it depends on what kind of a friend she is. If it is a friendship that you know you vowed your life to and you trust each other and you know that even if you were to fall into fire, she would be the one to rescue you ah... then you can trust that person, but if somebody you know, keeps on hurting you all the time ah... then you have to think twice about your secrets.

**KA:** Sometimes OR, eh... your friend can be like gold. There is an idiom that says that all that glitters is not gold. This means that your friend outside may appear like she is a caring person when she is actually not such a person. Then you break up. She goes and tell other people, her new best friends your secrets. That is why I say trust no one, but love them all. I still repeat it.

**SA:** Since you people like telling your secrets to your friends, give them a test first. I once told my best friend a secret and I tested her four times. I told her the secret in grade five and I am now in grade twelve and even now, nobody knows but herself only. I think it is good to test a person. It's really good.

**KA:** I think maybe she told it to someone you don't know. It could be her cousin who stays far away from you. Yes, she can't just keep it. Once she realizes that this person was testing her, she may decide to tell someone.

**SA:** No, if you tell someone your secrets and that person passes them, she will act in ways that will show that she told someone else.

**OR:** It doesn't always have to be that way that you have to test someone in your life. You mean even if you live with your mother for thirteen years and another added nine months in her stomach, you still don't trust her? Eh... it is impossible? You have to learn to trust her with something. I agree that you may not trust her with everything because eh... not with all, because there are some things your mother... mothers, sometimes know, but then you have to learn to trust someone in your life. You have to have somebody that you know you can go and talk to.

**SA:** Some mothers spread secrets at women's meetings. The whole block may know your secrets from your mother. From mothers it goes to children and from children it goes to children's friends. From friend it goes to others. Then thereafter the whole school will be knowing your secrets. Even the youngest kid at school and the newest kid in school will know your deepest secret.

**KA:** When your secrets are spread they don't just pass to one person, like in the case of a group. They talk about it. "Did you hear the latest, what, who did what? Then sir, the secret passes on from group to group."

**OR:** I would like to say it again. It is impossible to trust someone. You may trust the person and the person might trust someone and it continues like that because that person trusts somebody else. She might trust somebody else at home and that person trust somebody else, too.

**KA:** If you are ready for the consequences that means you knew that this thing will spread but eh... there is no one to trust.

**BA:** And some other people want their secrets to be spread so that the whole township may know about their secret.

**OR:** I also agree with you, but I also disagree. I agree because KG, you say that we don't have to trust anyone, but KG no one can tell the future. Right now if you are sitting here and somebody overhears us from outside, you don't know if that person heard you, but then you must be ready for consequences if that person tells others.

**BA:** I also want to ask SA something because she says that no one knows anything about her. Do you want to tell me that your mother or any other person doesn't know anything about you?

**SA:** Yes, they only know by seeing letters, but I won't tell them anything. Sometimes I do tell them, but my mother is the one who is disclosing my secrets, but sir, I don't tell her secrets. I tell her what is all about life (that is, general issues). I don't tell her my secrets, no! I try to keep my secrets to myself. I told my secrets to my mom and she made a big fuss out of them, and I think I have gone into a lot of trouble for that. I prefer just to keeping them to myself and telling them to God if you are a Christian, but then otherwise eh... keep them to yourself. Love them all, but trust none. This earth is full of people like everybody else. On earth we make mistakes.

**OR:** But look, you don't trust anyone, right? If you don't tell your mother secrets or stuff like that, one day you are going to need advice from her. If it is a big secret like maybe if you start having boyfriends, who are you going to tell, your friends? I think it is better if you tell your mother first because then if she finds out she won't be as cross as she will be if she hears it from everybody else.

**KA:** Don't share your secrets with anybody

(Silence)

**R:** Girls, thank you very much

**All:** Our pleasure, sir.

### **5.3.1.3 Third adolescents girls' focus group interview**

**Key:**

<b>R</b>	: Researcher
<b>Aa</b>	: First girl
<b>Bb</b>	: Second girl
<b>Cc</b>	: Third girl
<b>Dd</b>	: Fourth girl
<b>Ee</b>	: Fifth girl
<b>Ff</b>	: Sixth girl

**R:** Thank you very much for having accepted my invitation to this discussion and the question that I would like us to discuss is as follows: "How do children of your age deal with their secrets?".

**Aa:** Okay, some of us tell their friends their secrets but they don't treat our secrets well and we, too, do not treat theirs well.

**Bb:** Hm... "ja", we keep them to ourselves because we cannot trust friends. If I tell her my secrets now, when we are no longer friends, she is going to boom them to the Rebecca's. So you just have to keep them to yourself.

**R:** Okay, thank you. Any other view?

**Cc:** Some secrets you cannot keep for they will haunt you for ever. You just have to share them with someone. It is, however, difficult to share them with someone because they are hard to tell and they unfortunately make you to end up committing suicide.



- Id:** Some problems are indeed hard to keep. We therefore have to let them out. Unfortunately some of us do not have close people that we can share them with. A good person is supposed to be a parent who is supposed to give you advice and unfortunately some parents are not close to their children. That is, they don't have that close mother and daughter relationship. We, therefore, find it difficult to tell them our secrets. Secrets end up haunting us, because we end up being unable to tell them our secrets.
- R:** Thank you. (Pointing at one of the girls who appeared to be shy) Do you have something to say? Come nearer and spell it out. Any view?
- Je:** Some parents are too rural. One cannot talk to them about anything. They cannot just be open with their kids. It is hard talking to them. I therefore end up keeping secrets to myself.
- Jc:** "Ja", some secrets are too confidential. What I mean is that I cannot even share them with my friend and sometimes my friend does not even understand what I try to tell her. Some secrets are really confidential but you have to do something to get them out, but they are really confidential.
- Jf:** Some are too embarrassing and you can't just share them with anyone.
- R:** Okay, anything else. (Silence) Come on guys.
- Ja:** Eh... some people are able to deal with their secrets in a positive manner. They just accept them and live with them until...
- Jf:** (Interrupts) "Ja", exactly.

**Dd:** But then what about those who cannot deal with their secrets? What do we do with those kind of people? I think the government has to do something for them, such as a youth advice centre where they can help us. If I don't know this person. I can tell him all my secrets because it is easy telling such a person my secrets.

**Ee:** Strangers! A very challenging thing. I cannot talk to strangers about anything. "Ja", if your parents are those, oh... !

**Bb:** (Interrupts) "Ja", those rural people.

**Ff:** Oh! Those people are not civilized.

**Ee:** Those old people! When you talk to them about something, they go screaming at you and shouting at you.

**Bb:** Okay, some people write in their diaries, especially if it is the one with a lock because some people feel better after writing in a piece of paper. For example, if my friend has angered me and I find it difficult to talk to her about what she has done to me I write in a diary. I am a person who hides behind my shadow. I just write what she did to me and thereafter I feel better.

**R:** Thank you. (Pointing at one of the girls) Will you please say something?

**Ff:** She said what I was also going to say.

(Silence)

**R:** Oh! Fine. Thank you very much girls. Perhaps we have come to the end of this discussion. Thank you a million times.

**All:** Thank you sir.

#### **5.3.1.4 First adolescent boys' focus group interview**

**Key:**

<b>R</b>	:Researcher
<b>Mo</b>	: First boy
<b>Be</b>	: Second boy
<b>Ma</b>	: Third boy
<b>Nk</b>	: Fourth boy
<b>Re</b>	: Fifth boy
<b>Sy</b>	: Sixth boy

**R** Thank you very much boys for having accepted my invitation to this discussion and the question I would like us to discuss is as follows: "How do children of your age deal with their secrets?"

(Silence)

**R:** Who would like to make a start?

**Mo:** I think children of our age deal with their secrets by always telling their closest friends (pause) and maybe one of their family members, like a sister or a brother.

**Be:** I think children deal with their secrets by keeping them inside . They don't tell them to anyone.

**Ma:** I think children keep their secrets by telling their parents only. They don't tell anyone because they trust their parents only.

**Re:** If they tell their parents, don't you think that their parents dislike what they do? Others are having boyfriends and they can't talk with their parents about their

boyfriends.

**Mo:** Eh... I think that they should talk to someone else close to them so that they can know eh... it must be their closest friends who they can always talk to.

**Nk:** I don't understand why we should have secrets.

**Ma:** You have to tell someone your secrets because when trouble comes, you will know whom you talk to, but when you don't tell someone, when trouble comes you will get scared.

**Be:** Do you think that you will get help by telling someone your secrets?

**Ma:** I think it will depend on what the secret is. I think he will help you where he can. It will depend on how you expressed yourself to that person.

**Sy:** What if the person who is keeping your secret is just betraying you? He is not the person you thought he is.

**Mo:** I think from the beginning you should have wanted to know more information about that friend of yours.

**Sy:** I think friends should be faithful to each other.

(Silence)

**R:** Thank you very much boys. We have come to the end of this discussion. Thank you.

**All:** Thank you sir.

#### **5.3.1.5 Second adolescent boys' focus group interview**

**Key:**

<b>R</b>	: Researcher
<b>As</b>	: First boy
<b>Bs</b>	: Second boy
<b>Cs</b>	: Third Boy
<b>Ds</b>	: Fourth boy
<b>Es</b>	: Fifth boy
<b>Fs</b>	: Sixth boy

**R:** Thank you very much for having accepted my invitation to this discussion. The question that I would like us to discuss is as follows: "How do children of your age deal with their secrets?"

(Silence).

**R:** Right, anyone may make a start.

**As:** "Ja," most of our secrets we keep them within ourselves, but as time goes on, it becomes a problem that eats you alone. So you have to tell it to someone. I think the best way to deal with it, is to tell them to someone because you can't keep it within yourself. It will eat you up.

**Bs:** I don't see how there might be a secret if you told yourself that there is no secret. I think there may be a secret, but if you just face everything the way it is there may be no secret. You find that a person is having a secret, for instance, about a girlfriend. This is not a secret. You have to take it as it is. We have been frustrating ourselves with things that are not existing at all.

**Cs:** "Ja" (pause) according to me, most of our friends discuss problems with each other but sometimes problems are difficult to solve. So we keep the secrets to ourselves. We don't request help from others.

**Ds:** If you find it difficult to tell someone, I think you have to pretend as if you have solved it and bring it to other people. For instance eh... if I have a problem, I may just go to my friend and tell him as if my other friend has a problem. Then we solve it together. I think for one problem there will be many solutions. The only way to find a solution to a secret is to tell it as if it is something that happened to someone else, not yourself.

**As:** The problem of most boys of our age is that we failed... we hide the truth. We keep it in our hearts and then eh... in the long run that secret I think will eh... cause a big trouble to you. What I know is that most of our friends hide the truth because when hiding the truth or eh... having some secrets and it will be difficult in your way, because you may find that on some other days you may have nightmares. I think the only way to deal with these secrets, is to share them with other people who are next to you so that you can help each other.

**Es:** I think even the question of one's family background plays an important role. If you are from a family which keeps secrets, you will end up keeping secrets, too, and this attitude will be in your whole life.

**Cs:** If you want to solve a problem, you may just go to your friends and discuss your eh... problem with them and I think it will be simple and you will be free.

**As:** I still say under no circumstances can you be able to keep a secret. It is better for you, maybe, to consult experts concerning such kind of a problem. Maybe you can go to the clinical psychologist who can determine and sketch the problem that

you are facing. I think this is the only way to cope with your problems.

**Cs:** Again some of the issues are shameful and embarrassing eh... because most teenagers compete with one another and then as I said, some issues you will feel embarrassed to tell to someone because you may think that he will share them with other people.

**Fs:** I think we are from different backgrounds. Some of us are afraid of our parents. We cannot as such talk to them about our secrets, because since from the beginning they never taught us to speak to them. You know they don't love us enough to talk about things.

**As:** It is very much shameful to tell your parents secrets that you have. I think eh... but we have to try to tell them even though it is difficult. You have to approach them and tell them.

**Fs:** The only problem that is killing us, is our culture. In our culture there are some things you are not allowed to tell your parents, whereas you may find that they may have a solution.

**As:** I think parents play a role here but eh... our norms sometimes restrict us and restrain us from sharing our secrets with our parents. They prohibit us from telling them the truth. I therefore say that we should be able to sit with our parents and just try to tell them, so that our things may be solved because alone you can't make it. I am telling the truth. It is very difficult without them. I think this days it will be important for our parents eh... to have discussions with us because you can see that these days there are many eh... difficult things that we most teenagers come across. It is not possible to find a solution of a problem from one's friends. Parents must feel free to talk to us as they know that we are their sons or their daughters.

In fact, they must not just hide the truth away from us. They must forget about their culture and then face the truth because sometimes we teenagers need to be... some of our problems need the parents' guidance, because there are some other things that we just go into while we don't know what the consequences will be. We need to be helped and they must tell us eh... how to deal with the things which will destroy us. Although teachers can also help us, I don't trust them.

**Cs:** "Wa bona" (meaning you see) one of our problems with teachers... you find that you tell your teacher your secret, the whole staffroom gets to know about your problem and every time you walk around, they will just point fingers at you. "There he is. That one. He is having this and that problem and sometimes he thinks he is wiser." Such things prohibit us from going to them, just because we know that they will be squandering your name all over the school. This is bad. For instance, if you didn't write your homework and you didn't work well in class, they may just humiliate you in front of other children. That's why we are failing to tell them our secrets.

**As:** I think it is not necessary for us to tell teachers our secrets. Those people... in fact eh... I cannot say that eh... they are somehow, but naturally they are too inquisitive, and they will try to find out about things that are going on in your family. In the classroom they just point at people and say "you... you don't understand. Your parents are also like this (laughter by all)." Such kind of things. I think the secret should only be told to parents, your close relatives, your friends and other people, except teachers. (Emphasizing) They should be forgotten.

**Cs:** Actually teachers are not good at all (Stamping feet on the ground as a gesture of emphasis). I am telling you they are not good. If you tell them your problem which may be from your family... you know they will know much more about your family background and then if in the classroom you don't perform or you just do



something which is not related to the class work, they will start pointing at you and saying, “You boy, poor boy”. Or they may say anything, including using swearing words. That is why most of us fail to approach our teachers with our problems. Telling them your problems creates even more serious problems. You can’t even go to hang around with your friends because they will be told about your family background. They will undermine you. Teachers will say a mouthful about you.

**As:** But I think it is not all teachers who are bad. Some of them are good. You know, the way you approach a teacher counts. I don’t know how to explain it.

**Cs:** But what I know is that when they are in the staffroom or (agitated) whatever, they backbite students. They talk about us. That’s why I say that we can’t tell them our secrets. And the worst thing about telling them our secrets is that you create more problems for yourself because you will end up not even enjoying going to school. Yes, just because of the things that they will be saying to you. You won’t enjoy them (that is, the things they will be saying to you).

**As:** Something very important is sharing secrets with a girlfriend. Telling a girlfriend does help sometimes but sometimes it does not. Telling a girlfriend sometimes hits back. It will hit you the time you separate because you cannot be always together. When you separate she will try to pin you down by telling everybody about your secrets

**Ds:** Telling your girlfriend secrets is good but it is also bad sometimes. (In a frail voice that expresses uncertainty) It depends on the relationship between the two of you. If my girlfriend is younger than I am it is not advantageous to me to tell her my secrets because she will all the time depend on me.

**Cs:** Girlfriends are not good sometimes. I don’t trust woman (laughter by all). They

cannot keep a secret.

**As:** But then you cannot get married.

**Cs:** Yes I know. I mean it is a question of evaluating what you have to tell them. There are some of the things you cannot tell them.

**Ds:** So who to tell your secrets, then?

**Cs:** I mean the best person that you can share your secrets with is your friend and not your girlfriend.

**Ds:** You don't raise a secret as if it is your problem. You raise it as if someone else told you his problem. That problem would then be attacked.

**Cs:** What I know about we boys and girls, is that we become crazy when coming to relationships. You may find yourself telling her some eh... big issues that you have never told her. We tend to forget that there will be a time when she will dump you. Love them enough but trust no one.

**Ds:** A family background plays a role here. If I am dealing with a girlfriend eh... that stays with me in the same area, and I know her family background, it means I will know everything about her. As such I cannot say something that is crucial because she might tell everyone, including her friends, and her parents will also get to know the secret and they might make some plans against me. For example, if in the following year I will be graduating and she will still be in matric or whatever standard, that family may bewitch me if it knows witchcraft.

(Silence)

**R:** Thank you very much boys.

**All:** Thank you sir.

#### **5.3.1.6 Third adolescent boys' focus group interview**

**Key:**

<b>R</b>	: Researcher
<b>Pq</b>	: First boy
<b>Qr</b>	: Second boy
<b>Rs</b>	: Third boy
<b>Tv</b>	: Fourth boy
<b>Uw</b>	: Fifth boy
<b>Wx</b>	: Sixth boy

**R:** Thank you very much for having accepted my invitation to this discussion. The question that I would like us to discuss is as follows: "How do children of your age deal with their secrets?"

**Pq:** Okay eh... eh...

**R:** (Interrupts) A bit louder please.

**Pq:** Eh... as friends, if one of us "a na le" (Sepedi expression meaning having) a secret.

**R:** (Interrupts) A bit louder please. Please try to talk in English.

**Pq:** As friends, if one has a secret, "ja", we share it. In that way we get helped. If I don't share a secret, it will stress me up. "Ja", that's it. Yes, I also share with my friends.

**Rs:** You can share your secret with your friends because it hurts and it does not help

to keep quiet if you don't know what to do. You should share it with your friends.

**Tv:** I also say that it is a good thing to share secrets with your friends because sometimes it may be a big secret that can make you to kill yourself. So you have to share secrets with your friends so that they can give you guidance with regard to what to do and what not to do.

**Ux:** I think you don't have to share your secrets with some of your friends because they may mock you and make you unhappy on some days. Just keep it to yourself.

**Wx:** I would say that sometimes it is not good to share secrets with your friends because some friends are not trustworthy. They may take your secrets to others and you end up being... all people will know about it and sometimes it will hurt you because you wanted to share it with your friend only, but your friend took it to others.

**Tv:** Eh... secrets. You can actually share them with friends. It does not matter whether your secret is very big or the way it is. If you share it with friends you won't commit suicide because you won't have a lot of troubles. For example, if someone dies in the family, it is better to say it to relieve yourself.

**Rs:** I think it is not easy to tell your family your secrets. You may perhaps tell your friends, but it is not easy to tell your parents. You cannot tell your parents your secrets, your own secrets.

**Pq:** I would like to say that there are secrets which you can share with your parents and those that you cannot share with them. For example, you cannot share a secret about a girlfriend or things you do at school with your parents. With parents, you can only share secrets that are personal and hurting. For example, if parents ask

you about how you feel concerning something that happened in the family, you may tell them. You may also tell your brothers and sisters.

**Tv:** I say that you can share girls' stuff with your brother whereas family stuff should be shared with parents. A boy should share with his father whereas a girl should share with her mother.

**Qr:** Well, I prefer that a boy shares secrets with his father because his father went past all boys' stages in life. He therefore knows better than a child.

**Pq:** In the family it is better if I share my secrets about girls with my mother because my mother knows more about girls. She will give me guidance as to how they do things and how they want to be treated. I say that deciding who to share a secret with depends on what kind of a secret it is.

(Silence)

**R:** Thank you. Any other view.

(Silence)

**R:** Alright. Thank you very much. It looks like we have come to the end of this discussion. Thank you very much.

**All:** Pleasure.

### 5.3.1.7 Parents' focus group interview

**Key:**        **R:**     :Researcher  
              **Lg**    : First mother  
              **Tk**    : First father  
              **Kt**    : Second father  
              **Mp**    : Second mother  
              **St**    : Third mother  
              **Yz**    : Third father

**R:**     Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen for having accepted my invitation to this focus group discussion. Now, the question that I would like us to discuss is as follows: "How do parents deal with their adolescent children's secrets?"

(Silence).

**R:**     There you are. You may make a start.

**Lg:**     I keep their secrets confidential because if I don't do so, they are not going to trust me so that they can trust somebody in future. I don't disclose their secrets to anybody.

**Tk:**     If as a parent I can (pause) not keep their secrets, in future they are not going to tell me their problems and then at the end we are going to have embarrassment in the family.

**Kt:**     Okay. Children look upon us as parents as their role models and by so doing they expect us to respect whatever secret they might have and in turn we as parents, I believe we have to give our children the trust they deserve. If a child comes to me, especially a teenager, with serious issues, she or he expects me as a parent to keep that between me and himself or herself. If you leak that information she or he is

going to hide whatever is troubling him or her. All her secrets that she or he is experiencing, she or he won't share them with me anymore because she or he knows that if she or he shares with his or her parents, eventually the next doors are going to know or something else within the family or outside his or her home will know his or her secrets. So to win their trust we have to keep their secrets to ourselves, but we should make sure that we help them to solve them so that in future they can go to their mothers with their problems.

**Mp:** We should not forget that there are people waiting to hear from them if we don't listen to them. If we do not listen to them they go to people that mislead them. So it is good for us to listen to what they say and keep everything confidential so that they can always come to us even in future so that we can guide them.

**St:** And the other thing is that as a parent you must also keep your secrets from your children. You must never share secrets with your children, but once your child tells you his or her secret you must also keep it as a secret. You mustn't tell a neighbour or his friend or her friend his or her secrets because once you tell his friend, he is going to be embarrassed. Sometimes we do have conflicts with our partners or with our children's fathers. In order to keep that kind of a secret you don't have to say much to the husband in front of children.

**Yz:** Eh... we as parents in the household environment have to respect each other. We should respect each other as parents and we have to respect our children. We have to protect them from whatever conflicts or quarrels we might have. It is always better for the two partners to have their conflicts in a separate place. Sometimes it is much better to attend to burning issue between you and your partner by first taking children out of the house and put them somewhere away from the house and then sort out your problems and afterward bring them in, or else let them to go to bed first before discussing such issues. When the kids are asleep, sit down with

your partner, discuss your problems but make sure that the kids never ever hear you quarrelling because if they hear you they are going to believe that this is the kind of life they must also lead. In future they may use the very same techniques.

**Tk:** Secrets do differ. There are some secrets you know that you cannot keep away from your kids. They have to know the reality of where they are coming from, and where they are going to. So it might happen that their own personal secrets involve them alone, for example, their sexuality. It is something that they might feel it belongs to them. These are some of the things that you can't keep away from your kids. For instance, if you are divorcing your husband, they have to know what is happening before any other thing can be done so that they can understand what's happening and they can also go to an extent of asking their father or their mother what's going on. By questioning their parents about this divorce, they may make it possible for their parents to reconcile.

**St:** I think it is very important to share secrets with children because most of our children, if we don't discuss their problems with them, they go outside where they get wrong information. As parents we can discuss with them. By discussing with them we make it possible for them to help themselves in future and they will be better grownups who have confidence in themselves. I believe that through sharing information we guide one another. Even children can also guide their parents. Discussing their problems promotes communication between children and the parents.

**Yz:** I think it is proper for parents and children to share their secrets and parents should guard against telling their children what they wanted to tell them a long ago after having heard the children's problems.

**Kt:** It also depends on what type of a parent you are. It may happen that your child



wants to come to you with a secret and you are not opening up and he or she feels that she or he is not going to be safe. So it depends on how you are and who you are and then how are you relating with your child. Are you relating with a child as a friend or as a boss or something? Some parents are bullying their children. Whenever they have problems with their children, they just become hush with them. So it depends (that is, on what kind of a parent you are).

**Lg:** You find that parents eh... are judgmental. All what they know is that children are always wrong. They do not want to know the other side of the coin. This is a problem because already a parent has judged a child.

**Tk:** I think parents and children should have open relationships. Eh... I know parents cannot be friends to their kids to a large extent but I think they should be understanding and they should sometimes bring themselves down to the level of their children because it is not easy for a child to understand that the very parent who is talking to her has been through all those stages. They must know that they must come to us for advice, because if really a child comes here at home and tries to talk to you and you already give him or her that look that she has done something wrong before she can get into the inner part of the story, that child can never come back to you. Parents must listen and understand what a child says. From there onwards you must sit down with the kid and try to advice him or her or show her the way. When kids grow, especially teenagers, they experience a lot of troubles. I will speak of girls. Girls experience a lot of things. They think they are grownups. They think they can take charge of their own lives, not realizing that the very same mother has been through the same difficulties and the very same mother can be the one to lead or to guide him or her. By opening up to your kid you will give them a way of knowing and understanding what life is all about.

**Mp:** Eh... eh... as parents if ever we want trust from our children, they can trust us by

communicating with them and by listening to them, because they know that if ever they have told us something which is important to them, we don't speak with other person about that, they will gain trust in us whenever they have a problem. They will come and speak to us and thereafter they will regain confidence back.

**Tk:** I don't think that children trust us. My boy doesn't trust me. He always thinks that I might share his problems with my mom and my sister because I am avoiding inconsistent discipline. Sometimes he doesn't even trust me (all laugh). It is true.

**St:** As long as we share problems with our children there will be mutual trust between the parent and the children and also there will be that mutual trust and respect between parents and their children. Once children have problems, they will trust that their parents will solve them.

(Silence)

**R:** Thank you . Any other view. There you are. Thank you.

**Kt:** I think our children trust us only when they are still young but when they reach that eh... adolescent stage they no longer trust us. That is why they hide a number of things that they are doing.

**Mp:** Hm... but I think to a certain extent they can discuss some other things such as having sex and everything, if we are open enough to them. That is, when you tell them the truth. We should be open to them with regard to issues concerning sexuality and about having sex. You even have to ask your children if they are involved with such activities. We don't have to be scared but in a black community we usually don't discuss with our children such things. We are shy. We feel we are going to do something which is taboo but then to a certain extent we are losing

our children to the world. These are the things we have to discuss with them.

**St:** Hm... adolescents really keep the secrets to themselves. They keep family secrets to themselves. They don't even share them with their friends outside because they are attached to their families than to people outside home. They keep the secrets to themselves. Maybe there will be a stage in future where they will be able to share, but adolescents do keep their secrets until when they are in search of information. That is the time when they will start talking because they have a tendency of wanting to know their identity. What makes them to talk, and to search for information, is curiosity which is born of the lack of information, but if they know everything they become satisfied. They then keep secrets to themselves.

**Kt:** Okay, teenagers are very secretive and they don't like to leak home secrets. They always try to protect what is in their homes. They always try to make sure that whatever is happening in their homes nobody on the street picks it up because they always feel ashamed or embarrassed to talk about home. So they try by all means to keep their home secrets to themselves. They don't share .

**Tk:** Keeping secrets of their families makes these children to experience problems at school. For example, when there is family violence they pick up problems at school. You find that the performance of a child drops if there are problems at school.

(Silence)

**Wx:** I think it depends on what the type of a secret is because there are positive and negative secrets. I think an adolescent sometimes like eh... I don't know how I can put it... to shine. They therefore talk about good matters only.

**Tk:** I think this has to do with the culture. Culturally men seem to be reserved whereas mothers seem to be in contact with children. We do not go along with children because of the right they have.

**Lg:** Honestly speaking, men are very poor at communication. We, therefore, refer children to their mothers when they have problems but since things are changing we turn to be more and more involved with our children but communication is still a problem.

**St:** I think the most important thing is that parents should communicate effectively with their children. As a parent I am always available to listen to my children's problems and where possible give them the assistance they require. This days children need assistance with problems concerning drugs and drug abuse and other related problems. This is the area that I am particularly more open to them with.

**Yz:** As far as I am concerned I don't think our children are able to share their secrets with us. We always get second hand information as their mothers. We are used to that and there is nothing we can do.

(Silence).

**R:** Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen for having taken part in this discussion.

**All:** You're welcome.

### **5.3.2 Face-to-face interviews**

#### **5.3.2.1 Adolescent girl's face-to-face interview**

**Key:**        **R**        : Researcher  
              **N**        : Interviewee

**R:**    Thank you very much for having accepted my request for an interview with you. The first question that I would like you to respond to is as follows: "How do children of your age deal with their secrets?"

**N:**    Eh... children of my age hang out with people of their age obviously. So they tell secrets among each other and you find others that have intimate relationships with their parents. They share their secrets with their parents and there are others who are much more of introverts that share their secrets with their diaries or the so called journals.

**R:**    Between sharing a secret with a diary and parents, which way is a better one?

**N:**    Hm... for me as an individual, I think sharing with parents is better because they are older and they have much more broader knowledge of what you will be dealing with. When writing in a journal, you just write down and still have to keep on with the grudge and sometimes it gets really heavy.

**R:**    Between fathers and mothers who are the easier people to share secrets with?

**N:**    I think mothers, as they are more approachable and much more kinder than fathers because fathers are known to be very strict. It is much more easier to go to a mother and approach her and tell her whatever is wrong with you.

**R:**    What are mothers' responses in some cases when children share secrets with

them?

**N:** I think it all depends on the relationship you have with your mother and how intimate it is and whatever secret you are telling her, but usually the normal responds will be a gesture of kindness and understanding if the relationship is very good.

**R:** How do mothers deal with these secrets?

**N:** Hm... I think that one thing they do is to discuss the whole issue with you. Hm... try to find out how you feel about the whole issue and then try to advice you on what to do thereafter...

**R:** Is there a possibility that some mothers share their secrets with outsiders?

**N:** Hm... it might happen because people are very different. It might happen but I don't know if that happens that much, but I think it does happen.

**R:** Hm... is it not happening that some children are afraid to share secrets with their mothers for fear of having their secrets shared with outsiders?

**N:** No, I don't think so. The only fear they might have is that their parents or their mothers might respond in a very odd way.

**R:** Eh... can you perhaps give me an example of an odd response?

**N:** Eh... an odd way depends on what kind of a secret you are telling them. They might be quite eh... angry, disappointed or amazed in a way. Eh... a response that you as a child eh... wouldn't be expecting.

**R:** What kind of an influence will that have on disclosure?

**N:** Ah... a negative one, obviously.

**R:** How would that affect future sharing of secrets?

**N:** I don't think there will be more sharing of secrets thereafter. There can be sharing but of certain secrets that are mild.

**R:** What about strong ones?

**N:** With the strong ones then you have to go to friends or journals.

**R:** Friends or journals?

**N:** Yes.

**R:** Why is it that friends are being preferred in disclosing very serious issues rather than mothers?

**N:** Hm... friends are more easier to talk to because you deal with them on a daily basis and the language they use among each other makes it very easy to talk about things. When it concerns parents you have to be quite straight forward and be precise of what you say. It is not easy to talk to parents.

**R:** So it is easier to share secrets with friends than with parents?

**N:** Yes.

**R:** And where do fathers come in after having shared a secret with a mother? How do fathers come in?

**N:** Hm... again it all depends on the relationship between the father and the mother. If the mother is used to telling the father issues concerning children, then she will tell him and then it will then be up to him to decide what he does. Some fathers would eh... let the mother control the situation, others would intervene.

**R:** In what way do fathers intervene?

**N:** They try to help. Eh... others eh... depending on who they are, would then come in a violent way or maybe a more reprimanding manner.

**R:** Between fathers and mothers who usually take the route of reprimands?

**N:** It is usually fathers since they are the strictest.

**R:** Does it mean that fathers as compared to mothers do not understand children's secrets?

**N:** No, they don't. Usually they don't.

**R:** In a family where there are one or two or more siblings, where would you start with the sharing of your secrets?

**N:** I think I would start with a sibling whose age is closer to mine and a female sibling if I am a female.

**R:** Are you saying it is easier to share secrets with the same sex sibling than with a



sibling of the opposite sex?

**N:** Yes, it is.

**R:** Why is it easier that way?

**N:** Hm... they are more approachable and they understand you from your female point of view depending on... on the secret or the problem.

**R:** How do children of your age deal with a secret that has been shared with them?

**N:** Usually they listen and try to sensationalise whatever you have been saying, but they never help. The only thing that helps is that you said something to somebody, then you feel relieved, but most of the time they don't help because they are of the same age.

**R:** Is there any possibility that they might spread others' secrets?

**N:** There is a ninety percent possibility.

**R:** Why is it that eh... children of your age share secrets with people that are known to be spreading them?

**N:** Eh... usually when you go to tell somebody a secret eh... the mere fact that somebody will spread it don't occur at that time. Usually you don't think of it because everybody spreads rumours and secrets.

**R:** How then would these people whose secrets have been divulged... how do they feel the day they get to know that their secrets were divulged?

**N:** Depending on the individual the usual reaction is becoming angry, feeling small in a way and feeling being intimidated when you look at people. "Ja," that's all.

**R:** What about their way forward after they got that kind of a feed back?

**N:** Eh... usually amongst teenagers there is going to be a lot of fighting, but a small percentage will just carry on and maybe go for somebody as a friend at a later stage.

**R:** Seeing that there are problems in all areas, what is the best way of sharing secrets or handling them?

**N:** Hm... the best way for me as an individual is taking them to a parent but the safest is just going to the journal.

**R:** What if the journal gets lost?

**N:** Eh... if it gets lost then... I don't know then eh... you are in trouble because everything you have written and everything in there, is going to be exposed where ever it is going to land. So the best thing is just to talk to a parent.

**R:** What is the main purpose of a journal? In what way does it help you, the discloser?

**N:** Hm... you get to write down each and everything you are thinking about and want to say to anybody, other than going to talk to a person because sometimes you feel you cannot say something to some people because you are afraid of their reaction. In a journal there is no after reaction. You just write everything that you are thinking of at that moment.

**R:** It is an impersonal thing.

**N:** Yes.

**R:** How do you tell whether a person is your closest friend or not?

**N:** Usually somebody that eh... you can connect to very well. Eh... somebody that cares for you and then you also care for.

**R:** So it is some kind of a feeling that you are connected to this one, and this very same person is also connected to me.

**N:** Yes sir.

**R:** Other than this feeling, is there no other way in which you can tell whether the relationship is close or not?

**N:** Hm... there are, depending because eh... some when you see a good friend, a really good friend, they care about you. They really care and mind your well being. With others, a friend is not like that.

**R:** At what age do children start to share secrets?

**N:** At a very young age, immediately you start going to a primary school when you have your friends. The little secrets that you have, you start sharing. When you grow older, then you have bigger ones that you share with your fiends.

**R:** This sharing of secrets, what purpose does it serve?

**N:** Eh... somehow you try to gain some intimacy with your friend and some sense of trustworthiness in a sense, and being able to relieve yourself from whatever you are having in you.

**R:** Stress reduction perhaps?

**N:** Hm... I don't think teenagers experience stress. I don't think they do.  
(Emphasizing) They don't.

**R:** Explain that to me.

**N:** Eh... stress is something associated with big people. I think people that are older experience much more bigger things. Things that teenagers go through are not that big. They cannot be stress related.

**R:** Thank you very much. Anything else?

**N:** Ah... no... no... everything is fine.

**R:** Thank you very much.

**All:** Thank you sir.

#### **5.3.2.2 Adolescent boy face-to-face interview**

**Key:**        **R**        : Researcher  
              **P**        : Interviewee

**R:** Thank you very much for having accepted my invitation to this discussion. The

first question that I would like us to discuss is as follows: “How do children of your age deal with their secrets?”

**P:** I think children of our age differ in holding secrets. Girls are more open whereas boys are more private. Girls talk to their friends whereas boys keep it inside because they are not open.

**R:** And what about telling your parents secrets?

**P:** I think at our age we do not go to parents. Telling parents is out.

**R:** Why are you not telling your parents?

**P:** Because parents might say things that you do not want to hear such as telling you that you think you are a grownup. They won't understand that which you understand. They cannot come to your level to see a problem as you see it.

**R:** How do parents usually see (that is, perceive) their children?

**P:** They see them in a more simple way. That is, they regard them as kids who don't know much about life.

**R:** Is it not true that perhaps what they see in their children is true?

**P:** I think sometimes it is not true. Although they have been where we are, they don't understand what we understand because this is a new era. Therefore, what they know differ from what their children know.

**R:** Are you saying that parents do not have the experiences of life that their children

have?

P: Yes.

R: Are you saying that parents cannot guide their children?

P: They can guide us but not in the way in which we want them to guide us.

R: So, they do guide children.

P: (Hesitant after a deep breath) "Ja".

R: If they do not guide you in ways in which you want them to guide you, in what way should they guide you?

P: They may guide in the way in which they see (that is, perceive ) things. Some of us start realizing later in life when they shall have grownup a little bit that what their parents were telling them, is true.

R: Okay, there is a time when they understand and time when they don't.

P: Yes.

R: Why do they behave like this?

P: It is because the things they did when they were of our age and the things we do, differ. The way we play and the way in which we do other things, differ.

R: Don't you think that through observation they learn what you do?

**P:** They may learn something but learning through observation may not put them in a position to guide us properly.

**R:** Are mother and fathers the same in reacting to their children's problems?

**P:** No, they are not.

**R:** In what ways do they differ?

**P:** I think mothers pretend to listen when they are actually not listening. Fathers listen and take their children's issues seriously, but they later behave in ways that might make you feel you were not listened to.

**R:** And what do they do with the secrets thereafter?

**P:** Mothers tell you right away what they feel, but fathers first start by analysing what you told them. Later they then either tell you what they feel or they don't.

**R:** Okay, when they do talk, how do they talk? How do you describe their talk?

**P:** Eh... mothers are too open. They would just say, "P, what you are doing is wrong" but fathers are long-winded.

**R:** You said friends are more helpful under such circumstances.

**P:** Generally, yes friends can help you.

**R:** What is your feeling about eh... teachers and secrets?

- P:** Teachers and secrets? I don't think that will work (probably telling teachers one's secrets). I know that teachers try to be our mothers and fathers here at school but shall never make it to be like our real mothers and fathers. They can, but as far as secrets are concerned, they can never treat them like our mothers and fathers. Telling one's mother or father a secret is not like telling a teacher a secret.
- R:** How do they deal with their children's secrets?
- P:** Some teachers eh... most teachers are women eh... they listen and talk to you as if they understand, but they do not understand.
- R:** Female teachers do not understand. What about male teachers?
- P:** (With a big sigh combined with little laughter) Male teachers eh... you cannot approach a male teacher because they appear as if they are enclosed within their skins or something like that.
- R:** Are they like fathers?
- P:** Yes, they are like fathers.
- R:** In closing what would you say is the best way of dealing with one's secret?
- P:** I think the best way to deal with a secret is to talk to someone you really trust and someone who is experienced, be it your brother or your sister.
- R:** And who is easily approachable, a sister or a brother?
- P:** Both of them are.



**P:** I think the best way to deal with a secret is to talk to someone you really trust and someone who is experienced, be it your brother or your sister.

**R:** And who is easily approachable, a sister or a brother?

**P:** Both of them are.

**R:** Thank you very much

**P:** Thank you sir.

#### **5.4 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter the different types of interviews, namely, the focus group and the face-to-face interviews were presented in a verbatim transcribed form. These verbatim transcriptions contain the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes held by adolescents towards self-disclosure in their interpersonal relationships and their parents' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards their adolescent children's self-disclosure behaviour.

In the next chapter, attention will be paid to the analysed version of these transcribed interviews.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF THIS STUDY**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, themes and categories derived from the analysed data as presented in a transcribed form in the previous chapter, will be discussed. The discussion of these themes and categories is done with a purpose of illustrating adolescents' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards self-disclosure in their interpersonal relationships. The last section of this section will be devoted to parents' self-perceptions, beliefs and attitudes with regard to their adolescent children's self-disclosure to determine whether they, as primary socialization agents, have a chance of positively influencing their adolescents' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes. Parts of the transcripts will be quoted to substantiate themes and categories.

The following themes and categories (indicated between brackets), were identified:

- Authenticity of secrets (Existence of secrets, non-existence of secrets)
- Man-to-man self-disclosure of secrets (I don't care attitude, straight/direct talk, disguised self-disclosure, the influence of the self-disclosure content on self-disclosure, choice of self-discloser targets, self-disclosure as a means to an end)
- Use of diaries (Accidental leakage of self-disclosure content)
- Monopoly over one's secrets (Locus of control)
- Mistrust of people (Mistrust of significant others)
- Undermining of secrets
- Parents' background (Rural background, cultural background, the socialization process)
- Stigmatization
- Fear of being blackmailed (Fear of vulnerability, fear of being manipulated)
- Unpredictability of relationships

- False beliefs, perceptions and attitudes
- Self-disclosure content's nature
- Fear of witchcraft
- Limitations of concealment (Negative effects of concealed secrets)

## **6.2 DISCUSSION OF THEMES AND CATEGORIES IDENTIFIED FROM GATHERED DATA**

This section of the study will be devoted to the discussion of the above themes and categories (cf 6.1) with the aim of pointing out the adolescents' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards self-disclosure in their interpersonal relationships. These themes and categories will be substantiated with relevant quotations from the interviewees' transcripts.

### **6.2.1 Authenticity of secrets**

Adolescents differ with regard to the existence and non-existence of secrets. Some believe that adolescents do have secrets whereas others seem to believe that they do not have secrets.

#### **6.2.1.1 Existence of secrets**

Some adolescents believe that secrets do exist.

*I disagree with you because some of us here have secrets.*

*I disagree with you because eh... some of us have secrets from home.*

*I agree with SH. All of us have secrets, but we cannot tell anyone,*

*especially our friends or somebody...*

*...so we all have secrets.*

Those who think that adolescents have secrets, seem to base their argument on what appears to be a functional definition of what a secret is.

*People, I think the main reason of calling this a secret is because you should be the only one to know it. Your secret does not mean that you should share it with everybody or maybe with your friend. Maybe you can deal with it alone, if you can, or with your friend if you trust her, but then if you can't, you can go to somebody older who can give you advice. That's how I feel.*

#### **6.2.1.2 Non-existence of secrets**

According to some adolescents, since self-disclosure content has the potential of being passed to others, it should not be regarded as a secrets.

*It is not a secret. It wouldn't be a secret because she told it to somebody and she didn't tell that person to keep it as a secret.*

*I think it is not necessary for children of our age to have secrets because everything in the coming time eh... everything will just go out.*

According to some adolescents, secrets are self-made and self-imposed.

*I don't see how there might be a secret if you told yourself that there is no*

*secret. I think there may be a secret, but if you just face everything the way it is, there may be no secret. You find that a person is having a secret, for instance, about a girlfriend. This is not a secret. You have to take it as it is. We have been frustrating ourselves with things that are not existing at all.*

### **6.2.2 Man-to-man self-disclosure of secrets**

Some adolescents (that is, those who belief in the existence of secrets) are of the opinion that secrets should not be kept, but should be disclosed to someone.

*...you just deal with them by telling a friend or somebody.*

*I think it is supposed to be out (that is, the secret) so that everybody can know about it and if it is a problem everyone should help you.*

*...I think the only way to deal with these secrets is to share them with other people who are next to you so that you can help each other.*

#### **6.2.2.1 I don't care attitude**

There are times when, however, self-disclosure is done indiscriminately with no regard for consequences.

*I think it is a matter of eh... of no secrets. Everyone has to know ( that is, the secret). I don't care what they say. I don't mind what they do. If someone says something, it doesn't get into my brain. It gets in this side and gets away on the other side.*

### 6.2.2.2 Straight talk/direct talk

Sometimes the don't care attitude in self-disclosure appears to take the form of straight talk.

*If you have any problem with TH, I think you should go and tell her and not tell me because I am not TH.*

*This is what I say to SH. The things that you think you can't tell your friend, you should keep them to yourself as your secrets because there are people that you tell secret and they go around telling everybody.*

*...in fact, I think if she saw me doing something she doesn't like, she should come to me instead of telling somebody else.*

*I like a person who hates me openly and hate or dislike someone who hates me secretly. I think if you dislike someone's manners, you just have to tell that person.*

*I think it is the best way to tell a person that you don't like her because if you are open to another person she is going to get even more hurt when she hears it from another person.*

*You should go to CHR and tell her that you hate her. Just talk to her. Sit down with her. Tell her that you have a problem. "I don't like your manners. I dislike your attitude and I don't see you in the coming future having you as a friend." It will be the best thing because at least she will know where your loyalty stands and where your friendship with her stands.*

The reason why a straight talk attitude is being favoured seems to be that gossips have a negative effect on the self-disclosure target.

*...maybe when someone tells her, she might have a heart attack.*

Straight talk does not seem to be an easy task for everybody. It is a highly questionable strategy for disclosing painful self-disclosure material in adolescent interpersonal relationships.

*SH, it won't be easy telling someone such an issue.*

*TH, I disagree with you. How can you... let me say you hate somebody. Can you just go to a person... let me just say you hate CHR. Can you just go to CHR and tell her that you hate her?*

*SH, I think it is going to be hard to sit with that person and tell her how you feel about her. Let me just say you and BRI are friends and you hate her guts. You come and tell me about her. The moment I know I go to her (that is, BRI). BRI is going to dump you. How would you feel?*

*I don't think it is ever possible to talk to someone you hate being two only because you won't be able to talk to that person.*

*Yes, you won't feel comfortable telling a person that you hate her.*

#### **6.2.2.3 Disguised self-disclosure**

Those who cannot self-disclose in direct ways, seem to indulge in indirect self-disclosure.

*If you find it difficult to tell someone, I think you have to pretend as if you have solved it and bring it to other people. For instance eh... if I have a problem, I may just go to my friend and tell him as if my other friend has a problem. Then we solve it together. I think for one problem there will be many solutions. The only way to find a solution to a secret is to tell it as if it is something that happened to someone else, not yourself.*

*You don't raise a secret as if it is your problem. You raise it as if someone else told you his problem. That problem would then be attacked.*

#### **6.2.2.4 The influence of the nature of the self-disclosure content on self-disclosure**

Although there is advocacy to disclose secrets, it appears as if the nature of the self-disclosure content determines whether it will be disclosed or not.

*Wait a minute. There are some secrets that you cannot tell to people. Some secrets you may share with other people because they may affect your health.*

*Their secrets are very private. They won't tell them but if it is something little they may tell their parents or their friends.*

*"Ja", some secrets are too confidential. What I mean is that I cannot even share them with my friend and sometimes my friend does not even understand what I try to tell her. Some secrets are really confidential...*



### 6.2.2.5 Choice of self-discloser targets

Adolescents seem to be highly selective in as far as who their discloser targets are. The selection they make appears to be based on reasons well understood by them. Some prefer their friends as their self-discloser targets.

*Eh... children of my age hang out with people of their age obviously. So they tell secrets among each other...*

*Eh... I think that they should talk to someone else close to them so that they can know eh... it must be their closest friends who they can always talk to.*

*I think children of our age deal with their secrets by always telling their closest friends.*

*So most people of our age prefer to keep their secrets to themselves or to their very best friends, that is, their closet friends. Otherwise eh...they keep them to themselves.*

*If you want to solve a problem you may just go to your friends and discuss your eh... problem with them.*

*Eh... secrets. You can actually share them with friends. It does not matter whether your secret is very big or the way it is.*

Others adolescents prefer to disclose their secrets to their siblings.

*...and maybe one of their family members, like a sister or a brother.*

There are those who prefer their parents as their self-discloser-targets.

*...and you find others that have intimate relationships with their parents. They share their secrets with their parents...*

*I think children keep their secrets by telling their parents only. They don't tell anyone because they trust their parents only.*

*Hm... for me as an individual, I think sharing with parents is better because they are older and they have much more broader knowledge of what you will be dealing with. When writing in a journal, you just write down and still have to keep on with the grudge and sometimes it gets really heavy.*

In disclosing a secret selectively, professionals seem to be preferred because of their relationship with the discloser. They seem to be preferred because they are strangers.

*I still say under no circumstances can you be able to keep a secret. It is better for you maybe to consult experts concerning such kind of a problem. Maybe you can go to the clinical psychologist who can determine and sketch the problem that you are facing. I think this is the only way to cope with your problems.*

*I think it honestly helps going to a psychiatrist because there are secrets that you just can't keep to yourself. You just can't keep quite about them and you just can't tell them to someone. If you tell them to a psychiatrist you get to trust him although he is a total stranger. He or she can't say anything about you because he doesn't know you. So telling a psychiatrist something I think is something good.*

Sometimes adolescents self-disclose only in the presence of same sex self-disclosure-targets.

*A boy should share with his father whereas a girl should share with her mother.*

*Well, I prefer that a boy shares secrets with his father because his father went through all boys' stages in life. He therefore knows better than a child.*

*In the family it is better if I share my secrets about girls with my mother because my mother knows more about girls. She will give me guidance as to how they do things and how they want to be treated.*

There are times when religious beliefs play a role in the selection of discloser-targets.

*I usually tell one person my secrets, that is, my best friend and that is God. If He knows something I am hundred percent sure that nobody else is going to know it, unless you... find me praying but otherwise eh... no one else will find out. I always get them off my back by telling them to God.*

*...and telling them to God if you are a Christian, but then otherwise eh... keep them to yourself*

Self-discloser targets should be trustworthy individuals

*It is best to tell somebody close to you and if you trust that person.*

*There are other people that you can trust, that you can just see that you can tell them secrets. If it is your friend you can just tell secrets to, but if it is somebody that you don't trust, you don't have to tell her your secrets because she may pass them to others.*

Self-disclosure content seem to determine who the self-discloser targets should be

*I would like to say that there are secrets which you can share with your parents and those that you cannot share with them. For example, you cannot share a secret about a girlfriend or things you do at school with your parents. With parents, you can only share secrets that are personal and hurting. For example, if parents ask you about how you feel concerning something that happened in the family, you may tell them. You may also tell your brothers and sisters.*

#### **6.2.2.6 Self-disclosure as a means to an end**

Adolescents regard self-disclosure as a means to an end. The end does not, unfortunately, take relationships building into consideration.

*...but as time goes on it becomes a problem that eats you alone. So you have to tell it to someone. I think the best way to deal with it is to tell them to someone because you can't keep it within yourself. It will eat you up.*

*You have to tell someone your secrets because when trouble comes, you will know whom you talk to, but when you don't tell someone, when trouble comes you will get scared.*

*As friends, if one has a secret, "ja", we share it. In that way we get*

*helped. If I don't share a secret, it will stress me up. "Ja", that's it. Yes, I also share with my friends.*

*You can share your secret with your friends because it hurts and it does not help to keep quite if you don't know what to do. You should share it with your friends.*

*I also say that it is a good thing to share secrets with your friends because sometimes it may be a big secret that can make you to kill yourself. So you have to share secrets with your friends so that they can give you guidance with regard to what to do and what not to do.*

*If you share it with friends you won't commit suicide because you won't have a lot of troubles. For example, if someone dies in the family, it is better to say it to relieve yourself.*

Self-disclosure has the advantage of enabling the self-discloser to avoid face-to-face encounters with health professionals such as psychologists, who should be avoided as contact with them, according to adolescents, is frustrating.

*If somebody wants advice from me on whether they should tell people their secrets, I'll say go ahead because it is not nice going to see a psychiatrist. It is not an everyday thing. It is not like going to Dr M. just to go and get checked up because you wouldn't mind because you will just open your mouth and be checked but telling a psychiatrist is like telling a total stranger everything you feel and when she gives you an advice, she sometimes tells you to try to apply the advice and sometimes it doesn't work. I went to her and I told her about my brother and what he does and how I feel about him. She told me to ignore him. Trying to ignore a person*

*is very hard. Imagining going back to her for another advice is problematic because I don't know what I will have to do if she gives me another advice. I don't know whether I will have to try it again or just ignore it.*

### **6.2.3 Use of diaries**

This attitude towards self-disclosure makes adolescents to avoid self-disclosing to all people in favour of their diaries.

*...and there are others who are much more of introverts that share their secrets with their diaries or the so called journals.*

*Okay, I agree with TH, but most people at our age buy these books called diaries and keep their secrets in there.*

*Some people use diaries to write secrets...*

*Okay, some people write in their diaries, especially if it is the one with a lock because some people feel better after writing in a piece of paper. For example, if my friend has angered me, and I find it difficult to talk to her about what she has done to me I write in a diary. I am a person who hides behind my shadow. I just write what she did to me and thereafter I feel better.*

#### **6.2.3.1 Accidental leakage of self-disclosure content**

There are, however, those who feel that the use of diaries is not a reliable way of concealment as secrets may be accidentally leaked.

*But MA, a diary can get lost.*

*I agree with CH because sometimes you find that you have a diary. You put it in your school bag and thereafter your friend comes and takes it. All your secrets... she reads all your secrets. Thereafter she throws it away. Other people are going to pick it up and read it. How will you feel about that?*

#### **6.2.4. Monopoly over one's secrets**

It appears as though those who are sceptical of people and diaries belief in keeping secrets to themselves.

*"Ja," most of our secrets we keep them within ourselves,*

*I think children deal with their secrets by keeping them inside . They don't tell them to anyone.*

*I prefer just to keeping them to myself.*

*The problem of most boys of our age is that we failed... we hide the truth. We keep it in our hearts...*

*If something is eating you up, let it do so. Let it eat you and finish you up. You won't die sir. Maybe it will help you. Yes sir.*

*There is only one person that can keep a secret and it is you because you may leave a diary somewhere unattended and your friends or someone may take it.*

*Children of our age keep secrets to themselves because they say they don't want other people to know about their personal lives and I don't blame them.*

#### **6.2.4.1 Locus of control**

It appears as if some adolescents believe that they can exercise control over their secrets because they believe that they have accepted them.

*Eh... some people are able to deal with their secrets in a positive manner. They just accept them and live with them until...*

#### **6.2.5 Mistrust of people**

As a result of a high level of mistrust of people, adolescents find it difficult to disclose

*Love them all but trust none. This earth is full of people like everybody else. On earth we make mistakes.*

*No, they don't tell their best friends because eh... they don't trust any one.*

*I also prefer keeping my secrets to myself because you might not be sure whether the person you disclose your secrets to also thinks of you as her best friend. What if that person also has another best friend and passes your secrets to her best friend and her best friend passes them to her best friend, too. So your secret will be known by everyone.*

*And it is difficult to tell someone a secret because you don't know what*



*that person is going to do with your secret.*

*I think you should love them all but trust none. You just keep your secrets to yourself. It should rather haunt and kill you and take it to the grave than to tell it to other people because you never know who to trust. There are some goats in sheep's clothing.*

*Since you people like telling your secrets to your friends, give them a test first. I once told my best friend a secret and I tested her four times. I told her the secret in grade five and I am now in grade twelve and even now, nobody knows but herself only. I think it is good to test a person. It's really good*

*I would like to say it again. It is impossible to trust someone. You may trust the person and the person might trust someone else and it continues like that because that person trusts somebody else. She might trust somebody else at home and that person trust somebody else, too.*

*What if the person who is keeping your secret is just betraying you. He is not the person you thought he is.*

#### **6.2.5.1 Mistrust of significant others**

Although there are times when adolescents disclose to their significant others, they however, seem to mistrust almost all of them, if not all. There are those who mistrust their mothers.

*Imagine telling your secrets to your mother and thereafter she tells other mothers your secrets at their block meetings or something like that. Then*

*next thing everybody in your street knows about your deepest, darkest secrets. So most people of our age prefer to keep their secrets to themselves only...*

*I also don't prefer telling my parents because if you tell your mother, she passes it to your father. If you tell your father, he passes it to your mother. Yes, you see sometimes mothers sir, they enjoy telling your secrets to their friends. You find that mothers tell one another their children's secrets...*

*Some mothers spread secrets at women's meetings. The whole block may know your secrets from your mother. From mothers it goes to children and from children it goes to children's friends. From friends it goes to others. Then thereafter the whole school will be knowing your secrets. Even the youngest kid at school and the newest kid in school will know your deepest secret.*

*Sometimes I do tell them but my mother is the one who is disclosing my secrets but sir, I don't tell her secrets. I tell her what is all about life (that is, general issues). I don't tell her my secrets, no! I try to keep my secrets to myself. I told my secrets to my mom and she made a big fuss out of them, and I think I have gone into a lot of trouble for that.*

Although adolescents do not trust their mothers they, however, seem to have a yearning to trust them so as to make use of them as their self-discloser targets.

*But look, you don't trust anyone right? If you don't tell your mother secrets or stuff like that, one day you are going to need advice from her. If it is a big secret like maybe if you start having boyfriends, who are you going to tell, your friends? I think it is better if you tell your mother first*

*because then if she finds out she won't be as cross as she will be if she hears it from everybody else.*

*It doesn't always have to be that way that you have to test someone in your life. You mean even if you live with your mother for thirteen years and another added nine months in her stomach, you still don't trust her? Eh... it is not impossible. You have to learn to trust her with something. I agree that you may not trust her with everything because eh... not with all, because there are some things your mother... mothers, sometimes know, but then you have to learn to trust someone in your life. You have to have somebody that you know you can go and talk to.*

Fathers are, unfortunately, also not being favourably evaluated by their adolescent children. They are also being singled out as significant others who pass their secrets.

*Telling fathers a secret is a nightmare because if they see you in the mirror at the back of the car while driving, they will just laugh at you. The father might just say: "Hey, that secret." Then your mother is also going to say: "Hey, which secret?" You see sir, telling the father your secret is... perhaps to boys, yes it is good sometimes but to girls, no. Yes, it depends on what kind of a secret is it.*

Adolescents find it difficult to trust their siblings, too

*Sometimes it is not only a matter of fathers. Like your brothers and sisters or your friends or something, because it once happened that I told my brother a secret. I think a month later... a month is a very long time. He was like... I don't forget... ah... I didn't forget. Then everybody knew my secret. So, it is useless telling your secrets to others. Just keep them to*

*yourself.*

*Telling your brothers and sisters? No, because sometimes they may manipulate you by trying to black mail you to your parents. No, just keep them to yourself.*

*Telling your brothers and sisters? No, because sometimes they may manipulate you by trying to blackmail you to your parents. No, just keep them to yourself.*

Teachers, seem to be seen in the same light as parents although they appear to be placed in a darker position as compared to parents. They, too, like all other significant figures are regarded as being untrustworthy.

*Teachers and secrets? I don't think that will work (probably telling teachers one's secrets). I know that teachers try to be our mothers and fathers here at school but shall never make it to be like our real mothers and fathers. They can, but as far as secrets are concerned, they can never treat them like our mothers and fathers. Telling one's mother or father a secret is not like telling a teacher a secret.*

*Some teachers eh... most teachers are women eh... they listen and talk to you as if they understand but they do not understand.*

*(With a big sigh combined with little laughter) Male teachers eh... you cannot approach a male teacher because they appear as if they are enclosed within their skins or something like that.*

*Yes, they are like fathers.*

*I told myself that I will never ever tell my secrets to anyone. I once disclosed them to someone and that person is a teacher. You know sir, teachers are friends. Is not it sir? They tell each other things and when you do something like a mistake in class they remind you of your mistake. You see and it is not nice telling teachers your secrets.*

*I think telling teachers is not very good sometimes but it depends on which teacher it is. Here at school there are only two teachers that I trust. Two among, I think, twenty two teachers or twenty six teachers. What about the other twenty? It once happened to me that they just took out my deepest secret in public and now I think all teachers discuss about us in their staff meetings. They take out our deepest, darkest secrets in the staff meetings, sir. They then tell their children and their children tell their friends. Everybody ends up knowing your secrets. I trust only two teachers eh... eh... two teachers! Staffrooms are dangerous (all laugh).*

*Although teachers can also help us, I don't trust them.*

*“Wa bona” (meaning you see) one of our problems with teachers... you find that you tell your teacher your secret, the whole staffroom gets to know about your problem and every time you walk around they will just point fingers at you. “There he is. That one. He is having this and that problem and sometimes he thinks he is wiser.” Such things prohibit us from going to them, just because we know that they will be squandering your name all over the school. This is bad. For instance, if you didn't write your homework and you didn't work well in class, they may just humiliate you in front of other children. That's why we are failing to tell them our secrets.*

*I think it is not necessary for us to tell teachers our secrets. Those people... in fact eh... I cannot say that eh... they are somehow, but naturally they are too inquisitive, and they will try to find out about things that are going on in your family. In the classroom they just point at people and say "you... you don't understand. Your parents are also like this (laughter by all)." Such kind of things. I think the secret should only be told to parents, your close relatives, your friends and other people, except teachers. (Emphasizing) They should be forgotten.*

In response to another interviewee who was making an attempt to defend teachers, another interviewee rejected the defence and instead angrily emphasized the teachers' untrustworthiness.

*Actually teachers are not good at all (stamping feet on the ground as a gesture of emphasis). I am telling you they are not good. If you tell them your problem which may be from your family... you know they will know much more about your family background and then if in the classroom you don't perform or you just do something which is not related to the class work, they will start pointing at you and saying, "You boy, poor boy". Or they may say anything, including using swearing words. That is why most of us fail to approach our teachers with our problems. Telling them your problems creates even more serious problems. You can't even go to hang around with your friends because they will be told about your family background. They will undermine you. Teachers will say a mouthful about you.*

*But what I know is that when they are in the staffroom or (agitated) whatever, they backbite students. They talk about us. That's why I say that we can't tell them our secrets. And the worst thing about telling them our*

*secrets is that you create more problems for yourself because you will end up not even enjoying going to school. Yes, just because of the things that they will be saying to you. You won't enjoy them (that is, the things they will be saying to you).*

Although adolescents profess to be disclosing to their friends, they, too, do not enjoy the trust of their peers.

*Okay, some of us tell their friends their secrets but they don't treat our secrets well and we, too, do not treat theirs well.*

*I would say that sometimes it is not good to share secrets with your friends because some friends are not trustworthy. They may take your secrets to others and you end up being... all people will know about it and sometimes it will hurt you because you wanted to share it with your friend only but your friend took it to others.*

*Sometimes, eh... your friend can be like gold. There is an idiom that says that all that glitters is not gold. This means that your friend outside may appear like she is a caring person when she is actually not such a person. Then you break up. She goes and tell other people, her new best friends your secrets. That is why I say trust no one but love them all. I still repeat it.*

Girlfriends, too, are being mistrusted.

*Something very important is sharing secrets with a girlfriend. Telling a girlfriend does help sometimes but sometimes it does not. Telling a girlfriend sometimes hits back. It will hit you the time you separate*

*because you cannot be always together. When you separate she will try to pin you down by telling everybody about your secrets.*

*Telling your girlfriend secrets is good but it is also bad sometimes. (In a frail voice that expresses uncertainty) It depends on the relationship between the two of you. If my girlfriend is younger than I am it is not advantageous to me to tell her my secrets because she will all the time depend on me.*

*Girlfriends are not good sometimes. I don't trust woman (laughter by all) . They cannot keep a secret.*

*Yes I know. I mean it is a question of evaluating what you have to tell them. There are some of the things you cannot tell them.*

*I mean the best person that you can share your secrets with is your friend and not your girlfriend.*

Adolescents do not seem to trust significant others they are still to meet in future, too.

*That's why I say even although you can get married, sir, I will tell my secrets to my husband only. He, too, may however also tell his friends my secrets. Sometimes you should keep your secret to yourself. Maybe it will help you. Even this psychiatrist sir. Even though they sign papers it is happening that they tell people's secrets.*

#### **6.2.6 Undermining of secrets**

Parents are sometimes considered as significant others that undermine adolescents'



secrets.

*They see them in a more simple way. That is, they regard them as kids who don't know much about life.*

*I think mothers pretend to listen when they are actually not listening. Fathers listen and take their children's issues seriously but they later behave in ways which that might make you feel you were not listened to. If you tell your father that's another story. If you find him reading a newspaper or something, he is just going to say hm... all the time and afterwards when you ask him for an advice he may say "what were you talking about." Then you have to repeat what you said again and again. They don't listen.*

*It also depends on what kind of a father it is. If it is a father that likes reading a newspaper his eyes will be looking at the newspaper while you tell him your deepest secret and he ignores completely what you will be telling him. It happened to me. I know what I am talking about. It happened.*

Parents manifest the attitude of undermining adolescents' secrets in various ways such as laughing at their children when they disclose to them.

*If you tell your parents sometimes they will laugh at you (laughter by all). Yes, that is what I dislike about telling someone my secrets.*

*My father likes to laugh at me when I tell him my secrets. Let me give you an example. I once told him that we were making noise in class and we were punished. It was a secret not to tell my mother. He went on laughing*

*every time at that secret. Even my mother happened to know the secret. That is why I say fathers should not be told.*

## **6.2.7 Parents' background**

### **6.2.7.1 Rural background**

There are adolescents that cannot disclose to their parents because of their parents' rural background. As a result of the nature of their background, these parents, are perceived as lacking communication skills that enhance their adolescents' self-disclosure.

*Some parents are too rural. One cannot talk to them about anything. They cannot just be open with their kids. It is hard talking to them. I therefore end up keeping secrets to myself.*

*Those old people! When you talk to them about something, they go screaming at you and shouting at you.*

### **6.2.7.2 Cultural background**

The inability to self-disclose is sometimes blamed on culture.

*The only problem that is killing us is our culture. In our culture there are some things you are not allowed to tell your parents whereas you may find that they may have a solution.*

*I think parents play a role here but eh... our norms sometimes restricts us and restrain us from sharing our secrets with our parents. They prohibit us from telling them the truth.*

Despite the negative perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards their parents, adolescents seem to be in need of their parents' support.

*Unfortunately some of us do not have close people that we can share them with. A good person is supposed to be a parent who is supposed to give you advice and unfortunately some parents are not close to their children. That is, they don't have that close mother and daughter relationship. We therefore find it difficult to tell them our secrets. Secrets end up haunting us because we end up being unable to tell them our secrets.*

*It is very much shameful to tell your parents secrets that you have. I think eh... but we have to try to tell them even though it is difficult. You have to approach them and tell them.*

*I therefore say that we should be able to sit with our parents and just try to tell them so that our things may be solved because alone you can not make it. I am telling the truth. It is very difficult without them. I think this days it will be important for our parents eh... to have discussions with us because you can see that these days there are many eh... difficult things that we most teenagers come across. It is not possible to find a solution of a problem from one's friends. Parents must feel free to talk to us as they know that we are their sons or their daughters. In fact, they must not just hide the truth away from us. They must forget about their culture and then face the truth because sometimes we teenagers need to be... some of our problems need the parents' guidance because there are some other things that we just go into while we don't know what the consequences will be. We need to be helped and they must tell us eh... how to deal with the things which will destroy us.*

it is possibly as a result of reactions such as these that adolescents conceal due to fear.

*...some of us are afraid of our parents. We cannot as such talk to them about our secrets because since from the beginning they never taught us to speak to them. You know they don't love us enough to talk about things.*

### **6.2.7.3 The socialization process**

Some adolescents believe that there are some of them who conceal because they are from families that have socialized them into keeping secrets as a result of their parents' rural and cultural background.

*I think even the question of one's family background plays an important role. If you are from a family which keeps secrets you will end up keeping secrets, too and this attitude will be in your whole life.*

### **6.2.8 Stigmatization**

Concealment is sometimes brought about by fear of being discriminated against as a result of stigma attached to certain topics or ideas or concepts.

*But then there are those who want to keep it a secret because most people discriminate gay people because they don't really understand how they feel. That's why they would keep such issues as secrets.*

*So okay, I agree with TH that most people that are gay have been treated somehow. Therefore if you are gay you have to keep it a secret.*

### 6.2.9 Fear of being blackmailed

Adolescents fear that their secrets may be used to blackmail them if they are known.

*I think... I prefer keeping my secrets to myself because if you tell someone maybe one day he or she will blackmail you. That's my point.*

#### 6.2.9.1 Fear of being vulnerable

Blackmailing may make it easy for one to be vulnerable. Vulnerability should, therefore, be avoided through concealment.

*I disagree with SH: You don't have to let everything out SH because sometimes you take out something... I mean like you know that there are people that like to get to you if you say (pause) something concerning secrets.*

#### 6.2.9.2 Fear of being manipulated

A vulnerable person may also be easily manipulated. To avoid manipulation by others, adolescents prefer to keep their secrets to themselves.

*I think most of them like to keep secrets to themselves because when they tell people, like their friends, they will manipulate them and say if you don't do this, I will do this to you. I will tell everybody your secrets. If they tell their mothers they first check what kind of a secret it is.*

### 6.2.10 Unpredictability of relationships

There is also a perception that relationships have an element of life-span unpredictability due to lack of locus of control over them. It appears as if what adolescents fear is losing a friend after having self-disclosed to him or her.

*You see, this thing for having a best friend... somewhere somehow you talk to each other and in the process of talking to each other you may somehow hurt her feelings. Then you break up. She then goes and have another best friend. She tells those secrets, all of them to her new best friend. That is why I say trust no one, but love them all. Yes.*

*Hm... "ja", we keep them to ourselves because we cannot trust friends. If I tell her my secrets now, when we are longer friends, she is going to boom them to the Rebecca's.*

*What I know about we boys and girls is that we become crazy when coming to relationships. You may find yourself telling her some eh... big issues that you have never told her. We tend to forget that there will be a time when she will dump you. Love them enough but trust no one.*

### 6.2.11 False beliefs, perceptions and attitudes

Mistrust appears to lead to a negative life-view which tends to give birth to misjudgements.

*No, if you tell someone your secrets and that person passes them, she will act in ways that will show that she told someone else.*

### **6.2.12 The influence of the nature of self-disclosure content on concealment**

According to some adolescents, they are compelled to conceal as a result of the nature of the self-disclosure-content. They point out that self-disclosure is sometimes embarrassing.

*...some of the issues are shameful and embarrassing eh... because most teenagers compete with one another and then as I said some issues you will feel embarrassed to tell to someone because you may think that he will share them with other people.*

*I would like to say that there are secrets which you can share with your parents and those that you cannot share with them. For example, you cannot share a secret about a girlfriend or things you do at school with your parents. With parents, you can only share secrets that are personal and hurting. For example, if parents ask you about how you feel concerning something that happened in the family, you may tell them. You may also tell your brothers and sisters.*

### **6.2.13 Fear of witchcraft**

It appears as if there are times when adolescents fear to self-disclose due to supernatural cultural issues such as witchcraft

*A family background plays a role here. If I am dealing with a girlfriend eh... that stays with me in the same area, and I know her family background, it means I will know everything about her. As such, I cannot say something that is crucial because she might tell everyone, including her friends, and her parents will also get to know the secret and they might make some plans against me. For example, if in the following year*

*I will be graduating and she will still be in matric or whatever standard, that family may bewitch me if it knows witchcraft.*

#### **6.2.14 Limitations of concealment**

Although some adolescents attach great importance to keeping secrets to themselves they are, however, aware that not all secrets can or should be concealed.

*Some problems are indeed hard to keep. We therefore have to let them out.*

##### **6.2.14.1 Negative effects of concealed secrets**

Adolescents believe that the concealment of secrets has detrimental effect on their health.

*Guys, I think there is a big problem here. The minute you say keeping many secrets... that may affect your health. They may also affect your school work when you are at school, especially when you are in class when you try to remember.*

*And sometimes when you keep your secrets sometimes they eat you inside because eh... they are hurting.*

*...and then eh... in the long run that secret I think will eh... cause a big trouble to you. What I know is that most of our friends hide the truth because when hiding the truth or eh... having some secrets and it will be difficult in your way because you may find that on some other days you may have nightmares.*



*Some secrets you cannot keep for they will haunt you for ever. You just have to share them with someone. It is, however, difficult to share them with someone because they are hard to tell and they unfortunately make you to end up committing suicide.*

Adolescents who are unable to disclose or deal with their secrets on their own should be given assistance to do so by the government through the establishment of centres meant for this purpose.

*But then what about those who cannot deal with their secrets? What do we do with those kind of people? I think the government has to do something for them, such as a youth advice centres where they can help us. If I don't know this person. I can tell him all my secrets because it is easy telling such a person my secrets.*

There are, however, some who feel that they cannot disclose to strangers who will be manning these centres.

*Strangers! A very challenging thing. I cannot talk to strangers about anything.*

They also argue that secrets are a stumbling block in one's academic work

*I agree with SH. Some secrets can affect your studies. Let me say somebody raped you and you don't want to tell anyone. In class you always think about that rape and you don't forget about it.*

### 5.3 Change versus the status quo

It appears as if the establishment and maintenance of relationships among adolescents may always pose a serious problem. Parents (as primary agents of socialization) do not live up to the expectations of their children although they seem, to a large extent, to be aware of their adolescent children's true nature of perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships. Their awareness of their adolescents' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes does not seem to translate into acceptable behaviour. This discrepancy, if not taken care of, may perpetuate among adolescents, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards self-disclosure that do not enhance the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

For instance, adolescents regard their parents as significant others that pass their secrets to others although parents consider themselves as keeping their adolescents' secrets.

*I keep their secrets confidential because if I don't do so, they are not going to trust me so that they can trust somebody in future. I don't disclose their secrets to anybody. Once your child tells you his or her secret, you must also keep it as a secret. You must not tell a neighbour or his friends or her friends his or her secrets.*

*If as a parent I can not keep their secrets (pause), in future they are not going to tell me their problems and then at the end we are going to have embarrassment in the family.*

*Okay. Children turn to look upon us as parents as their role models and by so doing they expect us to respect whatever secret they might have and in turn we as parents, I believe, we have to give our children the trust they deserve. If a child comes to me, especially a teenager, with serious issues,*

*she or he expects me as a parent to keep that between me and himself or herself. If you leak that information she or he is going to hide whatever is troubling him or her. All her secrets that she or he is experiencing, she or he won't share them with me anymore because she or he knows that if she or he shares with his or her parents, eventually the next doors are going to know or something else within the family or outside his or her home will know his or her secrets. So to win their trust we have to keep their secrets to ourselves, but we should make sure that we help them to solve them so that in future they can go to their mothers with their problems.*

Parents seem to be aware that they should listen to their adolescents, although they are perceived differently by their children. Some adolescents prefer being heard by friends rather than parents.

*We should not forget that there are people waiting to hear from them if we don't listen to them. If we do not listen to them they go to people that mislead them. So it is good for us to listen to what they say and keep everything confidential so that they can always come to us even in future so that we can guide them.*

Parents value the importance of sharing secrets with their adolescent children, but they are not perceived in the same way by their children.

*I think it is very important to share secrets with children because most of our children if we don't discuss their problems with them, they go outside where they get wrong information. As parents we can discuss with them. By discussing with them we make it possible for them to help themselves in future and they will be better grownups who have confidence in themselves. I believe in guiding one another. Discussing*

*their problems promotes communication between children and the parents.*

*Hm... but I think to a certain extent they can discuss some other things such as having sex and everything, if we are open enough to them. That is, when you tell them the truth. We should be open to them with regard to issues concerning sexuality and about having sex. You even have to ask your children if they are involved with such activities. We don't have to be scared but in a black community we usually don't discuss with our children such things. We are shy. We feel we are going to do something which is taboo but then to a certain extent we are losing our children to the world. These are the things we have to discuss with them.*

Parents are aware that parental self-disclosure is a tool to be used to gain their adolescents' trust.

*I think it is proper for parents and children to share their secrets and parents should guard against telling their children what they wanted to tell them a long ago after having heard the children's problems.*

*Eh... eh.... as parents if ever we want trust from our children, they can trust us by communicating with them and by listening to them, because they know that if ever they have told us something which is important to them, we don't speak with other person about that, they will gain trust in us whenever they have a problem. They will come and speak to us and thereafter they will regain confidence back.*

*As long as we share problems with our children there will be mutual trust between the parent and the children and also there will be that mutual*

*trust and respect between parents and their children. Once children have problems, they will trust that their parents will solve them.*

Parents and their adolescent children seem to be on agreement with regard to the fact that the nature of a secret determines whether it may be shared with parents or not but unfortunately adolescents perceive parents as being completely secretive.

*Secrets do differ. There are some secrets you know that you cannot keep away from your kids. They have to know the reality of where they are coming from, and where they are going to. So it might happen that their own personal secrets involve them alone, for example, their sexuality. It is something that they might feel it belongs to them. These are some of the things that you can't keep away from your kids. For instance, if you are divorcing your husband, they have to know what is happening before any other thing can be done so that they can understand what's happening and*

Parents seem to be aware that their adolescent children classify them into two main categories, namely, those who are understanding of their secrets and those who are uncooperative as a result of their background. This awareness does not, however, make them behave in ways that evoke favourable perceptions from their adolescents.

*It also depends on what type of a parent you are. It may happen that your child wants to come to you with a secret and you are not opening up and he or she feels that she or he is not going to be safe. So it depends on how you are and who you are and then how are you relating with your child. Are you relating with a child as a friend or as a boss or something? Some parents are bullying their children. Whenever they have problems with their children, they just become hush with them. So it depends (that is, on what kind of a parent you are).*

*You find that parents eh... are judgmental. All what they know is that children are always wrong. They do not want to know the other side of the coin. This is a problem because already a parent has judged a child.*

*I think this has to do with the culture. Culturally men seem to be reserved whereas mothers seem to be in contact with children. We do not go along with children because of the right they have.*

They are aware, too, that it is not only the parents' background that has an influence on how parents interact with their adolescent children, but a parents' sex, too, has a tendency of rendering interaction between parents and their adolescents either difficult or easy. Parents, however, seem to fail to live up to the expectations of their adolescents by working on their perceived weaknesses emanating from their sex.

*Honestly speaking, men are very poor at communication. We therefore refer children to their mothers when they have problems but since things are changing we turn to be more and more involved with our children but communication is still a problem.*

There is also an awareness among parents that their adolescents keep secrets away from them but they are unfortunately unable to behave in ways that invite positive perceptions from them.

*As far as I am concerned I don't think our children are able to share their secrets with us. We always get second hand information from their mothers. We are used to that and there is nothing we can do.*

There is also an awareness on the part of parents that their children need them for guidance concerning problems within their interpersonal relationships but they are not

perceived as offering the guidance as expected.

*I think parents and children should have open relationships. Eh... I know parents cannot be friends to their kids to a large extent but I think they should be understanding and they should sometimes bring themselves down to the level of their children because it is not easy for a child to understand that the very parent who is talking to her has been through all those stages. They must know that they must come to us for advice, because if really a child comes here at home and tries to talk to you and you already give him or her that look that she has done something wrong before she can get into the inner part of the story, that child can never come back to you. Parents must listen and understand what a child says. From there onwards you must sit down with the kid and try to advice him or her or show her the way. When kids grow, especially teenagers, they experience a lot of troubles. I will speak of girls. Girls experience a lot of things. They think they are grownups. They think they can take charge of their own lives, not realizing that the very same mother has been through the same difficulties and the very same mother can be the one to lead or to guide him or her. By opening up to your kid you will give them a way of knowing and understanding what life is all about.*

#### **6.4 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, attention was paid to the discussion of the analysed data. In this discussion, fifteen themes and their categories, substantiated with relevant quotations from the transcribed interviews, were presented. Parents' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards their adolescents self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships were also presented. The purpose of the discussion of these themes and categories was to point out adolescents' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards self-disclosure in their

interpersonal relationships.

The next chapter will be devoted to the conclusions, guidelines and recommendations of this study.



## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CONCLUSIONS, GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THIS STUDY**

#### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will be devoted to the discussion of some guidelines to assist adolescents to handle self-disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their interpersonal relationships so as to enable themselves to self-actualize. These guidelines are a product of literature and empirical investigation which was guided by the primary and secondary aims. Consequently, the aims of this study (which were achieved through both literature study and empirical research), and a summary of both the literature and empirical investigation will be presented so as to contextualize these guidelines. Later in the chapter, attention will also be given to the shortcomings of this study and recommendations for further study.

#### **7.2 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH**

##### **7.2.1 Primary aim**

The primary aim of this study was to identify perceptions, beliefs and attitudes held by adolescents that make it difficult for them to handle self-disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships so as to enable themselves to self-actualize.

##### **7.2.2 Secondary aims**

This study's specific aims, which were achieved by either literature study and/or empirical investigation, were as follows:

To investigate the nature of self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships.

To explore and understand the extent to which adolescents disclose in interpersonal relationships.

To explore the nature of interpersonal relationships.

To develop guidelines to assist adolescents to handle self-disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships so as to enable themselves to self-actualize.

### **1.3 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE AND EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION**

The literature and empirical investigation were preceded by chapter one which was devoted to an argument in favour of equipping adolescents with interpersonal skills, because it is at this developmental level that adolescents start to focus on interpersonal relationships that lay a foundation on which future relationships will be built. Interpersonal skills are supposed to make it easier for them to deal with interpersonal problems which they find difficult to deal with. It was pointed out that one of the skills they need at this stage is self-disclosure because of its value in the enhancement of relationships. Lack of such a skill makes it difficult for them to handle self-disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships so as to enable themselves to self-actualize. It seems as if lack of such a skill makes adolescents' behaviour, in interpersonal relationships, to be motivated by perceptions, beliefs and attitudes that are detrimental to the enhancement of relationships.

The first part of literature study in chapter two, focussed on the nature of self-disclosure. The intensive investigation of this phenomenon revealed that self-disclosure cannot be wished away as people self-disclose due to various reasons. Although it appears as if adolescents are compelled to self-disclose, they however, do not disclose satisfactorily. It appears as if adolescents' self-disclosure may be enhanced if factors that enhance self-disclosure are taken into consideration. If these factors are taken into consideration, the probability is high that they will engage in one or all forms of self-disclosure. Self-

disclosure. Self-disclosure does not, however, take place haphazardly. It follows particular patterns and in some cases, some adolescents conceal completely with hazardous consequences.

In chapter 3 attention was paid to the investigation of the nature of interpersonal relationships. From this investigation, it was found that the development of relationships follows a particular pattern. The route to the establishment and maintenance of fulfilling and intimate relationships is not an easy one, but adolescents are compelled to walk it because of the advantages yielded by belonging. Sometimes the hard earned relationships break up due to various factors.

The results of the empirical study obtained from data collected from adolescents and the most important section of the adolescents' interpersonal world, their parents, revealed that adolescents hold perceptions, beliefs and attitudes that make it difficult for them to handle self-disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their interpersonal relationships so as to enable themselves to self-actualize.

#### **.4 LITERATURE AND EMPIRICAL CONCLUSIONS THAT UNDERPIN THIS STUDY' GUIDELINES**

Adolescents yearn for the establishment and maintenance of intimate relationships with their significant others.

Although adolescents seem to have a deep desire to self-disclose, they find it difficult to do so because of lack of trust for their significant others. They seem to trust no one, including their closest significant others, that is, their nuclear family members.

Boys and girls experience problems with self-disclosure. Both sexes hold self-

defeating perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards self-disclosure which make it difficult for them to establish and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships with their significant others.

As a result of these self-defeating perceptions, beliefs and attitudes, adolescents engage in various forms of negative self-disclosure such as impulsivity, which are not favourable for the establishment of healthy relationships. Such behaviour makes them, among others, to either indulge in unnecessary excessive self-disclosure, insufficient self-disclosure or concealment of self-disclosure material.

Concealment does not foster the establishment and maintenance of relationships. Self-disclosure should, however, be controlled. Indiscriminate self-disclosure should be avoided. No matter how intimate a relationship may be, total self-disclosure should be avoided.

It appears as if sex determines adolescents' nature of self-disclosure. Girls disclose more than boys, and moreover, both sexes prefer disclosing to individuals of the same sex. Both sexes, however, seem to be compelled to self-disclose to the opposite sex because of various reasons. For instance, girls disclose to the opposite sex because they perceive girls, including their mothers, as being unable to keep secrets whereas both boys and girls are attracted to their mothers because of perceived favourable personality traits. Mothers are considered to be humble, kind and understanding as opposed to fathers who are considered to lack understanding and unkind.

Although adolescents' self-disclosure to friends surpasses self-disclosure to other significant others, they seem to have a deep need to disclose to their parents, who unfortunately, they find difficult and sometimes impossible to share their secrets with because of their negative reactions to children's self-disclosure.

- Families are primary education situations where children learn and acquire self-disclosure perceptions, beliefs and attitudes in their interpersonal relationships.
- Self-disclosure has both advantages and disadvantages. It appears as if the most important advantage of self-disclosure is the establishment and maintenance of intimate relationships, if it is used appropriately. In instances where it is mishandled, it can result in negative reactions that can lead to everlasting hatred.
- There is a need for adolescents to be equipped with interpersonal skills in order enable themselves to get along with others (Burnard,1989 : 32).

## **7.5 THE PROPOSED GUIDELINES**

### **7.5.1 Guideline 1: Authentic primary environment**

If adolescents' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards self-disclosure in their interpersonal relationships are to enable them to establish and maintain healthy relationships, parents should display to their children behaviours that are underpinned by perceptions, beliefs and attitudes that promote the establishment and maintenance of healthy relationships. According to Van Schalkwyk (1986 : 180) homes that stand a better chance of equipping their children with positive perceptions, beliefs and attitudes have, among others, the following characteristics:

- Provide children with a community of love.
- Provide children with a sense of togetherness which is based on love.
- Help children to attain the acceptable social norms of their community.
- Take care of the physical and emotional needs of children.
- Provide its children with a sense of security.

In this regard Fraser, Loubser and Van Rooyen (1990 : 12) maintain that a home is a primary environment that gives shape to a child's future behaviour by way of equipping him or her with norms, values and attitudes. The influence of homes on their children is such that understanding a child's behaviour, including that of adolescents, is difficult and almost impossible without having a grasp of how his or her home functions (Damast & Mellet, 1982 : 44).

Adolescents acquire these norms, values and attitudes in various unintentional techniques which include, among others, observation (Gunter, 1995 : 44) although they acquire prosocial behaviour in a better way if they are subjected to scientific techniques such as victim-centred guidance techniques where they are assisted to develop what Mullis, Smith and Vollmers (1983 : 3) refer to as perspective-take (perspective take refers to an ability to comprehend someone else's state).

#### **7.5.2 Guideline 2: Controlled self-disclosure/ Snowballing self-disclosure**

It has already been shown that self-disclosure may either lead to the establishment and maintenance of relationships, or it may make it difficult to have relationships established or maintained. Self-disclosure that is handled in indiscriminate ways tends to fail to lead to friendship formation and maintenance thereof, whereas when it is controlled, chances of establishing and maintaining a healthy, intimate relationships are enhanced.

Self-disclosure should, therefore, be handled in certain ways if it is to produce intimate relationships. That is, adolescents should be taught the art of self-disclosure if they are to establish and maintain intimate relationships. The core aspect of this art is that they should learn to engage in a snowballing type of self-disclosure, where self-disclosure moves from self-disclosure of superficial to intimate self-disclosure content.

In this regard Finkenauer and Hazam (2000 : 248) argue that self-disclosure should not

be regarded as “one-shot event.” Instead, they should , if it need be, be allowed to progress over a period of time where “work time “ alternates with “play time”, since relationships develop over time, too. In the same vein, Moon (2000 : 324) asserts that according to the principle of sequence, disclosure of self-disclosure content lends itself in steps, and there should be gradual escalation such that the relationship proceeds from casual exchanges to increasing intimate ones overtime.

Dawis, Fruehling and Oldman’s (1989 : 268-270) advice is that during the development of a relationship, information disclosed should be restricted to superficial information in the initial encounter. In this regard Petrie (1997: 58) maintains that since some personal information is more “weighty, more serious, than other personal information,” such information should only be disclosed if there are equally serious reasons for disclosing. As the relationship develops, self-disclosure may be broadened (that is, it may cover an increasing number of different topics) and it may also deepen (that is, it may become more intimate). The level of self-disclosure we reach with someone should thus tally with the extend of the intimacy achieved.

Waska (1999 : 231) also warns that self-disclosure should not be regarded as a licence for “anything goes”. Care should be taken to disclose personal feelings and thoughts in a systematic, well thought out manner. Likewise, Setsena in Sunday Sun (18 November 2001 : 26) maintains that a discloser should not be encouraged to disclose everything immediately. In this regard Calhoun and Acocella (1990 : 372) maintain that self-disclosure should be controlled through proper timing. For instance, one should not make one’s feelings known about a partner’s weight when the partner is depressed about his or her academic progress.

Derlega et al.’s (1993 : 79-83) advice is that since liking by others is determined by the point at which certain self-disclosure content (either threatening or less threatening) is revealed, the point at which self-disclosure is made is of vital importance. For instance,

attraction for the revealer is enhanced if negative self-disclosure is revealed early in the interaction, especially if the revealer is personally responsible for the negative event, whereas where the discloser is not responsible for a negative event, the self-disclosure content should be placed later in the interaction.

Burton and Dimbleby (1989 : 33) points out that when deciding to move on to the next step, one should, therefore, be guided by discloser target's needs and feelings. That is, in deciding to take a step to disclose or not to disclose extensively, for instance, the needs and feelings of the discloser-target should be taken into consideration.

### **7.5.3 Guideline 3: Preparation of the self-discloser target**

The discloser should prepare his or her self-discloser target for self-disclosure, especially in the event of emotionally charged self-disclosure content so as to reduce or eliminate negative self-discloser targets reactions (Martin., 1999 : 281). Williamson (1998 : 24) identified three strategies that the self- discloser may make use of to prepare the discloser-target before making a disclosure. Preparedness on the part of the disclosure target ensures that the first response, which is the most feared one by the discloser, is a positive and supportive one.

Firstly, long before the disclosure content is revealed, the target group should be emotionally prepared in a systematic way by means of giving clues about the disclosure content. This strategy may be regarded as a form of systematic approximation which requires the use of time and skillful conversation. Preparation of the self-discloser target may take different forms:

- The target group or individual may first be equipped with background information concerning the self-disclosure content.



The belief system of the target group or self-discloser target should be considered and tackled in ways that will bring about flexibility of views which would ensure tolerance of others' values without putting the relationship in jeopardy because of the difference of opinion.

Since the quality of the first response is determined by the quality of the preexisting relationship between the self-discloser and the target individual, it is advisable that attention be given to the strengthening and the improvement of the relationship before self-disclosure is made. In this regard Green's (2000 : 261) advice is that preexisting levels of closeness and openness should be raised by way of increasing contact time (that is, time together) as well as through social and economic support.

Adolescents cannot, however, be completely sure of others' reaction as some self-disclosure topics seem to be completely unacceptable. Kadushin (2000 : 2) for instance, noticed that it is uncertain whether disclosure of HIV status enhances support or rejection and moreover, the age of the discloser also determines self-discloser target reaction, with younger children receiving the least supportive reaction (Arata, 1998 : 64). The possible reason why age determines self-discloser targets reaction to self-disclosure content is that completeness of children's statements is related to age, whereas accuracy is not.

Avin-Williams and Dube (1998 : 7) caution, therefore, that adolescents should disclose only if they are sure of a positive reaction or have a secure fallback option (that is, an alternative place to live, financial and emotional support and a means of continuing their education) in case they are expelled or abused by self-discloser targets (Henderson, 1998 : 373).

#### **.5.4 Guideline 4: The use of diaries**

Adolescents should be encouraged to write self-disclosure content in their diaries before it is shared with others. After having written the self-disclosure content in their diaries, they may revisit them whenever a need arises. Writing and reading them a few times has advantages which are, among others, as follows:

Establishment of a structure which ensures the delivery of coherent messages.

Minimization of impulsivity.

Gaining insight into the advantages and disadvantages of self-disclosure.

Making a selection of appropriate self-disclosure targets.

Deciding on content that may be disclosed and that which should not be disclosed.

Disclosing at the time when self-disclosure will yield better results.

For many years, diaries have been in use. For instance, Quennell (1990 : vii) reproduced the contents of Byron's diary that was written from 1798 to 1824, Mary Berenson kept several diaries that were edited by Strachey and Samuels (1985 : 9). Bunkers and Huff (1996 : 1) state that a diary may be used as a private archive of information about, among others, social relationships. Harrow Cecil Beaton, whose diaries were edited by Buckle (1979 : ix) wrote about his hopes, fears and dreams in the many diaries that he kept.

#### **.5.5 Guideline 5: Teach adolescents self-disclosure key concepts**

Junter (1990 : 10) maintains that teaching is always concerned with ensuring that a learner acquires knowledge and skills. The knowledge that adolescents need in order to deal with self-disclosure in their interpersonal relationships is that which concerns the meaning of concepts that seem to be peculiar to self-disclosure which are, among others, secret, self-disclosure content, concealment and friendship. It is only after these concepts shall have been taught that they may be taught the self-disclosure skills. Insight

into these concepts may enable them to be in a possible to come to grips with the nature self-disclosure.

#### **7.5.6 Guideline 6: Understanding therapists/counsellors' functions**

Adolescents should be educated on the work of the health workers dealing with counselling and therapy so that they may, without fear, consult them with their problems. Morse and Ivey (1996 : 1) point out that education is a profound enterprise whose objective is, among others, giving assistance to learners. The knowledge imparted to them should include, among others, the following issues:

- The oath of secrecy embodied in the code of conduct of counsellors and therapists.
- The different types of therapists to enable them to make informed decisions in their choice of therapists and counsellors.
- The approaches therapists and counsellors use in offering assistance.
- The scope of therapists' and counsellors' work.

#### **7.5.7 Guideline 7: Parents' communication skills**

Since adolescents' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes with regard to self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships are influenced by how their parents communicate with them, parents should be guided to observe communications skills that stand a better chance of engendering favourable perceptions, beliefs and attitudes. Petrie (1997 : 6) asserts that "communication is part and parcel of social life that takes place when people interact with one another through talking, listening, observing and reacting to each other". During this interaction the exchanging of various kinds of information, which may give birth to trust (Mnguni, 2001 : 30), takes place. Without trust, which is born of love (Msengana, 1996 : 28), satisfactory interpersonal relationships may not be established. As a result, parents and their adolescents may not enjoy effective communication with one another.

Long (1996 : 173-174) maintains that both the verbal and nonverbal forms of communication should be taken into consideration. Morse and Ivey (1996 : 5) divide communication skills into two categories, namely, pacing and leading. Pacing communication involves the establishment of who your communication partner is at the onset of communication and it includes, among others, understanding the communication partner's thoughts, feelings, perceptions and attitudes. On the other hand, leading refers to the ability to lead or move a communication partner into new directions. Moving a communication partner into new directions requires the use of influencing skills such as interpretation or reframing, self-disclosure, advice and a listening skill that is characterized by the ability to pay attention and concentration.

Parents should learn to be more of listeners than speakers. Zuker (1991 : 142) asserts that closing one's mouth while keeping our ears open is a difficult task. If parents are to succeed in the task of leading, they should relax and concentrate on listening (Ailes, 1988 : 7). Through proper listening, they may gain insight into their adolescents' self-disclosure material which may lead to empathy. It is a kind of communication that should make adolescents develop a sense of safety in the company of their parents (Morse & Ivey, 1996 : 1).

Parents that are unable to listen to their children behave in repulsive ways which Morse and Ivey (1996 : 11-12) describe as follows:

- They do not look at their adolescents when they (their adolescents) speak to them. The message embodied in this kind of a behaviour is of non-recognition of the communication partner.
- Their body posture indicates that they are not listening. They, for instance, fold arms, jiggle legs or turn their bodies away from their adolescents.
- Their voices are void of acceptance of the other person, Such voices may sound either bored, supercilious, disdainful or uninterested.

They tend to dominate the discussion and ignore what their adolescents say.

### **.5.8 Guideline 8: Self-esteem enhancement**

Adolescents' self-esteem needs to be enhanced so as to enable them to deal with self-disclosure to the best of their ability. Lawrence (1996 : 5) defines self-esteem as the product of the evaluation of the discrepancy between one's self-image and the ideal self. A fractured self-esteem may not be in a position to deal with the traumas that accompany issues related to self-disclosure. Mnguni (2001 : 25-26) suggests ways in which adolescents' self-esteem may be enhanced:

Adolescents should be assisted to make use of positive intrapsychic talk. They should for instance, be helped to avoid negative statements such as "I do not make my parents happy, and instead make use of statements such as "my parents are proud of me".

Adolescents should be made to experience love and warmth in both their primary and secondary environments.

### **7.5.9 Guideline 9: Therapeutic assistance**

At times adolescents need to undergo therapy or counselling so as to enable them to handle self-disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their interpersonal relationships. Munchin and Donald (1987 : ix) consider therapeutic assistance as an interpersonal process where one partner in a relationship, guides proceedings in a professional manner. Long (1996 : 7) describes counselling as a type of helping relationship in which the identified helper has, as his most important objective, giving assistance to the person to be helped with his or her emotional, mental, physical and spiritual well-being. Adolescents that need therapeutic or counselling are those that either completely conceal, disclose indiscriminately or disclose excessively.

#### **7.5.10 Guideline 10: Guidance of educators**

Since educators seem to play a major role in shaping adolescents' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes in the secondary education environments (second to that of parents in the primary education environments) they should be given guidance with regard to ways of promoting positive perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of adolescents towards self-disclosure. Effective guidance may only be rendered where the relationship of trust has been established. As such, they should be made aware of educator characteristics that may render them attractive to their learners as trustworthy individuals in whom adolescents may confide. In this regard Landman in Vrey (1979 : 206) maintains that where attraction characterizes a relationship, closeness and trust are possible. Du Plooy and Kilian (1984 : 82) asserts that under such circumstances, a learner is made to experience genuine trust that makes him feel that the educator is always at his disposal whenever he or she needs him. Consequently, the trust that develops between learner and his or her educator becomes increasingly intimate. According to Vrey (1979 : 206) the following characteristics, among others, render educators attractive to their learners:

- Friendliness and consideration towards each learner
- Patience
- Broad interests
- Attractive appearance
- Fairness and impartiality

Vrey (1979 : 207) makes mention of, inter alia, the following personality characteristics which repel learners from educators:

- Sarcasm
- Fault-finding
- Ill-temper

Unfriendliness

Aloofness

#### 5.11 Guideline 11: Locus of control

Adolescents self-disclosure is enhanced if they feel that they are in control of the self-disclosure process (cf 2.3.1). Consequently, if the level of self-disclosure in their interpersonal relationships is to be enhanced, techniques aimed at making them experience a sense of power and control with regard to the self-disclosure process, such as the following ones, as suggested by Setsena (2002 : 26 ) should be used.

Give matter of fact answers.

Stay reassuring and non-judgmental.

Believe what the adolescent tells you.

Do not ask questions that sound like accusations.

In the case of abuse, tell the adolescent that she or he is not responsible for the abuse, no matter what the circumstances are.

Do not encourage the adolescent to tell you everything at once.

Help the adolescent by saying that you realize how difficult it is for him or her to talk about a traumatic experience.

Acknowledge the adolescent's statement.

Do not show shock. That is, always speak to the adolescent calmly and in private.

#### 6 SHORTCOMINGS OF THIS STUDY

This study has a few shortcomings, most of which surfaced during the empirical investigation, that need to be pointed out.

Interviews were conducted in English, and since this study focussed on Black

adolescents, there is a possibility that some interviewees did not express themselves in the way they would have expressed themselves had the interviews been conducted in their mother tongue. An ideal interviewing language was, therefore, the interviewee's mother tongue. They could not be interviewed in their mother tongue because the researcher was not acquainted with the language of some of the interviewees.

Some adolescents, who might have expressed different views from those that were gathered, and as a result influenced the findings of this study differently, have been left out because of their inability to communicate in English.

Since self-disclosure is one of the most sensitive topics, the possibility exists that some adolescents with ideas different from those that were expressed, did not participate in this study or those that did take part in the study, might have concealed some issues.

## **.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

The vastness of the field of self-disclosure is so wide that the researcher could not investigate all phenomena as a result of the limited nature of this study. Other aspects of self-disclosure that still need to be researched are the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of parents in their own interpersonal relationships. Their perceptions, beliefs and attitudes should be compared with those of their children.

The adolescents' significant others, especially their parents and teachers' perception, beliefs and attitudes towards their children need to be investigated and changed so as to enable adolescents to evaluate them favourably. Favourable evaluation by adolescents of their significant others may lead to better relationships which may engender positive behaviour on the part of the adolescents.



## 7.8 CONCLUSION

Adolescents need social skills to enable them to handle self-disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their interpersonal relationships. Without social skills they may lead lonely and depressive lives. One of the most important social skill they require in their interpersonal relationships is self-disclosure. The literature study of the nature of self-disclosure and interpersonal relationships revealed that self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships is a complicated phenomenon which adolescents may not comprehend without assistance.

The qualitative empirical investigation revealed that the problem of comprehension of the self-disclosure phenomenon among adolescents is aggravated by the fact that they seem to harbour perceptions, beliefs and attitudes that are not helpful in managing self-disclosure in ways that ought to enhance their interpersonal relationships. Consequently, guidelines concerning the skilful handling of self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships with a view to enhancing interpersonal relationships were developed.

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